Inspiration galore at the BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair 2023

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This year the BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair returned to Beaulieu…

Kim Henson reports on the show – and yes he did find some wheels as well as gardens!

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Beaulieu is, and ever will be, associated with historic vehicles, but an array of different-themed events are also held there, this year including the return of the BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair, held between 28th and 30th April. These days colour in our lives is especially welcome – and there was plenty on offer at Beaulieu!

While Wheels-Alive is of course a motoring magazine website, many of our readers are also gardening enthusiasts or novices looking to improve their knowledge of this great pastime. I am in the latter category and attended with my wife, finding plenty of inspiration among the 150+ exhibits. I was also delighted to find many 'wheels' to enjoy, including a fine array of classic tractors (put on by the New Forest Tractor and Engine Club – "Preserving agricultural heritage today for tomorrow's generation"), stationary engines and even a magnificent steam traction engine driving a threshing machine. Wonderful!





A magnificent Fordson – in ‘original’ condition but operational.



‘Freddie the Fordson’ – provided with an invitation for people to sit on the tractor to have their photo taken to remember their day.



Stationary engines doing their thing!

Back to the gardening aspects, and this show is intended to be of interest for ‘everyone’, from beginners to keen gardeners.

Headline partner for the event was Hillier, and especially notable was their very special garden inspired by ‘The Secret Garden’, this taking the form of a colourful walk-through display, which we loved.

Within its high hedges were found colour-co-ordinated plants and shrubs, highlighting the movement of the sun during a day in springtime. Visitors in transit through the garden witnessed cool whites and purples depicting daybreak, progressing to fiery reds and

oranges denoting sunset. The garden was surrounded by wild flowers to enjoy.



Spring morning area…

As the UK's largest grower of trees, Hillier incorporated many in their display, including the white-trunked Himalayan Birch (Betula 'Jacquemontii') amidst a sea of lush green Hostas.

Hillier provided a wide-ranging retail area, where plants could be purchased, and in addition, for members of their Gardening Club there was an alfresco Club Lounge.



The BBC Gardeners' World stage was set up with a variety of experts to provide practical advice for visitors, and daily talks were hosted by Chris Bavin.



In addition to the multitude of retail stands selling everything from garden tools to bug-friendly garden features, as well as plants, there were many fascinating complete themed gardens to view…

…Among them was Paul Stone's showcase 'Theatre of Greens', comprising vegetables and edible plants, and 'Nordic Retreat', set up by the New Forest based garden design firm 'The Landscape Service'. This was a calming place, including spaces in which to relax and 'recharge'.

There was an array of small but comprehensively stocked gardens, and we were drawn to the 1m x 1m design provided by the 'Garden Organic' charity and inspired by 'bugs, birds and biodiversity'. Within its compact area were a vegetable plot, composting system and a high-rise 'bug hotel'!



‘Bugs, birds and beneficial plants’.

Horticultural students from Kingston Maurward, Merrist Wood and Cannington Campus (Bridgwater and Taunton College) created budget-friendly gardens under the accomplished eye of mentor Cherry Carmen, multi award-winning garden designer.



‘An Ode to Victoriana – A Wardian Journey’; Designer Alison Firth, Kingston Maurward College.



‘Elysium’. Designed by Merrist Wood College; a garden for wellbeing.



‘Obscura’, by students from Bridgwater and Taunton College, and inspired by Beaulieu’s beautiful Victorian estate.



‘Planted Path’, designed by Helen Wilson (Helen Wilson Garden Design).



The Boaz Border, ‘My Garden Escape’ – therapeutic horticulture. Designer, Andy Brooks, The BOAZ Project.



‘Not All Who Wander Are Lost’, designed and created by Furzey Gardens, Hampshire, including people with learning disabilities.

Other highlights of the show included ‘Floral Crown’ workshops operated by the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies (NAFAS) Hampshire Group, and Oyster Mushroom Growing workshops with the Caley Brothers (of interest to me as I am very partial to mushrooms!).

Available too was live music (which my wife and I enjoyed), plus an extensive food market.



Shane Falvey ready to talk to potential customers on the Nonna Tanda pasta stand.

For those who wished, and using the same entry ticket, access to Beaulieu's grounds, gardens and attractions including the National Motor Museum plus Palace House. I found some time to briefly re-acquaint myself with exhibits in the National Motor Museum – well worth a visit, there's such a wealth of automotive and motoring history to view there, and the vehicles and other exhibits are cleverly laid out.



The National Motor Museum's 1903 6hp De Dion Bouton.

The 'slide show' below features some of the imaginative/colourful sights encountered during our day at the event…

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

VERDICT

A great day out; relaxing and providing many ideas to incorporate into a domestic garden – some of these my wife and I plan to attempt! There was certainly much helpful food for thought on offer.

Judging by the many visitors leaving carrying large containers of plants and other items purchased (sometimes on trolleys – a good idea to take or buy one at this event!), there will be much gardening activity ahead in the near future for those who attended.

I'll just mention… maybe it was us, but we didn't find it very easy to find specific exhibits and stands using the map/list provided on entry to the show. In fairness everything was there but for us it was easier just to walk around the whole show, which we did within the day of our visit.

Look out for this joyful show in the future; if you like gardening or plan to learn how to do it, or to improve what you already do, it represents a useful and enjoyable day out.

