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Festival to give gardening a boost

By June Ramli

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - There appears to be renewed interest in gardening among Malaysians and this bodes well for efforts to turn the country into a landscaped nation by next year.

"More and more people are looking at garden space now before buying a house. It was not so before," said the Housing and Local Government Ministry's National Landscape Department deputy chief director, Esa Ahmad, here today.

As a further boost, his department is organising the Malaysian International Garden Festival, dubbed "Laman 2004", from July 17 to 25, at the Perdana Lake Gardens.

The festival will see the famed Perdana Lake Gardens decked out in a variety of flowers.

Special air-conditioned tents will house plants and flowers from temperate climates.

Esa said the exhibition, themed "Colours Amidst Green", would emphasise flowers.

"There will be floral sculptures, wedding bouquets and an educational session on how to grow grapes in this country."

According to Esa more than 150 exhibitors, including gardening enthusiasts from Singapore, were expected to display their plants and flowers at Laman 2004.

Also taking part will be nine State Landscape Departments and five universities - Universiti Islam Antarabangsa, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Mara.

He said the event, which will take on the form of a cultural festival, was expected to draw about 100,000 visitors besides spurring interest in gardening among Malaysians.

"The exhibition is in line with the country's vision to turn the nation into a beautiful landscaped country by 2005," said Esa at a briefing.

The idea of transforming the country into a garden nation was first mooted by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the mid-1980s and over the years, parts of Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh, have been turned into "garden cities."

Creating an awareness on the environment through landscaping is also one of its goals.

"Visitors can purchase flowers, plants and garden materials and try their hand at landscaping at Laman 2004," he said.

The Malaysian garden concept will also be revealed for the first time at the event.

Esa was hopeful that the exhibition, if held on an annual basis, would become one of the country's major tourist attractions.

The event has been welcomed by organisations such as the Orchid Society of Malaysia, which has been holding orchid shows on its own on a regular basis.

President Lim Mok Hai was excited about Laman 2004.

"Such an exhibition will not only help create more awareness of the importance of the environment but will also introduce more species of orchids to visitors."

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