

## 2006 CHICAGO FLOWER &amp; GARDEN SHOW PREVIEW



## ARRANGED MARRIAGES

Floral designer dares to be different.

12 FUN FACTS TO KNOW . . .  
. . . about the show.

## HELLO, GOOD BUYS

Our pointers for show-shopping fun.

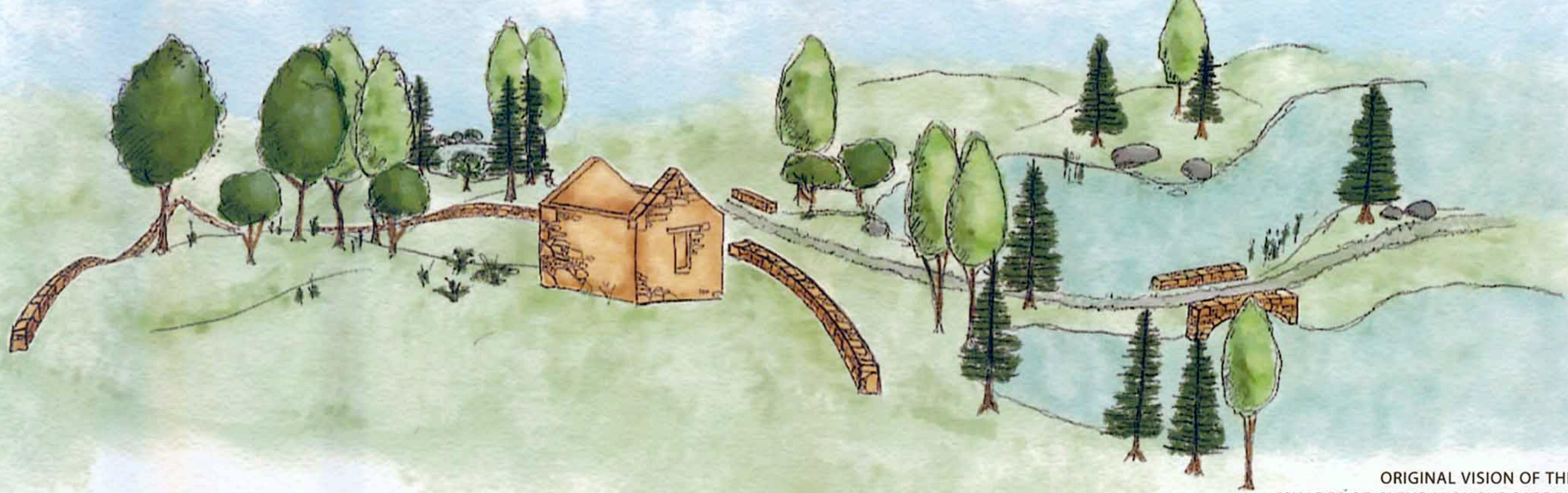
ORIGINAL VISION OF THE "SHADES OF GLENDALOUGH" GARDEN  
Tribune illustration from sketch by Celtic GardensAN Irish COUNTRYSIDE  
GROWS IN Chicago

Photo from East Coast &amp; Midlands Tourism, County Westmeath, Ireland

The 9th Century chapel of St. Kevin in Glendalough, Ireland, is one of John Cullen's inspirations for his display garden at the show.

## Chicago Flower &amp; Garden Show facts

**WHAT:** The 12th annual indoor exhibit of gardens, gardening ideas and products, with seminars, demonstrations and competitions.**WHERE:** Festival Hall of Navy Pier, 600 E. Grand Ave.**WHEN:** Saturday to March 19**HOURS:** 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays**COST:** \$12 weekdays, \$14 weekends; ages 4 to 12, \$5 weekdays and \$6 weekends; under 4 free. Discount coupons (\$2 off) are available at all National City Bank branches. For locations, see [www.nationalcity.com](http://www.nationalcity.com).**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Call 312-321-0077 or see [www.chicagoflower.com](http://www.chicagoflower.com)

Well, that's the plan, anyway. But the making of a Flower &amp; Garden Show display garden can be as unpredictable as a Chicago winter.

By Beth Botts | Tribune staff reporter

It's a long road from Tipperary — or, actually, Glendalough — to Chicago.

When John Cullen of Celtic Gardens in Dexter, Mich., set out last summer to create a major display garden for the Chicago Flower & Garden Show that opens Saturday at Navy Pier, he planned to bring antique artifacts from Ireland and to draw inspiration from the magical interplay of wild-run plants and weathered stone he had seen as nature reclaimed its ground around ancient and abandoned buildings there.

In particular, he remembered the 9th Century chapel of St. Kevin in the monastery town of Glendalough in County Wicklow and a derelict centuries-old stone farmhouse in County Carlow.

With a garden-design business that imports farm troughs, fence posts and other interesting old stone from Europe, with the show spanning St. Patrick's Day and with his affinity for all things Irish, an Emerald Isle evocation was obvious.

But the making of this garden is itself running wild. As with all of the show's major exhibits, it has required many months of planning and meticulous preparation, all leading up to the coming frantic week when the gardens must be constructed from scratch on the concrete floors of Navy Pier for Saturday's opening. Many of those gardens won't turn out

just exactly as planned, requiring tweaks and improvisations here and there. But Cullen and his partners, Kane Brothers Inc. of Burr Ridge, specialists in creating natural-looking water gardens, will have traveled an especially rocky road. This year's show theme is "Capacity for Invention," Cullen says, and "we might have to be more inventive than we expected."

It started on schedule. "With these gardens, it comes up on you so quick, you can't start early enough," says Chris Kane (the other brother is Frank). It would be their province to design and engineer

PLEASE SEE IRISH, PAGE 8



Photo by Chris Kane

Plans call for a water feature, such as this one created for a Hinsdale client by Kane Brothers Inc., to amble through the "Shades of Glendalough" garden.

## From Ireland to your land

Here are some things for a Chicago-area gardener to look for in the "Shades of Glendalough" exhibit at the Chicago Flower &amp; Garden Show:

## SOFTEN THE EDGES:

A stone edge may be necessary for a water garden, but it need not be harsh. Interplant the stones and rim the pond with hardy marginal aquatic plants such as blue pickerel (*Pontederia cordata*), corkscrew rush (*Juncus effusus* 'Spiralis') or lavender musk (*Mimulus ringens*), Kane says. The plants also will help keep the water clear of algae and also can draw the eye to specific details in the stone formations.

Photo by Dan Tenaglia  
Lavender musk

**PLANT MORE:** Whether in Ireland or Illinois, "in nature things happen in clusters," says co-designer John Cullen of Celtic Gardens in Dexter, Mich.: a grove of dogwoods, a clump of lupines, a sweep of heather. To aim for the same effect in a residential garden, plant at least three of anything and a mass if you can. That means you'll use fewer kinds of plants: "Our plant list is probably a third of what it was last year," Cullen says.

**CREATE SHAPE:** It is the form of the garden — not just stones, paths, bridges and walls but details such as an interesting statue and evergreens such as clipped boxwood — that make a garden interesting in a Chicago winter when most plants are dormant, Cullen says.

**MAKE PHOTOGRAPHS AND MEMORIES:** The "Glendalough" garden was inspired by Cullen's visit there. As you travel, take photographs and notes of things that stick in your mind. There may be ways to evoke the same effect, even with different plants, at home.

**LET YOUR GARDEN EVOLVE.** In the Irish countryside, nature reshapes forgotten gardens. The right plants thrive; plants that are wrong for the place give up. Even in the carefully crafted gardens he designs on the North Shore and elsewhere, Cullen says, "There are some things that adapt and some that don't." Don't be afraid to move plants or replace them with something more suitable.

— Beth Botts

IRISH:  
Designer must go with the flow

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a stream, waterfall and ponds to amble through the imaginary countryside of the 5,000-square-foot "Shades of Glendalough" garden. There were consultations. There were lists. There were drawings. It was a plan — until February. "You think you're in perfect shape, and then stuff happens," Cullen says.

First a slab of ice crashed through the roof of a greenhouse at Christensen Plant Center in Plymouth, Mich., which was forcing the perennials for the garden into bloom early. The crash crushed vines and let in icy air that damaged many specimens and threw much of the plant plan up in the air. Fortunately, Kim Roth, manager of the plant center, said, "we normally double the material" when forcing plants, because there always are some that don't turn out. So a week before setup, she was confident she could supply plants including Knock Out and 'Lady Elsie May' roses, delphiniums, catmint, a variety of ferns, violets, lupines, thyme and liriope to tuck among the rocks.

But in the meantime, a shipping container full of artifacts from Europe, many destined for the show, was halted in New Jersey by officials of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. They called in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which suspected that some Irish dirt clinging to the ancient stones might harbor plant diseases. Ultimately, Cullen rented a truck and drove to the port of Newark, hoping to unpack and thoroughly clean some of the objects he had planned to use: a set of limestone steps from a derelict Irish chapel worn by thousands of feet, an old farm watering trough, a set of mushroom-shaped foundation stones once used for farm outbuildings. He also had to convince government officials that the stones had been legally exported. On Tuesday, he was hoping to get the USDA's go-ahead so he could get them to Chicago in time for the show.

He had no doubt it would all come together. He just didn't know quite how. Over years of doing show gardens, "We always have learned it's wise not to be too set on something," he said.

Both Celtic Gardens and Kane Brothers are veterans of display gardens at the show, though this is their first year working together.

Another show veteran, Ted's Greenhouse in Tinley Park, was enlisted to provide dogwood, dawn redwood and sycamore trees that had been coaxed to bloom and leaf in early March, when outdoor Chicago trees still are dormant. Christensen Plant Center is supplying plants for six of the show's displays.

The Kanes weren't worried. Though they wouldn't know the precise shape of the brook until they actually start pushing dirt around, Chris said, they did know how they would do it. A black rubber liner over hidden supports would channel the water, made to look natural by artfully placed fieldstone. Cullen stopped off

## Designers show their 'Capacity for Invention' in 14 themed display gardens

Here's a list of the 14 display gardens planned for the 12th annual Chicago Flower &amp; Garden Show. Designed around the theme, "Capacity for Invention," the gardens promise plenty of ideas and opportunities to rest as well. The 2006 show will be held in Festival Hall at Navy Pier Saturday to March 19.

**1 "DAY AND NIGHT."** A pond has two faces — one for day and one for night. Designed by: Brian Helfrich and Tommy Hill of Aquascape Designs Inc., Batavia. Produced by: the North American Water Garden Society, Batavia.

**2 "THE ENABLING GARDEN."** See ways to make gardening more user-friendly with gadgets, tools, raised beds and more. Designed by: Heidi Sibert, vice president of James Martin Associates, Vernon Hills. Produced by: the Arthritis Foundation, Chicago.

**3 "THE GROWING CONNECTION."** Container gardeners alert. See a water-efficient way to grow a lot in a small space. Learn about the program that hopes to alleviate world hunger. Created by: University of Illinois Extension Service and the Illinois Master Gardeners program (coordinators of The Growing Connection in the Chicago area).

**4 "HOUSE OF GLASS."** A stylized glass house offers an unusual perspective on the use of fresh blooms. Designed by: Susan Bal and Gail Gregor. Produced by: the American Institute of Floral Design, North Central chapter.

**5 "ILLUSIONS."** A Japanese-themed garden that uses plants, bamboo and gravel. Designed by: Sam McGee. Produced by: Prufrock Floral and Botanical Design, Winnetka.

**6 "OUTSIDE THE FLOWER BOX."** The typical American back yard gets a dramatic makeover with a gazebo cantilevered over a 2,000-square-foot pond. Designed by: Cox Prairie Landscaping. Produced by: Leisure Woods, Genoa.

**7 "REINVENTING THE WHEEL."** This garden harkens back to our past with a collection of agricultural artifacts related to the wheel. Designed and produced by: students in the Horticulture and Agricultural Mechanics classes at the Chicago High School for the Agricultural Sciences, 3857 W. 111th St.

**8 "RINGS OF KERRY."** The magical green landscape of Ireland is reincarnated in this vignette. Designed and produced by: John Cullen of Celtic Gardens Imports, Dexter, Mich., in conjunction with water feature designers Frank and Chris Kane of Kane Brothers, Chicago.

**9 "SANDS THROUGHOUT TIME."** A salute to inventions that incorporate cacti. Designed and produced by: Ted's Greenhouse, Tinley Park. Web site: [www.tedsgreenhouse.com](http://www.tedsgreenhouse.com)

**10 "SIZZLING SERENITY."** As the outdoors becomes an extension of the home, this display looks at "living rooms" for the yard. Designed by: Elaine Peoples and Mark and Laurie McWilliams of GreenView Nursery in Springfield. Produced by: Illinois Nurseryman's Association.

**11 "UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN."** Students at Triton College create a sunny Mediterranean garden. Designed and produced by: students in Landscape and Floral Design, Triton College, River Grove.

**12 "WALK ON THE WILD SIDE."** By capitalizing on nature's mistakes, this display shows how mutations are used by horticulturists to create jaw-dropping gardens. Designed by: Gwen VanSteen and Todd Mohr. Produced by: Richard and Susan Eyre of Rich's Foxwillow Pines Nursery Inc., Woodstock.

**13 "WELCOME HOME."** See playful ideas for a space-challenged house in the city that includes distinctive garden art. Designed by: Patti Kirkpatrick. Produced by: the University of Illinois Extension.

**14 "TRANQUILITY OASIS."** A romantic, four-tier Italian-style fountain in a secluded setting promises a respite. Designed and produced by: Meadowbrook Landscape Management Inc., Mokena.

in Pennsylvania to shop for the fieldstones, discarded when old farm walls were torn down. Plants such as rushes, reeds, irises, cardinal flower and forget-me-nots would line the banks.

## Many things to many people

The nine-day Chicago Flower & Garden Show is a showcase for landscape contractors and designers. It's also a vast relief to some 150,000 winter-weary visitors who relish stepping into a warm space full of living things. It's a place where amateur gardeners vie in growing, arranging and photography competitions. And it's a source of inspiration and information to gardeners who attend seminars and demonstrations, pick up ideas from display gardens and shop for tools, plants and tchotchkes. Gardens will be sponsored this year by the North American Water Garden Society, the American Institute of Floral Design, Prufrock Floral and Botanical Design in Winnetka, Cox Prairie Landscaping in Naperville and Leisure Woods of Genoa, Ted's, Rich's Foxwillow Pines Nursery in Woodstock, the University of Illinois Extension, the horticulture department of Triton College in River Grove, the Illinois Nurserymen's Association and others.

It's a costly undertaking. Celtic Gardens defrays part of that cost by preselling much of the art, plants and stone it uses to Chicago-area garden-design clients.

As he reeled from misfortune, Cullen's rock was the Kane brothers. The brothers started with a lawn-mowing business as teens and by 1998 had become specialists in creating water features that feel like they belong in their landscapes.

Ted's, too, could be counted on. For years, the greenhouse has forced woody plants for the show, according to vice president Dan Biernacki, son of founder Ted, and is supplying several gardens at this year's show.

Keeping careful records from year to year helps Biernacki and his staff know how to manipulate plants' internal calendars in volatile weather, such as this year's freakishly warm January followed by arctic blasts.

## Call out the tree movers

Wheeled carts are built for trees 15 or 20 feet tall so they can be rolled into a warm greenhouse or out to a cold shed to control their progress. It's a delicate balancing act: You don't want them peaking too early, but you don't want to expose them to a frost that would kill extra-early buds. And "every tree is different," Biernacki says.

Cullen had no doubts about the trees or that Roth would supply plants he could work with. And he had no doubts about the stonework (if it arrived on time). Traveling as he often does in Europe in the winter, he knows good architectural bones when he sees them in a garden, and as

a master mason, he and his family business know how to create them.

He knew what look he was shooting for with the plants. In the neglected dooryards of castles, chapels and cottages of Ireland, Cullen had seen runaway roses, mosses and sweeps of wild heather and thistle. "When they're in bloom, the entire hillside is full of color," he says.

Cullen's challenge was to create the same effect using tougher Midwestern plants "that have that same kind of look."

There are other tricks: Since there's a limit to how much topographical variation can be created in a second-story convention hall (one year, a load of dirt actually collapsed the floor), the rolling hills and rocky outcrops of the Irish countryside would have to be suggested by the Kanes' subtle changes in elevation and by plant choice. For example, a grouping of dawn redwoods and sycamores is intended to suggest a mountain that would be the source of the brook.

Chicago gardeners can take a page from that notebook when they plan their own gardens. Cullen knew that once his crew started setting up Sunday, with whatever plants arrived in climate-controlled trucks, with five trucks of stone including, he hoped, those Irish artifacts, they would make the best garden they could.

As in creating a real garden, "it's design by discovery," Cullen says.

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