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Contact: Malei Weir
Mooncatcher Communications
(805) 239-0020 ♦ mw@mooncatcher.com

THE FUN CONTINUES TO GROW AT NORTHWEST CHILDREN'S GARDEN

Imaginative Ideas Take Root at The Oregon Garden's Whimsical Attraction for Kids

Silverton, OR— From the new Hobbit House to the “furniture” garden, the monkey puzzle tree to the upcoming miniature train garden, the Children's Garden at The Oregon Garden continues to plant an imaginative array of fun for the gardeners of tomorrow.

“Gardens aren't just to look at,” said Jeff Pera, staff horticulturist at The Oregon Garden, an 80-acre botanical attraction 45 miles south of Portland. “These days when I hear laughter and screaming coming from the Children's Garden, I am assured the kids are playing on the new Hobbit House.”

Indeed, with the addition of the Hobbit House and other whimsical elements to the Children's Garden, much more joyful noise seems to be emanating across The Oregon Garden.

Buried smack in the center of the Children's Garden, the Hobbit House consists of a submerged tunnel with both ends exposed at ground level. Here, kids pull open the round door coverings and peek inside before they choose to scuttle through the run.

“We are also adorning the tunnel area with plants that are a bit odd in order to enhance the magic of the Hobbit theme,” Pera said.

The Children's Garden's central plaza is also sporting a more imaginative profile these days with the addition of six topiary plants shaped as stars, fish, a flower, kangaroo, bear and a butterfly.

“Adults are also fascinated to learn about the process of maintaining these sculptures,” Pera said.

One of the garden's newest attractions is a tree house built around the trunk of a large curly willow tree. Only 15 inches off the ground, the tree house is accessible to most kids, yet still offers the excitement of a retreat via its thick green canopy. The trunk also sports decorative fencing adorned with jungle animal cutouts.

The garden's “weird plants” display also continues to evolve. Even adults can appreciate the unicorn grass, windmill palm, monkey puzzle tree and other peculiar varieties.

And these days, with the outdoor “living room” all the rage on home patios and decks, so too the Oregon Garden's Children's Garden is following suit with a collection of its own pieces for a “furniture garden.”

“It all began when someone last fall wanted to donate a piano,” Pera said. “This spurred the idea of creating a furniture garden where we transform pieces into planters and arrange them to look like a room.”

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Since the piano donation, the garden has collected and planted a pedestal sink, toilet, a pot belly stove and a bicycle with handlebar basket. As more items are gathered, the furniture will be planted and put into place.

Another coming attraction is a miniature train garden. "This will be a fun way to exhibit a large variety of miniature plants in order to create a scale-size landscape," Pera said. "Plus the working train will be an exciting and active addition to the garden."

Thanks to the help of the Pacific Crossing Model Railroad Club out of Salem, Oregon, The Oregon Garden now has a preliminary sketch for the track layout. The railroad club will also supervise track installation using the labor of local high school students who will use the job as credit for their senior project school requirement.

Yet another planned part of the scene at the Children's Garden is something called a "vertical garden picture." This living wall will be planted in the garden on September 20, 2008 by a workshop offered through Chemeketa Community College. Using the same concept as a green roof, this wall will have the added artistic value of a large animal image via different plant colors and textures.

"These new additions are really enhancing the enjoyment for children and parents alike when they visit The Oregon Garden," Pera said. "Interactive educational components are also in our future plans, but for now, we are pleased to offer a family friendly attraction that inspires the gardeners of tomorrow."

On Saturdays throughout the summer, children are invited to The Oregon Garden's "Saturday 4 Kids," in which they can participate in themed activities pertaining to the natural world, including bugs, flowers, birds and trees. And, beginning September 1, 2008, families interested in making the garden a true getaway, may book a room at the new Oregon Garden Resort, a 103-room hotel featuring a restaurant, lounge, day spa, meeting rooms and cozy guest rooms each with their own fireplace, landscaped patio or private deck. For more information, please contact 800-966-8490 or visit www.oregongarden.org.

GENERAL INFORMATION

May through September, The Oregon Garden is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and admission is \$10 for adults; \$9 for seniors; and \$8 for students. Entry is free for Oregon Garden members and for children ages seven and younger. Entry fees are reduced for the months October through April. For more information, or, to become a member, please call (503) 874-8100 or visit www.oregongarden.org.

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The Oregon Garden is an 80-acre botanical sanctuary that showcases the natural wonders of the Pacific Northwest with more than 20 individual themed gardens and related attractions. The mission of The Oregon Garden is to welcome and inspire all visitors with an appreciation for the extraordinary ecology of the Pacific Northwest, and to provide a meaningful educational experience for gardeners of all skill levels and ages. Visit www.OregonGarden.org or call (503) 874-8100 for more information.