Festival of Flowers

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Today at the Alzafar Shrine Center on Loop 1604 between Stone Oak Parkway and Blanco is the 19th annual Festival of Flowers. The Festival of Flowers is a “real” gardening event. Do not attend if you are interested in hot tubs, combination windows or burglar alarms, they won’t be there! There are some gardening accessories on sale but mostly the agenda is plants and gardening practices through the ambitious program schedule and over 50 exhibits. Expect to leave the Festival of Flowers with information, new ideas, and plants.

The San Antonio Water System has been one of the co-sponsors of Festival of Flowers since the beginning. Part of their contribution to the event is to provide every attendee a xeriscape plant for their landscape. This year one of the plants will be Asclepias tuberosa, a native milkweeds that provides an attractive bloom for the garden and nectar for the monarch butterfly. SAWS is generous in the number of plants it distributes but the free plant giveaway only lasts as long as the supply of plants does.

The program of speakers is always a highlight of Festival of Flowers. I will lead off the agenda at 9:30 am to cover “Attracting and Producing Butterflies in your Landscape”. The presentation will include some discussion of the Monarch butterfly initiatives. At 10:30 am, Pam Penick, author of “The Water-Saving Garden: How to Grow a Gorgeous Garden with a Lot Less Water” will discuss the topic of her book. Horticulturist Skip Richter will discuss the topic of his new book “Natural Pest Control Techniques” at 11:30 am. Daylilies are called the perfect perennial by some gardeners. Ray Elizondo, Master Gardener and daylily expert will discuss “Growing Daylilies in San Antonio” at 12:30 pm.

In the afternoon the popular Organic Roundtable led by Nurseryman and radio host Bob Webster will be reconvened. Bob’s team will include John Dromgoole owner of the Natural Gardener Nursery in Austin and one of my favorite radio gardeners.

There is also the opportunity to participate in the Herb Kitchen. The demonstration will include area cooks preparing simple recipes all day that emphasize the herbs we can grow in the San Antonio area. If one of the topics that you want to learn more about is Floral Design, seek out the Floral Design Challenge and Demonstrations. For “Do It Yourselfers” Master Gardener Lou Kellogg is conducting a “Build Your Own Rain Barrel Class”.

If the described gardening presentations aren’t enough, look for the “Daylily Show and Sale” and the “Plants that Thrive in San Antonio” exhibit. Master Gardener Sir Oliver Smith has put together a display of plant varieties that all watersaver homeowners should include in their landscape for low maintenance beauty throughout the year.

For many Festival of Flowers attendees the highlight of the event is the “City-Wide Plant Exchange” where over 1200 plants are exchanged between 9am and 3pm. The Gardening Volunteers of South Texas who conduct the exchange claim it is the largest in Texas. You bring the plants you want to trade, receive exchange tickets as credit, and then use the tickets to select from available plants.

The Festival of Flowers is open from 9am through 5pm. There is a $6 entrance fee but parking is free. There is a plant and package checkroom. For more information visit the website at [www.safestivalofflowers.com](http://www.safestivalofflowers.com).