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# Nursery hopes sculptures made of lavender plants attract more than just insects

KATE SHERIDAN, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE  
More from Kate Sheridan, Special to Montreal Gazette

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MONTREAL, QUE: September 21, 2009 - Lavender in the field at Le Lavandou in the Eastern Townships on Monday, September 21, 2009. (THE GAZETTE/Dave Sidaway) DAVE SIDAWAY / THE GAZETTE

A new agrotourism attraction is opening in Vaudreuil-Dorion, just in time for the long Canada Day weekend.

Fifteen acres of lavender — with about 20,000 plants — as well as “mosaiculture” style flower sculptures will be the highlight of a grand opening event on Saturday and Sunday at Champs des Rêves, a garden centre on Daoust St. in Vaudreuil.

Sand sculptors, including reigning world champion Mélineige Beauregard, will also create a variety of figures for the grand opening weekend. Visitors will be able to vote on the sculpture they like best to enter a draw for a gift card. A variety of musical acts will also perform on Saturday afternoon.

The activity is part of owner and landscaper Mark Rassi’s plan to attract more customers to the nursery after July 1, when business tends to slow down.

It’s also a new way for Rassi to cultivate perennial plants to sell. “Instead of farming in rows of plants, I thought I’d make it in a mosaiculture and garden beds instead.”

Rassi also hopes the exhibition will help set his garden centre apart from competitors, especially larger retailers.

“Being in the nursery business, it’s tough today,” he said. “Every store now is selling plants. You go anywhere — you go to IGA, Réno-Depot, Home Depot, Walmart, Costco — they probably sell more plants than we would ever sell,” he said, “but we know they’ll never make large gardens for people.”

Rassi’s gardens are inspired by the 2013 Mosaiculture exhibition at Montreal’s Botanical Gardens, he said. Just after he saw the showcase, the farm next door to the nursery went up for sale. “It was kind of a fluke that it happened all at the same time,” he said.

Rossi opened a nursery in Rigaud in 1988, and has been in business ever since. (He moved his shop to the Vaudreuil-Dorion area in 2000 to boost sales.) Now, he has about 5,000 clients.

Naturally, Rassi would like to continue to grow his client base. He’s also expanding the kinds of products he can offer: Champs des Rêves already sells soaps and hand creams made from lavender by-products.

“We’re trying it out to see what the market is,” Rassi said.

Although this is the first year for the nursery’s exhibition, Rassi hopes that a lot of people attend.

“I want it to inspire people to garden,” he said. “It’s not just walking through gardens and looking at plants, it’s really seeing what you can do with them.”

The exhibition will be open from 10 a.m. to 8 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday; beginning July 4, it will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Sept. 1. Admission is \$8; children under 12 are free. Parking is free with admission.

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