



Premiere plantsman to lecture at Yew Dell Gardens

Horticulturalist Foltz helped establish the Theodore Klein Plant Awards program

**By Helen E. McKinney
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February 2010

CRESTWOOD, Ky. – While working his way toward an accounting degree, Stephen Foltz discovered that he was headed down the wrong path. He switched gears and switched colleges to pursue a path more geared toward who he really was: He followed a path strewn with trees, shrubs and flowering plants that lead to a career in horticulture.

Adhering to the adage that “At the end of the day you have to follow what you love,” Foltz changed careers and has never looked back. As chief horticulturalist at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, his days are filled with botany research, testing new varieties of plants, and maintaining the flora that the zoo already has.

For the last 21 years, Foltz has worked at the zoo, “learning about new plants and what will do well in the region,” he said.

Foltz said he works with a lot of trialing programs to test perennials and annuals, and he contributes to endangered plant research. The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden has more than 4,000 different varieties of plants, which includes shade trees, ornamental trees, bamboo and ornamental grasses. In the spring, he and his staff maintain 92,000 tulip bulbs, followed by an Annual Trial-Display program that is one of the largest in the Tri-State region.

“We pride ourselves in trying to label as many plants on the grounds as possible,” said Foltz, 48. Foltz will be the first to tell someone that due to its research programs, the Cincinnati Zoo “is different from most zoos.”

The zoo is the second oldest in the United States, having been established in 1875. Its 75 acres are well maintained. And it is Foltz’s job to “make the zoo look good, and provide more depth and meaning” to the exhibits, he said.

Foltz will share his vast knowledge of plants from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11, at Yew

Dell Gardens in Crestwood, Ky. Ticket cost is \$15 for members, \$20 for non-members. Advance registration is recommended.

“Steve is one of our region’s premiere plantsmen with diverse knowledge of all garden plants including trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals and tropical plants,” said Leah Whitmer, director of Marketing & Development for Yew Dell Gardens. His plant experience has “produced a long list of excellent plant recommendations for gardeners in the local climate.”

Through his lecture, Foltz will provide an overview of his plant evaluation program and offer lists of specific plant varieties that have been the best performers in the landscape over the past several years. His list of recommended plants “will help area gardeners in their efforts to find and cultivate superior garden plants,” said Whitmer.

“Louisville is one of my favorite towns,” said Foltz, a northern Kentucky resident. He graduated from the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture in 1986.

It’s very important to Foltz for zoo visitors to see the animals in natural surroundings. “It’s a key point to the exhibits,” he said. Early in the zoo’s existence, animals were displayed in cages, unlike their current naturalistic displays.

The zoo is an accredited botanical garden, patterned after zoos in Germany. “In the 1930s, it was one of very few zoos to display animals in their natural habitats,” Foltz said. “We try our best to make the habitat more unique for the animals.”

Foltz has done his share of designing and implementing esthetic projects at the zoo. One he is particularly fond of is the area he converted to the Jungle Trails exhibit.

“In the early '90s it was a steep hillside and a parking lot,” said Foltz. He transformed the uninviting area into a tropical jungle paradise. In 1994, it was an award-winning exhibit, he said.

“As someone who has worked in horticulture in a zoo environment for years, Steve has many stories and amusing antidotes that combine with his easy going style to make for an entertaining and informative lecture,” said Whitmer. “Steve’s lectures are always rated as among the most immediately useful to gardeners.”

Foltz is one of the founding members of the Theodore Klein Plant Award program. He said the most memorable part of his career was meeting Theodore Klein, former owner of Yew Dell Gardens.

“Theodore Klein was a wonderful plantsman,” said Foltz. Though Klein is gone, Louisville has an outstanding group of horticulturalists even today, he said. “These are the kind of people we learn from.”

• *To register for this lecture, visit: www.YewDellGardens.org or call (502) 241-4788.*

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