

Connected by gardens of earthy delights



AARON FRANCIS

Myles Broad invites show visitors to stroll around his Connections garden, which transforms a traditional backyard into a communal space

Melbourne's annual Flower and Garden Show is sure to attract large crowds

HELEN YOUNG

AT the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, which opens today, it is usual for the 100,000-plus attendees each year to view the drawcard show gardens from a polite distance behind a barricade.

But not for Myles Broad's garden this year.

As one of 17 show gardens created by notable and emerging designers who interpret the latest trends and showcase new ma-

terials, Broad's garden, which he has dubbed Connections, turns a traditional backyard into a communal space and the visiting public are invited to walk through it. "The garden we've designed is a place to share experiences and nature," says Broad, of Melbourne's Eckersley Garden Architecture.

"It explores how traditional yards might transition to communal gathering spaces in the future. "It's not just about our dwindling parcels of land but also about the social disconnection that many Australians face in their lives today."

A sculptural canopy of hemp ropes criss-crossing above the centre space represents the ways our lives intersect.

Broad says that the garden was designed to be fluid.

"The furniture is interchangeable to accommodate different uses and the planting is designed to be looser too. We want the feel to be more relaxed, more fun, more welcoming".

The Connections garden, sponsored by *Australian House & Garden* magazine, is linked to NeighbourDay, Australia's annual celebration of community that gets us connected with those who share our street.

This year's 10th anniversary event is on Easter Sunday.

MIFGS, Australia's premier gardening show, is held over five days, from today until Sunday, in the dappled shade of Carlton Gardens, with floral exhibits in

the historic Royal Exhibition Building.

While the show gardens are aspirational, the Avenue of Achievable Gardens provides plenty of good ideas for home gardeners with small budgets and basic skills.

Landscape design students create these stylish mini landscapes so that the public can replicate favourite ideas, using recipe cards of the ingredients.

For plantaholics, the specialist nurseries are irresistible, offering a chance to talk with the growers as well as collect covetable plants.

The show's official charity partner, Kids Under Cover, benefits from the cubby house challenge, with a number of mini-mansions open for inspection

during the show, to be auctioned and raffled on the last day.

With sculpture, art, water features and the full gamut of garden products, plus plenty of free advice, if there's anything you need for the garden it will be there.

In the Royal Exhibition Building, huge floral displays mix with floristry classes and demonstrations, exhibits of new release roses, a fresh flower market and the Ask The Experts stage.

A highlight is the floral fashion competition, in which fashion students use flowers and foliage to create extraordinary garments. This year's theme, Vegetable Matter, is sure to open up even more inventive possibilities.

Be sure when you visit to take your camera.