

Garden club showcases chrysanthemums

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson

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LAKEPORT – The chrysanthemum – it's the flower of November, and is beloved in China and Japan. {sidebar id=105}

The beautiful fall flower with dozens of variations and colors was featured at a special show in Lakeport Friday afternoon.

The Dance of the Mums flower show, hosted by the Clear Lake Trowel and Trellis Club at the Lakeport Yacht Club, gave mum enthusiasts their first chance in several years to concentrate on the special flower, said club member Jo Jameson.

Another club member, June Beto, said the show – which also featured one of the biggest and tastiest selections of homemade goodies around – had many visitors, which may lead to future shows.

Lakeport resident and club Carol Kesey is considered by many to be the local expert on chrysanthemums.

Kesey, who will be 91 in December, started growing chrysanthemums in the 1950s, when she moved to her home on Ninth and High streets. She still lives there, with a yard that's a veritable flower showcase.

“I just love them all,” Kesey said of flowers.

Mums generally are in season September through November, said Kesey. That means the flowers arrive in time for the Lake County Fair, where Kesey has won many show ribbons. But she hasn't been of a mind to brave the late summer heat to show her flowers at the California State Fair in Sacramento.

Jameson said Kesey has encouraged other club members to enter their flowers in the fair. She added that Kesey also is incredibly generous, and shares her flower starts with anyone who drops by and asks for some.

Kesey, who comes from a family of people with “green thumbs and muddy hands,” said growing chrysanthemums is addictive. “You just can't stop.”

Mums also have taken over her yard, forcing her to grow vegetables in pots rather than the ground.

Getting the big, lush flowers requires a lot of work, including a process called “disbudding,” which Kesey said involves breaking the flowers down a few times.

Many of the chrysanthemums at the show were grown by Kesey, with numerous arrangements crafted by her friend, Shirley Estrem. Not one to play favorites, Kesey said she couldn't pick any one in particular that she liked the best.

Each day Kesey spends three to four hours outside working in her garden. Kesey, who could easily pass for about 20 years younger than her 90 years, credits her garden and working in it for her youthful outlook and good health.

Growing mums, like life, take some time to get right, according to Kesey, who has a sparkling wit.

“In about 50 years you usually get it all figured out,” she said.

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