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## **Woodland Gardens Art & Bloom Festival, at one with nature**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens Art & Bloom Festival, May 19 to 21, is one of those Comox Valley events that has become a must attend for many residents and visitors.

This is a perfect time to visit the gardens as many of the over 3,500 rhododendrons and wildflowers are in full bloom. The highlight of the weekend though is the fantastic display of work by artists and artisans who set up their booths throughout the nearly 24 acres of informal gardens.

“We wanted to create a special event in the gardens that would provide a venue for artists to showcase their work.” says Bryan Zimmerman the gardens owner and creator. “It only seemed natural to hold the event at one of the times during the year when the gardens are at their most spectacular.”

As visitors stroll the many pathways, enjoying the blossoms and relaxed atmosphere, they will discover an eclectic mix of paintings, photography, pottery, works in wood, stone, metal, along with fabrics, jewellery and unique pieces that can add a touch of art to their gardens.

Many of these artists are award winners in their own mediums and come from near and far to set up their booths that are literally spread out from one end of the gardens to the other. Some of these artists have been exhibiting at the Festival since its inception and visitors come to see their latest creations. On the other hand there are always new exhibitors whose works add to the ever-evolving mix of sights and sounds.

The gardens themselves are a work of art as Zimmerman has literally hand crafted a setting unlike any other of British Columbia’s botanical gardens. “My objective is to work with the land as I find it,” says Zimmerman. “I try not to disturb the natural growth and attempt to create an environment that looks as if it was always there.” Zimmerman takes this to heart. For example in order to minimize the impact of vehicles he hand spreads tons of bark mulch each year on over 4 kilometers of pathways and gets it there the old fashioned way by using a wheelbarrow.

To further enhance the cultural experience, visitors will find musicians playing at several locations throughout the gardens, each one of them performing in their own unique style with a sound that seems to blend with nature. Some of the musicians who will be on hand this year for everyone’s enjoyment are Bruce and Judy Wing, Greg Joy, David Somers, Anela Kahaimoe, Tracy Canil and Luke Blue Guthrie.

The Art and Bloom Festival has literally something for everyone. There is the spectacular display of flowers and blossoms whose smells permeate the air, kilometers of trails and pathways that weave their way throughout the gardens and of course the opportunity to shop and pick up a unique piece of art that will become a great conversation piece or family heirloom

Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens is located 15 minutes north of Courtenay, just off Highway 19a, look for the directional signs. The Art and Bloom Festival is open to the public from 10 am to 5 pm on Saturday and Sunday, from 10 am to 4 pm on Monday. And regular garden admission fees apply.

For more information about the gardens and the festival visit the website [www.woodlandgardens.ca](http://www.woodlandgardens.ca)