

## Floralies of the past

It was during the three centuries preceding the Christian era that the first flower festivals were held.

Flora, whose head, distinguished only by a floral crown, still appears on some of the coins of Italy, was the goddess of the flowering of plants. Her worship in Rome began early.

Her festival--Floralia, celebrated from April 28 to May 3--was instituted in 238 BC on the advice of the Sibylline Books, a collection of prophecies. At the same time, a temple was dedicated to Flora on the Aventine.

The Floralia was accompanied by much indecency. Harlots considered it their special season. In fact, the festival became an excuse for general lechery.

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A program of games (ludi Florales), though celebrated earlier, became an annual event only in 173 BC. However, the games ended with the decadence of Rome.

Still, the art of flower cultivation continued. In the Middle Ages, the Arabs became the masters of the art.

In the fifteenth century, legend has it that Clémence Isaure, of Toulouse, founded the Jeux floraux.

During the Renaissance, the Roman and Arab floral tradition was taken up in Europe, especially by Belgium, Holland, and France. In 1700, it is said that a Belgian scholar presented a collection of 6,000 varieties of plants in his garden in Leyde.

The dean of horticultural societies is Belgium. The Sociétté Royale d'Agriculture et de Botanique de Gand--"la ville de Flore"--was established in 1808 and each year it organized two exhibitions, one in Spring and another on the eve of Winter. The first such exhibition, called Le Frascati, opened Feb. 7, 1809.

In 1836, the Soci  t   built a palace to house an international horticultural exposition every five years. First called the "Grand Festival quinquennal de Gand", it later became known as "F  te de Flore" and, later, simply Floralties. By 1857, such countries as France, Russia, Holland, Germany, and England were participants.

In the last ten years, 14 international Floralties have been held in Europe in such cities as Dortmund, Paris, Cologne, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Vienna, Barcelona, Gand, Mannheim, Genoa, Nantes, Stuttgart, and Valencia.

In 1980, the year of Les Floralties internationales de Montr  al, other flower exhibitions are slated for Gand and Basel.