

ubiquitous rose, the toughest plant around this summer, which you'll find in the Royal Exhibition Building's Great Hall.

Show gardens are another highlight of the five-day event.

They demonstrate different approaches to landscaping, and while you probably won't go home, rip out your garden and build one exactly the same, there's sure to be something that catches your eye and will inspire you to emulate it somewhere in your plot.

Saying that, I would like to pick up Phillip Johnson's sustainable show garden, winner of the gold medal and a City of Melbourne award, and drop it into my garden.

Called "Habitat", it is breathtaking with its billabongs, water cascading over big boulders from one to the other, different plantings including vegetables, a Hill's hoist and double-storey stainless steel water tank.

Then there is the 250-kilogram red and yellow hand-made glass chandelier hanging from one of the trees — solar-powered, of course.

With sustainability the theme for this year's show, stainless steel tanks feature in several of the show gardens — not just as functional storage containers to collect water, but as environmental and decorative statements.

Vegetables too are popular and pop up in many of the gardens including Wayne DeKlijn's "Food for



and he didn't drink his way through them in the line of duty.

Another showstopper was Paal Grant's "The Entanglements Garden" featuring real and sculptured boab trees, a vertical vegetable wall, dry garden, dramatic metal archway and patterned paving.

It won gold in the outdoor exhibit category.

Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, who describes himself as a bad gardener, says the show is vital to Melbourne as it showcases the nursery industry, which has suffered badly.

Certainly any doom and gloom felt by growers has been dispelled by the plethora of flowers on display in myriad colours — from shocking pink bougainvilleas to fragrant purple hyacinths, bold bright tulips, delicate pastel-coloured roses, saucer-sized clematis and hardy bromeliads.

Very inspirational and like me, I'm sure, you'll want to get cracking in your garden after seeing all the wonderful plants and gardens on display at this year's show.

If it's advice you're after about water-saving products, mulch or just what to plant where, help will be on hand.

Just make sure you get a map of the exhibits and growers otherwise you could get lost, which I did!

And don't forget the sculpture exhibition in the gardens and the floral and fashion displays in the Great Hall.

The show is open today (9am-6pm) and tomorrow (9am-5pm).

Some tips from the show

- Use recycled materials
- Harvest and store rainwater
- Plant a vegetable garden
- Go organic
- Grow trees for shade
- Use solar for outdoor lighting
- Create vertical gardens
- Wine and dine alfresco
- Mix vegetables and ornamentals
- Mulch well to retain moisture

sculpture by Bronwyn Culshaw, Jenci Kapitany from The Collectors' Corner, 'Crystal Fountain' clematis, Daniel Tyrrell's award-winning show garden "Gardening by Numbers".

PICTURES:
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Read Denise Gadd's blog at blogs.theage.com.au/lifestyle/potteringby