



Date: March 8, 2007

What's growing on
at the Garden!

07019

For Immediate Release

EXOTIC NEW OTTOMAN GARDEN IS FIT FOR A SULTAN

(ST. LOUIS): When the flower beds behind the walls of the Ottoman Garden burst into bloom this spring and summer, visitors to the Missouri Botanical Garden might feel some of the awe of 16th century European travelers when they encountered the lush plants of that part of the world.

To those travelers, the flowers seemed exotic. Today's visitors will find many of them familiar because the Europeans of centuries past brought them home, where they came to heavily influence Western gardening.

The Ottoman Garden, which opened in summer 2006, will be in full bloom for the first time this year. Visitors will find a profusion of flowers that include classic Turkish tulips and drifts of bulbs, exotic citrus, aromatic herbs, pomegranate, lilac and various perennials, all set within a private courtyard embellished with Middle Eastern architectural elements and the music of water.

Horticulturalists supervised the planting of nearly 9,000 bulbs last fall, including historic hybrid tulips, with varieties dating from the 1500s through the mid-1900s. "It is perhaps the only one and is certainly one of the largest public displays of such rare tulips in the United States," said Jason Delaney, a senior horticulturist at the botanical garden.

The Ottoman Empire was among the largest in history. It was a Turkish state, which at the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries spanned three continents and controlled much of southeastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Although tulips and other flowers had been known in China and elsewhere in Asia, many varieties were first introduced to Europe through contact with the Ottoman Empire.

Flowers were important facets of the Ottoman culture. Their use comprised not only the small private gardens of the sultans but also the large public gardens, displays during festivals and ceremonies, and the depiction of flowers and foliage in art, decorations and clothing.

The Missouri Botanical Garden's Ottoman focuses on authentic "Rembrandt" tulips, which are infected

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ADD ONE: Ottoman Garden

with *potyvirus*. The virus causes color breaks in the petals, creating a feathered and streaked appearance to the blooms, Delaney explained. As their popularity spread westward, the Dutch turned the Ottoman appreciation into a “crazed obsession, buying and trading single bulbs...for entire family fortunes during a period known as ‘Tulipomania’ in the 17th century,” he said.

“It was not until the 1930s that this color-breaking and mutation was identified as a virus, and within the next few decades, the commercial cultivation of these types ceased. Look-alike Rembrandt tulips have been created through extensive hybridization and are now available to the home gardener in many different colors and styles,” Delaney continued.

The Missouri Botanical Garden’s designers tried to recreate sights and smells common to the people and officials of the historic empire. While gardens in Islamic lands differ in layout, most share the purpose of resembling the Koran’s description of the Gardens of Paradise. Gardens in those countries, many of which are arid, feature flowing water and abundant plantings.

The religious-based gardens seek to establish an atmosphere of peace and oneness with nature, enhanced by the rich, colorful sights and the pervasive fragrance of blossoms and herbs.

The Ottoman Garden strives to preserve the authenticity of the period. Its entrance features a wood double-arched door with an inscription in script that honors “the Great Benefactor.” Inside, visitors will find a stone pedestal fountain, or *cheshme*, inviting them to rinse their hands. Brick walkways lead visitors through the flower-laden plots to the center fountain. The fountain has small jets along its rim circling the bowl in the center.

At the north end of the garden, a paved patio stands covered with a wooden arbor, or *chardak*, with a tiled roof and painted murals of flowers.

St. Louis and Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, lie roughly at the same 40-degree latitude, offering an opportunity to present and support many of the same kind of plants.

The plants represent what would have been grown in the 16th through 19th centuries in what is now Turkey, Delaney said. Some plants, like the Asian persimmon *Diospyros kaki* from China, and the red-flowered mimosa tree *Albizia julibrissen* from Iraq and Afghanistan, were highly regarded ornamental exotics during the Ottoman period, he added. They are also represented in the Ottoman Garden.

“Scent is a strong component in this garden’s intent,” he said. “Jasmine, herbs, citrus, roses, juniper and a host of fragrant hyacinths, narcissus and lilies have been carefully arranged to provide the utmost olfactory experience.”

The unique one-quarter acre garden is northeast and to the rear of the Linnean House conservatory. The Ottoman Garden was made possible by a gift from the late Edward L. Bakewell, Jr.

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NOTE: A digital image of the Ottoman Garden is available upon request. All news releases are available for download as .pdf files at www.mobot.org/press.