

Headline **Paradise on a rooftop**
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TEXT: ROSALYNN POH PHOTOGRAPHY: LEE LAY KIN

Paradise on a rooftop

Filled with rare and beautiful plants
from various parts of the world,
The Secret Garden is 1 Utama's crowning glory

THERE CANNOT BE a more appropriate name than The Secret Garden for this garden as work on it had proceeded in secret for nearly four years on the rooftop of the new wing of 1 Utama Shopping Centre in Bandar Utama, Petaling Jaya. Who would have guessed an almost 30,000 sq ft garden — with over 500 species of rare and unusual plants from various parts of the world — is sitting on top of one of the busiest malls in the country?

The beautiful garden has seven themes: temperate and highland plants; succulents and dry climate plants; accent plants; climbers; herbs and food plants; flowering plants; and foliage plants.

It was a delight to also discover a mini-paddy field, cactus bed, palms, all sorts of spices and herbs, including nutmeg, lemongrass, cinnamon and pepper, and fruit trees such as apple, peach, plum, oriental persimmon and lychee here.

The variety of flowers in the rooftop garden — from the almost-extinct Kinta orchid, fragrant purple passion flower, star calathea, which is said to be difficult to grow, and elephant ear from Australia to the orange fire-cracker flower, glory bush from Brazil, green aralia and Sabah's state flower rafflesia — is impressive as well.

Clockwise from left A collection of cacti (Tropical America) • The fragrant passion flower (Tropical America) • Pride of Burma (Myanmar) • Lily Magnolia (China) • The almost extinct Kinta Orchid (Ipoh)

The man behind The Secret Garden, botanist and researcher Dr Francis Ng, is responsible for the Rain-forest section of 1 Utama too. He was recently awarded the prestigious David Fairchild Medal 2009 by the National Tropical Botanical Garden of the US, for plant exploration.

According to Ng, the huge amount of carbon stored in The Secret Garden is equivalent to the entire rainforest that would be needed to reduce 1 Utama's carbon footprint.

"The garden has a sustainable design; it uses a chilled water irrigation and rainwater harvesting system and a unique soil mix that is made in Malaysia and adopted

worldwide, making it energy-efficient and environmentally friendly," says Datuk Teo Chiang Kok, director of See Hoy Chan Holdings Group, which owns 1 Utama.

Sprinklers provide the plants with chilled water at night.

The base mix is made from sawdust that has been compacted and carbonised. This not only solves the problem of disposing of sawmill waste but also converts the waste to economic value.

Since the garden is so high above the ground, there are no mosquitoes and few grasshoppers while garden snails can be controlled, says Ng, who worked with Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) for 26 years. One of the objectives of The Secret Garden is education — developing in visitors an appreciation for plants.

The Secret Garden is open to the public only on week-ends from 10am to 6pm. Admission is free. ■

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Blooming rain lilies line the walkway leading to over 500 species of rare and unusual plants

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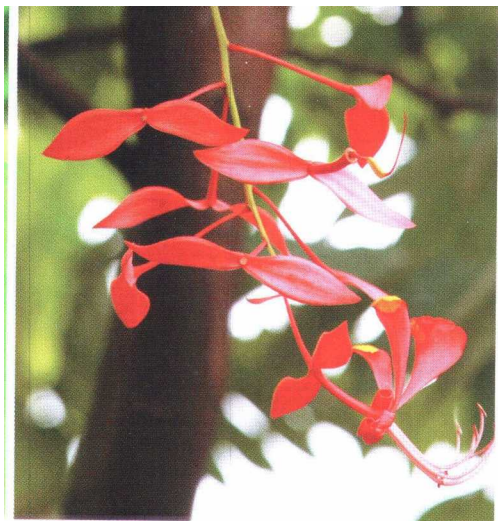
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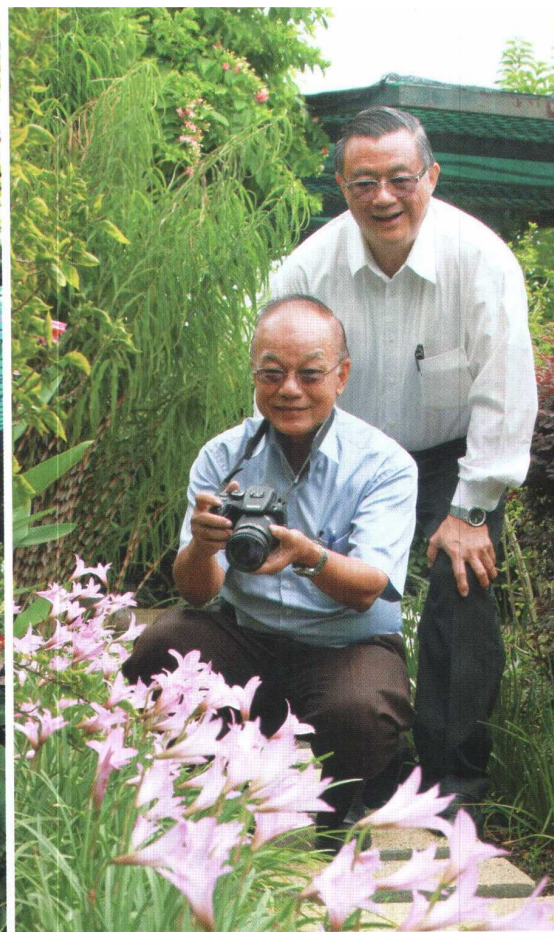
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From left One of the shaded walkways of The Secret Garden • Green enthusiasts Ng (left) and Datuk Teo are clearly proud of The Secret Garden