

Botanical Garden to host Day of the Dead Festival

Festival will celebrate life, remember loved ones

BY JASON EVANS
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CLEMSON — A festival Friday at the South Carolina Botanical Garden will aim to celebrate life while remembering loved ones who have passed on.

The Day of the Dead/Día de Los Muertos Festival will be held 6-9 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 2. The festival is free and open to the public.

The inaugural festival has its roots in a visit to the garden by the Mexican Consulate, according to South Carolina Botanical Garden business manager Angel Perkins.

"The Mexican Consulate had been here to speak with (garden director) Patrick McMillan regarding the poinsettia, and the connection with the poinsettias and Mexico and South Carolina," Perkins said. "There is a strong connection there, and they wanted to build upon that."

That led to a collaboration between the garden and six other organizations that led to the creation of the festival.

The Day of the Dead Festival is organized in collaboration with the Mexican Consulate in Raleigh, N.C., the South Carolina Botanical Garden, Clemson University Department of Inclusion and Equity, the President's Commission on Latino Affairs, the Hispanic Alliance, Lifelong Learning of Greenville County Schools and Palmetto Luna Arts.

"We're letting them run with it and making it all that they want it to be," Perkins said.

In addition to being the venue, the garden has an important role to play in the festival.

"We're growing the poinsettias and the marigolds," Perkins said. "Marigolds are very symbolic. They're used throughout the Day of the Dead. We're growing those for use for this event."

The Day of the Dead focuses

on honoring memories, uniting the community and using celebrations and vibrant colors to lighten "the dark shades of our mortality," according to a release from the Hispanic Alliance.

One of the more curious traditions of the Day of the Dead — and a reason why it is often confused with Halloween — is the richly decorated altars, or "ofrendas," that consume the houses and gravesites of the departed, and are decorated with sugar skulls, skeletons, incense and candles.

For the festival, the Hispanic Alliance will construct a massive altar where those attending can display pictures, food and favorite mementos from their loved ones.

These items symbolize what their loved ones need on their journey through the afterlife.

"We encourage everyone — whether they are Hispanic or not — to partake in this cultural event, and bring mementos of their loved ones to place on the altar," Perkins said. "These can be small gifts or even little bits of food. Therein lies the rich cultural heritage that we're trying to make people aware of and that they can partake in, even if it's not their cultural history."

At the center of the display, a giant La Catrina, a popular icon of death in Mexico, presides over the altar. Created by artist Sara Montero, this elegant paper mache sculpture towers 12 feet, and has been displayed across South Carolina.

An additional altar will also be designed and constructed by the students of Lifelong Learning.

There will be a keynote speech from Mexican Consular General Remedios Gómez Arnau, and an exhibition of Hispanic artists by Palmetto Luna Art featuring Mexican painter Laura Lesllo presenting a live Día de los Muertos painting performance.

Perkins said there will also be food trucks and activities for children.

"A showing of the Pixar movie 'Coco' will be out on the lawn beginning at 6:45 p.m.," she said.

Organizers hope the festival will become an annual event.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to celebrate not just the floral aspect, but to bring together everyone in the Upstate to celebrate cultural heritage and diversity," Perkins said.

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