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Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

By John Bordsen

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Don't underestimate what Mother Nature can pull off – with a little human wizardry – in drab midwinter.

Of the 100,000 or so annual visitors to Belmont's Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden (www.dsbg.org), roughly a fifth arrive in December – and a third of those 20,000-25,000 people come from more than 100 miles away.

The draw is the **Holidays in the Garden** event, Nov. 22-Dec. 31, with artfully staged displays that use plants to set holiday stages, both indoors and out.

Tried-and-true crowd pleasers are back, including the 16-foot Orchid Tree made from more than 300 live, blooming orchids.

This year's theme, "Holiday Harmony," will focus on displays that accent the garden's items of winter interest.

At the garden's Four Seasons Lawn, a 30-foot Fraser fir, grown and cut in the North Carolina mountains, will be draped with lights and encircled by an operating, scaled-down railroad train.

Elsewhere, about 100 trees, from birch to magnolias to traditional firs, will be decked in lights. You'll also find topiary artfully decked in burlap, flocked pinecones and other touches displayed with creative lighting.

The Orchid Conservatory, where colorful tropical plants are in bloom, has its own special effects and three garden-scale trains (cars are the size of shoeboxes).

The garden's continuing education programs accent the holidays, with workshops on wreath-making, papercraft and night photography. There are Santa Workshops for kids, with the Man in Red and his elves offering singalongs, stories, and craft and cookie activities. At other times Thursday through Saturday and the week before Christmas, you can meet Santa in his own decorated room.

Also scheduled: holiday teas and – on the Four Seasons Lawn – live entertainment Thursdays-Sundays with a capella, gospel and choir singers, and classical, jazz and handbell groups.

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