



Magnolia in full blossom near the Oriental Pearl TV Tower in Pudong.



The “most romantic residence” rouses joy in passers-by at the historical Sinan Mansions in Huangpu District.

“Urban dwellers bear great pressure in a densely populated city, and they increasingly yearn for the calming effect of nature, especially after experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years,” Liu said.

In traditional Chinese culture, flowers and plants lift spirits, encourage contemplation and evoke benevolent invocations.

The three durable plants of winter — pine, bamboo and plum blossoms — symbolize perseverance and nobility. Lotus was lauded by ancient Chinese poets for unspoiled beauty arising from muddy roots.

Shanghai’s love affair with flowers has a long history.

Floral cultivation as an industry began in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), when about 45 domestic species of flowers were cultivated across the city. More species from abroad appeared after Shanghai opened its ports in 1843.

In October 1986, the magnolia beat out the rose, peach blossom, begonia and azalea in a public poll to become Shanghai’s official city flower. The flower is said to represent enterprise, innovation and elegance.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the city began landscaping elevated highways with winter jasmine, a practice later expanded to local streets.

Zhu Daoyi, a senior horticulturist with Jing’an District’s greenery authority, was among the city’s first street landscape gardeners.

The 52-year-old horticulturist studied flower arrangement with famous master Liang Shengfang, bringing an artistic vision to street landscaping. He has been tending the floral landscape of downtown streets near Nanjing Road W. for 15 years.

He and his colleagues plant and

maintain over 500,000 flowers of 100 species in some 5,000 street-side flower boxes. The plants are replaced about seven times a year to ensure fresh seasonal flowers, Zhu said.

“We try to tailor the choice of flowers to the particular local characteristics of each road,” he added.

For example, he chooses flowers in purple and pink hues for trendy Nanjing Road W. because those colors are currently global fashion vogue.

“We usually change the floral scenes every 500 meters along a single road to avoid aesthetic fatigue,” Zhu said.

“More people are taking photos of the pot flowers and posting them on social media, which encourages me to keep improving the quality of the flower arrangements,” Zhu said.

The greenery authority of Xuhui District recently set up a team to solicit public opinion on street flowers, said Zeng Jun, an official with the Xuhui greenery management office.

Public comments on popular social media apps like Xiaohongshu, Douying and Bilibili are collected and personal interviews with shop owners and residents conducted.

The tulips for the Normandie Apartments, for instance, were arranged for Spring Festival after public input was evaluated.

“Heightened interest in floral landscapes shows people are becoming more sensitive to the quality of the urban environment,” said Wang Ying, director of the Xuhui Landscaping and City Appearance Bureau.

The tulips around the Normandie were replaced by pink hydrangeas as the tulips began withering, Wang said. The pot flowers will be refreshed every month with roses, carnations, peach blossoms and



Visitors line up to photograph a giant rose installation on the Bund.

crabapple flowers, based on public input.

Professor Liu says restraint is a big factor in street landscaping. Extravagant flower arrangements can look “unnatural and require high cost and energy consumption,” he explained.

Flowers and plants should have a natural look, Liu noted.

In 2016, Liu founded the Clover Nature School, a social organization dedicated to creating gardens in underutilized community spaces. During the pandemic, he encouraged individuals to cultivate plants at home and share seeds with neighbors — a campaign later lauded by the United Nations.

He said residents should focus more on often-ignored wild indigenous plants and flowers, such as wormwood, plantain herb and vetch, which have connections with the city’s culture and history.

“Public attention to plants and flowers actually goes to the heart of a city’s aesthetics,” Liu said.

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Liu Yuelai

Landscaping expert and professor at Tongji University