The Behnke Nurseries Co. Since 1930

GardeNews

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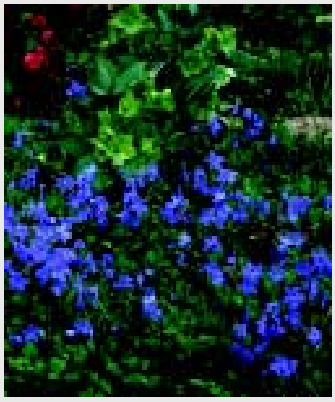

Phlox stolonifera is an excellent non-invasive ground cover. See Page 4.

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Beltway Shangri La

Attaining a Backyard Paradise without Losing your Worldly Fortune

by Gary S. Ingram, Manager, Behnke Nurseries at Potomac

This Spring, it seems every garden publication is touting the concept of "outdoor living." I am urged to install a new deck, patio, pool or sauna and add a stainless steel outdoor kitchen, fire pit, hot tub or lounging tent to my deck. And oh yes, my sauna will need a juice bar. But are amenities really what outdoor living is all about? Do I really need $20,000 and a building permit to enjoy some down time in my own green space? Of course the answer to both questions is no.

This peaceful spot at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum (Morristown, NJ) invites you to linger.

Creating "outdoor rooms" (a phrase used prolifically by the $6.2 billion leisure lifestyle industry to describe everything from a 6-foot deck to a 60-foot solarium) does not have to be expensive or very complicated. Ten years ago I used the space beneath the branches of the large willow oak in my back yard to create one of my favorite spots on earth. I placed three simple stone benches in a rough triangle around the great old trunk and laid a flagstone path leading to the benches. I then planted a carpet of pachysandra peppered with hostas and ferns. For privacy I added a circular wall of giant elephant ears. Without even realizing what I was doing, I created my first outdoor room. Today it is still unbelievably beautiful. I can sit in that peaceful place for hours, reading by dappled sunlight.

So what makes an outdoor room a room? There are no rules, but it has a lot to do with context and intent. In addition to physical definition—some kind of walls, floor and ceiling,

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Hours
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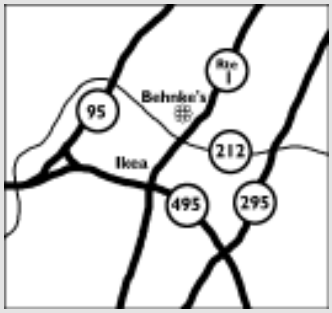

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From the Top

by Mike Behnke, Behnke Nurseries President and CEO

Spring is in full swing and Summer is just around the corner. This is the time of year we live for, when there never seems to be enough time to spend outdoors, whether we are planting or just relaxing on the deck.

Thanks for your positive response to our new lines of "outdoor living" products. As mentioned in the cover article by Gary Ingram, we are now offering more than just the best plants, we also provide everything you need to go with them. This includes our best-ever selection of colorful containers for indoors and outdoors.

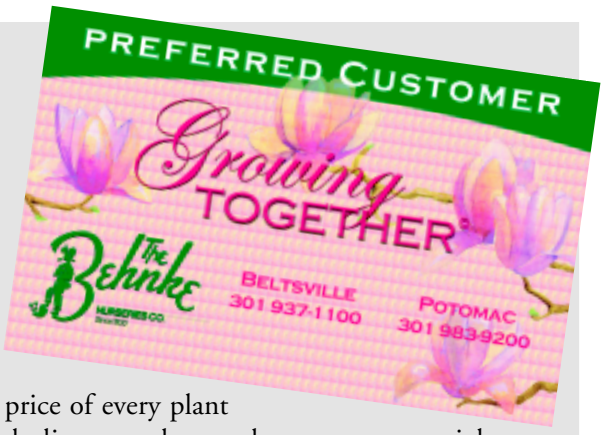
The nice thing about being a year-round garden center is that there is always something new. Throughout the Spring and Summer, we have truckloads of plants arriving daily. Just like most of you, I like to buy plants in bloom, so I can really see what they look like. Use them to perk up container gardens, or to give your perennial garden Summer interest (after all—this is the time of year when most of us are in the garden: it may as well earn its keep!) With many of our plants grown at our own Maryland nursery, we can bring them to our garden centers at their peak.

If you like the look but don't have time to do it yourself, call Behnke's Design and Landscape Services at 240-473-6733. Our design and install teams excel in hardscaping such as walkways and walls, as well as garden designs from the intimate to the exuberant. With our wide selection of plant material, you can be assured of not having another "cookie-cutter" landscape. Also available at our Beltsville store, use our Planting Service for those smaller "can you plant these three dogwoods for me?" sorts of jobs. Big or small, we do it all!

From the employees of Behnke Nurseries, and the Behnke family, we thank you for your business and look forward to seeing you again in the months to come.

Enjoy the Benefits... Become a Member

Behnke's Preferred Customer Card Rewards Loyal Shoppers



Take advantage of Behnke's Customer Card and start saving every time you shop. In addition to a 10% discount off the regular price of every plant we sell, you'll enjoy several other perks, including members-only coupons, special offers and sale opportunities via exclusive emails sent to program members only.

Behnke's Preferred Customer Card helps us reward shoppers who appreciate the great selection and top quality that have made Behnke Nurseries the premiere garden center in the Washington DC, area. Enroll in our Preferred Customer Program today. Membership is just $15 per year, and you will immediately begin to enjoy many wonderful benefits, including:

- **10% off the regular price of every plant we sell, every time you shop,**
- **Members-only offers, coupons and sale opportunities (via email),**
- **Free delivery on any order totalling more than $400 (within 25 miles).**

Shangri La, continued from front cover

it should have an intended use and be outfitted as such. A dining room, for example, would need a table and chairs; a kitchen would need an appliance for preparing food. My oak-tree room was for reading and meditation so it didn't require a lot of extras.

It's easier and less expensive than you may think to create an outdoor room. Find a place that provides what you need: quiet privacy, sun for bathing, shade for dining, etc., in an out-of-the-way spot—a side yard, an interior fence corner or even an under-used porch or deck. Smaller spaces are not only more intimate but easier to appoint.

Once you've defined the space, think about walls. Walls or the illusion of walls can be easily fashioned from plants, either in the ground or in planters. Evergreens like 'Nellie Stevens' holly and 'Green Giant' arborvitae, or clumping bamboos like 'Golden Goddess' make great plant walls, as do tall colorful perennials like *Eupatorium* 'Gateway' (Joe Pye weed) or *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen,' perennial sunflower. Arbors, trellises, lattice panels and reed or split bamboo screening are great wall choices especially when planted with beautiful climbers like *Hydrangea anomala petiolaris*, *Clematis montana rubens* or coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens* and related hybrids).

An outdoor room entitled "Antechamber" at the Montreal Botanical Garden includes these beautiful stone chairs.

Now add a floor and ceiling. Floors in your outdoor room can consist of anything from gravel to decking, paving stone or brick. If you're starting with a dirt floor and don't want to build a deck or buy stone pavers, simply cover it with pea gravel, mulch, flagstone or even sod. As for a ceiling, the sky works for me. I love the clouds and the stars. Beyond that, the branches of a large tree make a great leafy canopy over any room. You can attach lush hanging baskets of shady annuals as well as lanterns or hanging candles.

A quiet corner for contemplation at the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC.

If you've decided to create a room for dining or entertaining, you're going to need some real furniture. Tropical hardwood furniture designed and built by companies like *Arboria* is one of the smartest ways to go. The kapur wood from which high-style *Arboria* pieces are made wears and weathers like teak at a fraction of the cost. Another great value furniture option is cast aluminum—it is incredibly light, durable and affordable.

If you've decided on an intimate room for just one or two, you may want to search for a pair of interesting old deck chairs and a small cocktail table. Maybe a couple of classic Adirondack chairs or a distressed wicker loveseat. On the other hand the simple elegance of a well placed stone bench cannot be outclassed.

As accessories go, you can't beat lights. Landscape lighting extends the day into the night and allows you to enjoy your outdoor room long after the sun has set. One of my favorite product lines is the Westinghouse solar lights. These wireless, solar powered, natural white light units come in a variety of styles and mounting options. They are affordable, durable and easy to install—one of the greatest new outdoor living products I've seen in years.

No discussion of outdoor rooms would be complete without spending at least a paragraph talking about fire. Fire is primordial. Fire extends the season. Fire can transform a patch of grass in backyard suburbia into a place of warmth and wonder. Outdoor fireplaces come in such a variety of styles and sizes it's often difficult to decide which one best suits your specific needs. For me, a nice portable chimenea or ceramic fire bowl is most appealing. I like simple, uncomplicated designs—the fewer moving parts, the better.

I hope no one gets the impression from this writing that creating an outdoor room is not work, because it is. But if you stick to a couple of basic concepts, you can create something very personal and very special that will last for many years. Keep it simple and structurally organic. Remember context and intent. Use more plants, rocks and timbers and fewer man-made structures. Above all, enjoy. □

For many gardeners, the term "invasive plant" spreads terror and discord, creating waves of anxiety and resentment. Currently, invasive plants are defined to be non-native, exotic aliens which reproduce furiously, replacing native plant species and complex self-sustaining ecosystems with, in some cases, biological deserts or monocultures.

The same qualities that make these plants invasive–they reproduce freely, grow voraciously and are virtually indestructible–ensure that they will become champion garden-trade species.

One way to think of invasive species is to think of all the weeds we do not want in our own gardens. The worst ones are those that creep in from our neighbors' untended yards. Think "running bamboo," and understand the feelings of those who are tasked with protecting natural areas. They are gardening with a "native-only" concept, and we are gardening with the "anything goes" model. This situation makes for uneasy neighbors, and opportunities for stress and discord.

Top: Use *Liatris spicata* 'Kobold' to replace the pink spikes of lythrum.

Above: Coral honeysuckle vine is well behaved, yet enticing to hummingbirds.

Not all invasive species were introduced by gardeners or garden centers. Many simply hitched a ride on the bottom of a boot or in the cargo hold of a transport ship; even in the crates of packing materials we use to ship our consumer goods. But some, like kudzu, were originally introduced by the horticulture industry (1876), even though it took federal help to establish kudzu in our southern landscapes. Callery pear hybrids abound in the mid-Atlantic region as a highly recognizable invasive species, and are still recommended by local government agencies (Prince George's County tree) as a street tree choice, even though the tree is almost always a bad long term landscaping solution.

When choosing plants for your garden, you should know the needs of each plant you select. Does it need light or shade; what are the optimum soil types; how wet or dry is best for your species; and what are the potential impacts on your immediate and regional ecosystem? Using native alternatives to invasive plants reduces the environmental impact and allows you to concentrate on the right plant in the right place.

What are some of the bad actors and what can we replace them with? Lythrum, or purple loosestrife, is a spike-flowered invasive perennial which can be replaced in the garden by *Liatris spicata* (also known as gay feather or blazing star), an excellent native alternative. Liatris is easily grown in average, medium-wet, well-drained soils in full sun. Once established, liatris tolerates poor soils, drought, summer heat and humidity, but is intolerant of wet soils in winter. The two foot tall clump-forming perennial has long spikes of rounded, fluffy, deep purple flower heads, appearing atop rigid, erect, leafy flower stalks.

If you are seeking a long summer bloomer to match the floral display of lythrum, try hybrid hibiscus such as 'Lord Baltimore.' Huge flowers, reliably perennial and fast growing, this plant will fill the summer and fall garden with knock-your-socks-off beauty until frost. Although they prefer wet soils, I have seen them tolerate some fairly dry conditions. And since they grow so fast, they can out-compete many pests, such as another invasive species, the Japanese beetle.

Another bad actor is English ivy. Drive through Rock Creek Park in Washington, DC (or the grounds of my house, and probably your house, too), and the evergreen vine which is pulling off branches of the shade trees is *Hedera helix*. It is tough to beat English ivy for an all-purpose, practical, indestructible, inexpensive and easy-to-grow ground cover. You do not need to weed it, feed it, water it, mow it, trim it or think about it until it pulls down a major shade tree or your gutter system to your house.

A terrific alternative is *Pachysandra procumbens*, or Allegheny spurge. This plant is native to the eastern United States and is not to

nting with Nature in Mind

by John Peter Thompson, Chairman of the Board, Behnke Nurseries

***Pachysandra procumbens*, Allegheny Spurge, is an underused shade ground cover.**

be confused with the evergreen pachysandra you are used to seeing everywhere; that one is not native, and shows up on some "good plants gone bad" lists. Allegheny spurge is best in rich, moist soils and grows to around 12 inches high. It will grow in shade to part shade. In mild winters it may be partially evergreen.

Another great native alternative, *Polystichum acrostichoides*, Christmas fern, grows in the natural areas of the mid-Atlantic. An absolutely wonderful, shade loving, no-maintenance plant, it has the additional feature of being evergreen. It thrives under trees, and can often be seen in quite dry conditions. Planted *en masse*, this 24 inch tall species is a workhorse of the shade garden.

An added bonus is that the Eastern white-tailed deer, with its voracious appetite and very bad manners, will eat almost anything else before the Christmas fern. In fact I have a rule which states that deer eat five hundred dollar exotics first, followed by many rare and endangered natives second, and then pretty much everything else. The Christmas fern manages to find a way off of the dinner menu and thus is a perfect choice for a native, natural, and non-controversial landscape solution.

There are other Maryland natives which are easily found in nurseries and can be used as groundcovers, including *Tiarella cordifolia*, or foam flower, with white flowers and a preference for moist shade locations. Another is *Phlox stolonifera*, or woodland phlox, in pinks, blues, and whites, which rise to 8 inches tall when in bloom in April.

As a rule, vines are troublesome. Their rambling nature predisposes them to invasiveness. A list of vines which have gotten loose in natural areas is a list of the naturalists' most abhorred. Consider porcelain berry, Japanese and Chinese wisterias, Asiatic bittersweet, Japanese or Hall's honeysuckle: these plants terrorize natural areas and native ecosystems. But all is not lost, for there are many well behaved native alternatives such as *Wisteria frutescens*, or American wisteria, which produces a gentler, not-so-over-the-top inflorescence and a willingness to live with its neighbors, gently draping itself across lateral tree branches.

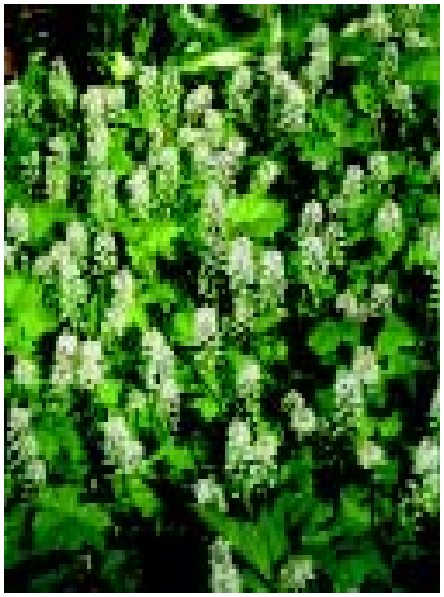
If you don't mind dealing with its aggressive tendencies, then the native trumpet vine, *Campsis radicans*, is for you. Although aggressive to the point of being rampant, it provides brilliantly colored flowers which serve to attract hummingbirds. The orange, yellow or red flowers are true show stoppers.

For those who recall the lazy days of humid Maryland summers and the scent of honeysuckle, you are recalling, most likely, a nativist's nightmare. The overpowering fragrance comes from the exotic species of Asia. There is a native alternative, *Lonicera sempervirens*, or coral

continued on back cover

***Below: Tiarella cordifolia*, the native foam flower, gives a spring show of white or pink star flowers.**

Bottom: *Phlox stolonifera* 'Sherwood Purple' and Ostrich Fern set off Golden Bamboo, which has been confined behind a deep trench.



Meet: Ann Taylor

If you shop at our Beltsville Garden Center, odds are that you've met Ann Taylor, Head Cashier/Coordinator of Customer Service. Ann is one of the people who works very hard to make your shopping experience a smooth one.

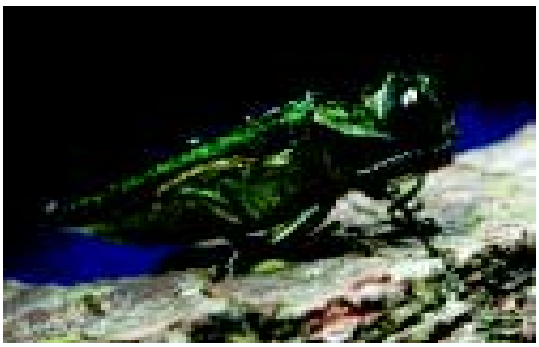
Ann has been with Behnke's since 1998, when she joined us a part-time cashier. Her "day job" at that time was "high school student." She moved to a full-time position while simultaneously earning a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Maryland in the field of Family Studies. This major focuses on the study of families in contemporary society. It looks at generational differences within family units, family group interactions, and the sorts of human interrelationships that make day to day life interesting in the retail world. After college, she spent some time in the field of social work, but found that she missed the fields of plants, and decided to remain with the nursery focusing on the customer service end of the company.

When not at the Nursery, Ann loves to travel and explore the world. She recently returned from three weeks in Africa, touring Ethiopia and Kenya. She has also traveled in parts of Central America, South America, and the United Kingdom. Between trips out of the country, she loves to take small road trips and find new places off the beaten path. She often takes time to explore old towns and parks. During her explorations she is often seen with a camera around her neck taking pictures. The pictures she takes run the gamut from landscape to portraits to architecture, always searching for the unique and unusual. Currently she is trying to arrange the hundreds of pictures she took while in Africa.

Next time you're at our store in Beltsville, wave "hi" to Ann as you speed through checkout!

Pest Alert: Emerald Ash Borer

There's a Green Menace lurking in Prince George's County, MD. The Maryland Department of Agriculture, with the help of the Maryland Forest Service and many others, has removed more than 24,000 ash trees to destroy the **emerald ash borer**. Now they are asking for help in preventing its spread to other parts of Maryland and the rest of the East Coast.



The adult beetle is about 1/2 inch-long.

The emerald ash borer is an exotic insect pest that is responsible for the deaths of nearly 25 million ash trees in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. It hitch-hiked to Maryland in 2003 on infested nursery stock shipped illegally from Michigan.

When you travel, please remember: DON'T MOVE FIREWOOD!

The adult beetle is dark metallic green in color, 1/2 inch-long and 1/8 inch wide. When adults flare their wings, you can see their violet abdomen.

The larvae feed in the inner bark between the wood and the rough outer bark. They are flat, cream-colored grubs with wide heads.

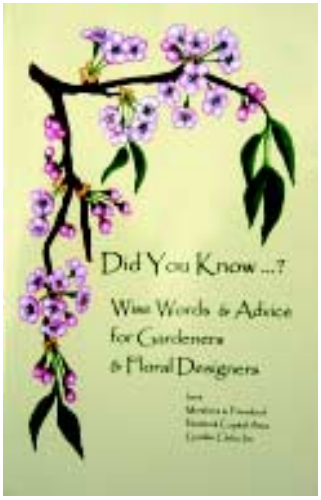
The emerald ash borer will move about ½ mile per year on its own, but can be carried by humans hundreds of miles on infested ash wood. According to a Quarantine Order issued by the Secretary of Agriculture, a person may not move ash nursery stock, ash wood, or **any hardwood firewood** out of Prince George's County, or from south of Rte. 4 and I-95 to the northern half of the County.

Please help stop the spread of the emerald ash borer and don't move ash wood or hardwood firewood out of Prince George's County. Spread the word: "Buy it Where You Burn It." For more information call, 410-841-5920, or visit emeraldashborer.info and click on the "Maryland" link.

— Maryland Department of Agriculture

Ash *(Fraxinus spp.)*

Book Review



Did You Know…?

Wise words and Advice for Gardeners and Floral Designers

Written by Members & Friends of National Capital Area Garden Clubs, Inc.

Reviewed by Patricia Manke; Annuals and Perennials Manager, Behnke Nurseries at Potomac

Have you ever cut out a planting tip from a newspaper or magazine and thumb-tacked it to your shed wall? Do you collect clippings of design ideas or garden hints in a binder or file, and riffle through them one by one, thinking, "I know it's in here somewhere..."? The concept for this book was born of these situations.

The table of contents has organized the information for you. The book is well-balanced with a variety of topics ranging from compost and fertilizer to vegetables and lawns. You'll need to decide which hints are worthwhile, but a large percentage of the content is extremely useful.

Some of the advice will be familiar ("To keep tall perennials from falling over, cut back by 50% when two feet tall. They will bloom a little later, but with more blooms and need no staking."); and some may not be ("If you grow comfrey, you can use the leaves to mulch/fertilize heavy feeders like astilbe. Comfrey is rich in many minerals."). Gee, I didn't know that!

This book will make a great addition to your gardening library, however large or small, particularly because it is written by gardening devotees from your general area. It's like leaning over the fence for counsel from the old man next door with the green thumb and the beautiful roses.

Order the book directly from the National Capital Area Garden Clubs (NCAGC). Print an order form from their website (www.ncagardenclubs.org) or call Arbor House at the National Arboretum, 202-399-5958.

The NCAGC is a member of National Garden Clubs, Inc. and encompasses four districts, 108 garden clubs, and approximately 3,800 members within the metropolitan Washington, DC, area, along with 28 plant societies and other affiliates. The NCAGC provides education, resources and networking opportunities for its members to promote the love of gardening, floral design, and civic and environmental responsibility.

Visit the website for information on events and joining a member garden club.

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Colors available (in addition to green, pictured).

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honeysuckle. And while it may not dazzle humans with nostalgic fragrance it does make quite a come hither plea to hummingbirds. Red to orangey-pink flowers in late spring spectacularly enhance this better behaved native vine which can grow to twelve feet in moist soils in full sun.

One of the most popular theme gardens is the "butterfly" garden, another would be a "native" garden or perhaps both together. A quick choice would be to plant a butterfly bush, *Buddleia davidii*, but alas that would remove you from your double-themed goal, because there is some evidence of the exotic's spread by seed into natural areas, and because it is not native. So, although there are those who are not ready to condemn the exotic buddleia, if you are looking for sure-bet native alternatives, consider *Eupatoriums maculatum* and *dubium*. Going by the common name of Joe Pye weed, which is not exactly a great marketing name, the eupatoriums are butterfly magnets. They grow in full sun to light shade and produce stunning summer flowers. They are rather large, 4 to 8 feet, so give them room and watch the butterflies come.

Native asters are another alternative to the invasive butterfly bush. A fragrant species of late fall blooming, butterfly-attracting aster is *Aster oblongifolius* 'October Skies.' Asters want full sun and limited love. Turn them loose in your garden and let them be; perfect for the summer-time-soldier gardener. There are so many asters to choose from!

I would be remiss if I did not sing the praises of *Clethra alnifolia,* or summersweet. Though most cultivars grow in the four to eight foot range, there is a 30-inch white-flowered cultivar named 'Sixteen Candles.' Fragrant light pink flowers are found on the aptly named 'Ruby Spice.' The summer flowering clethra grows in light shade to full sun in moist soil. In its natural setting clethra grows near stream beds—so the moister the soil, the happier the plant.

Growing native species instead of invasive plants you can still garden; you can still have diversity; you can still create a haven of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Personal choice and environmental responsibility can be part of your gardening traditions. For lots more on this subject, see the recent book by C. Colston Burrell, *Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants*. ▯

With regular pruning and proper siting, trumpet vine can be espaliered. This specimen of *Campsis radicans* 'Crimson Trumpet' resides at Longwood Gardens.

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