

A Garden That Makes Scents

By Holly Shimizu

The pleasures of fragrant plants are many, and you can remember them with every aromatic plant encounter. The National Herb Garden at The United States National Arboretum in Washington, DC, has a noteworthy collection of aromatic trees and shrubs incorporated throughout the garden. Walking through the garden to experience these plants through a sense of smell, you would find the following sights and scents.

You might recognize a thorny plant in the Oriental part of the garden by its deliciously fragrant white flowers. This plant, which later develops aromatic, velvety yellow fruit, is trifoliate orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*).

In gardens, you see it planted occasionally as a hedge, because its long, sharp thorns prevent intruders from passing through. Being very hardy (Zone 6), trifoliate orange has been used in hybridizing and as an understock for its more tender Citrus relatives.

One of the most beloved of spring delights to be found when you stroll through the herb garden is the littleleaf lilac (*Syringa microphylla*) in bloom. For many people, the memorable lilac fragrance brings back nostalgic images of grandmother's garden. Prolific, pale lavender blossoms fill warm spring air with a sense of the past.

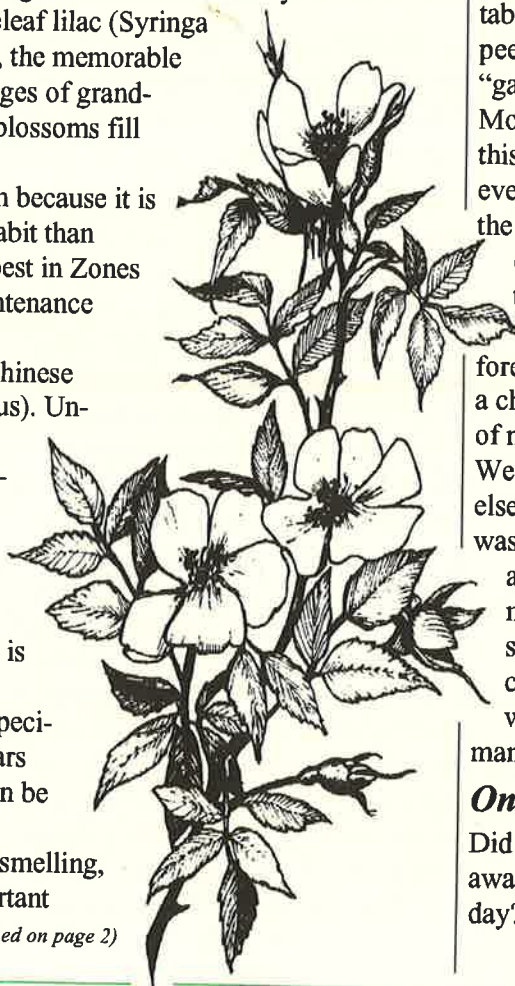
I singled out this species for attention because it is more dwarf and has a more interesting habit than many other lilacs. Littleleaf lilac grows best in Zones 5a to 7b and has proven to be a low-maintenance plant.

Another delight to the senses is the Chinese fringe tree (*Chionanthus retusus serrulatus*). Undoubtedly, it is The National Herb Garden's most spectacular tree. And I can attest to the tree's sweet fragrance. Its wonderful aroma penetrated my office during the entire four weeks the tree was blooming.

Birds seem to love the tree because it is perfect for perching. And its horizontal branching gives the tree good form as a specimen. Its attractive blue fruit, which appears in autumn and persists through winter, can be used for propagation.

In gardens designed for touching and smelling, plants with fragrant foliage have an important

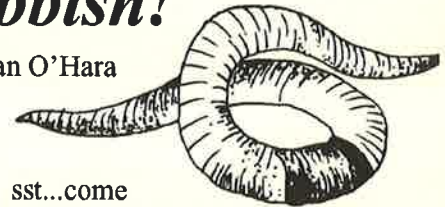
(Continued on page 2)



ORGANIC CORNER:

Rubbish!

By Susan O'Hara



Psst...come 'ere. Let's talk trash, or, more specifically, let's talk compost. While I was growing up, my family always had a compost pile. It wasn't anything we really thought about or toiled over; it was just there like the giant oak in the center of the yard and the squirrels on the picnic table. Whenever anyone in my family peeled or chopped vegetables the "garbage" portion would be placed in Mom's compost dish which sat (and to this day still sits) next to the sink. In the evening, Mom would take the dish to the compost bin and empty the contents onto the top of the pile. My aunt did the same thing; except, she would put hers through the blender before dumping it in her compost bin. (As a child, I was often amused at the sight of my aunt "pureeing" her garbage.) Were we so different from everyone else? Granted, we never had a dishwasher that didn't stand on two feet, and the glories of microwaving were not experienced until I was in high school, but surely everyone made compost, didn't they? Why is the word "compost" so foreign to so many?...

One Man's Garbage....

Did you know that Americans throw away 870,000 pounds of food every-day? That makes up approximately 8-

(Continued on page 2)

Scents *from page 1*

place. The aromatic chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*) highlights a perennial or shrub border with interesting gray-green leaves and blue summer flowers. Its fragrant fruit was once used instead of black pepper as a seasoning. In areas colder than Zone 7b, *Vitex* may die back to the ground in winter.

A close *Vitex* relative, and similar to it with respect to its lovely grayish, fragrant foliage and misty blue flowers, is bluebeard (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*). Being more of a subshrub than a shrub, bluebeard often blends with perennials in borders. As is always true, misty blue with white and pale pink is a pleasing combination.

Bluebeard's fruity, sagelike aroma comes primarily from its foliage. Con-

sidered hardy to Zone 5, the plant's landscape possibilities are broad.

Another plant with superb fragrance and flavor is spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*). In early spring, small, fragrant yellow flowers appear, which are followed by medium-green foliage. Autumn brings glorious red fruit, which makes an attractive display as well as good food for the birds.

Trees and shrubs were never supposed to be simply ornamental; the vast majority of them have a wide array of uses, and, like many herbal plants, were more highly valued in times gone by than they are today.

Combining beauty with utility is a philosophy that pervades The Na-

tional Herb Garden. Go and stroll through the garden. Enrich your sense of smell as you find fragrance abounding throughout. Think back to the past, when plants served many functions, and the sense of smell was one of the essential tools for survival. The plants I have discussed here are only a small sampling among many that are waiting to be discovered and rediscovered for your senses' pleasure.

Holly Harmar Shimizu was Curator of The United States National Arboretum's Herb Garden in Washington, DC. Currently she is the Chief Horticulturist at The United States Botanic Gardens in Washington, DC. In addition, Mrs. Shimizu lectures and writes on her specialty, herbs and their fragrances, and has just completed a video (available in our Garden Shop) on growing and using herbs.

Talking Trash *from page 1*

12% of the garbage in landfills. And, if you think the garbage disposal solves these problems, think again. The shredded food from disposals is sent to wastewater treatment plants. There it is turned into sludge which is another disposal problem. These leftovers or potential "com-postables" could be providing nutrients for our plants and food for beneficial organisms in the soil. In the landfill, they are just waste. Though some people may look down on compost as "trash", the tried and true gardeners can see beyond the garbage of today and into the compost of tomorrow. They see compost for its real beauty. Compost improves the structure of the soil, creates better drainage, allows for more air to get through, and helps store water. When you add compost to the soil, plants seem to have fewer problems with diseases and insects. Furthermore, when you rely on chemical fertilizers, over time, the soil's composition deteriorates. Plus, the excess nitrogen found in many chemical fertilizers causes excess leaf growth

and attracts leaf sucking insects. Organic fertilizers (composted organic matter) work slowly and in conjunction with Mother Nature.

The Circle of Life

Within this world of Mother Nature, there are a host of helpers which keep the "circle of life" spinning. In the realm known as compost, some of the helpers are beneficial bacteria and fungi. These microorganisms break down organic materials and release nutrients for the plants. The organisms need moisture, a source of carbon for energy, a source of nitrogen for protein (which is the key to their activity), and oxygen. Along with the microorganisms are macroorganisms, otherwise known as earthworms, nematodes, and grubs. They, too, help decompose the compost. However, macroorganisms do not usually enter a "hot" compost. (Heat occurs when the microorganisms are working their hardest and the temperature of the pile rises.) Macroorganisms wait until the pile cools off a little. So,

if you purchase earthworms to add to a pile, wait until after it has cooled or set



“Mother Nature and the average homeowner have very different gardening agendas.”

them around the cooler outside.

Although, microorganisms work very hard, a hot compost pile is not usually a natural occurrence. For example, if you watch organic matter decaying on the forest floor, you probably won't see steam rising. Mother Nature and the average homeowner have very different gardening agendas. The latter wants to add good organic matter to the garden each year; therefore, he/she must use "activators" to accelerate the rate of decay. Activators are simply products that are high in nitrogen which increase the activity of the microorganisms. As their activity increases, heat is produced. Some good activators include "seed" compost (compost from a fin-

Meet: John Rooney



John Rooney, a veteran of the U.S. Navy, came to Behnke's Woody Plant Department in 1974 with five years of experience in the nursery industry. John's million dollar personality along with his devoted service have made him a favorite among customers and co-workers alike. In 1988 John transferred to Behnke's Largo location to manage the retail department. John is married to Carol Rooney, a pediatric nurse, BSN.

Leisure Gardening Day

Saturday June 10, 1995

Beltsville and Largo locations

Focuses on Container Gardening, Weed and Insect Trouble Shooting, Aquatic Gardening, and, back by popular demand, two free programs for budding gardeners (Beltsville location only):

Rainforest Safari

12 noon and 3 PM

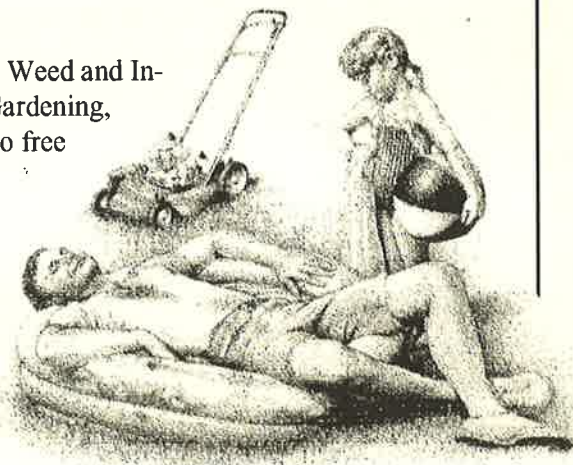
During this 1 hour tour, 6 to 10 year olds will visit our house-plant greenhouses, learn about tropical plants, and discover the animal inhabitants. Everyone ends up with a project to take home!

What's Growing On in My Garden?

10 AM to 4 PM

Kids 4 to 12 are encouraged to wander into our activity area and participate in any of several projects designed to inspire and instruct. We supply everything!

For more information on Leisure Gardening Day and other upcoming events at Behnke's, pick up a Behnke Bulletin when you visit us, or watch our weekly ad in Thursday's Washington Post Home Section, or Saturday's Baltimore Sun



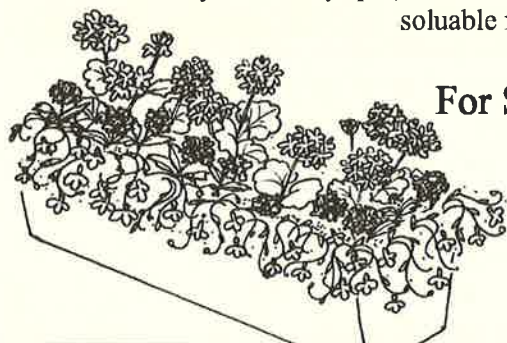
HAVE YOU SEEN THE DEPARTMENT 56 ITEMS ON DISPLAY IN THE FLORIST SHOP

AND GARDEN CENTER? YOU WILL ALSO FIND A SELECTION OF YANKEE CANDLES AND SCENTATIONS POTPOURRI.

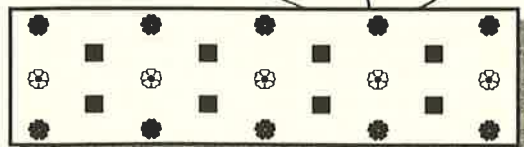


Charming Planter Designs for Sun and Shade

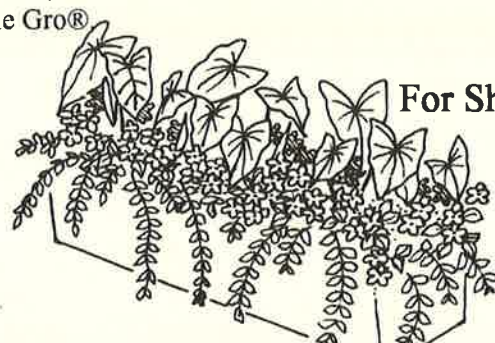
Try our simple designs for abundant summer color. Remember to water frequently (probably daily in a sunny spot), and for maximum bloom, feed every two weeks with a water soluble fertilizer such as Miracle Gro®



For Sun



- - Trailing lobelia, light blue
- - Verbena, white
- ⊗ - Geranium, red



For Shade



- ⊗ - Trailing vinca
- - Impatiens, white
- ◆ - Caladium, red

Note: If planter is used against a wall or window, omit the back row of trailing plants.

Behnke's Gardening Tips

May

The **last frost dates** in our area: downtown Washington-April 20; most of the surrounding areas-May 1

If **aphids** are apparent, apply Bio Neem® or a soap spray.

Plant container grown **shrubs, trees, ground covers, perennials, annuals and summer flowering bulbs** now.

Divide early blooming **bulbs** such as daffodils, if they are crowded.

Sow warm season **vegetable and annual seed** now (or set out transplants).

Don't forget to **lime the garden** — especially to prevent blossom end rot on tomatoes.

June

Prune spring flowering plants. This will provide the plants with plenty of time to fill in and to set buds on the new growth for next year. Super Phosphate added to your organic fertilizer will help ensure good bud production.

Poinsettias, Christmas cactus, and houseplants may go out for the summer now. They will rejuvenate in the humid weather. Take care to gradually move them into sunny spots (if appropriate). Too much sun too soon can be disastrous!

Prune off **dead flower heads**, especially roses. (With a pruning shear cut at the first five-leaflet leaf down.) Many perennials will rebloom if deadheaded now.

July

Prune **seed pods** off of annuals to keep them blooming. Cut back leggy plants to encourage vigorous new growth.

Sow **cool season crops**, such as ornamental cabbage and kale, in the flower garden. And in the vegetable garden: broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage.

Need a summer project? Put in a **pond**. A water feature adds enjoyment and attracts wild life.

If you already have a pond, don't forget to fertilize **lilies and lotus** twice a month when the water temperature is 75°F and above.

Walk around the garden on a regular basis to **check for insect and disease problems**. Just a few of the problems to be on the lookout for: discoloration of the foliage, holes in the leaves, or weakness of the stems.

Cultivate beds to get rid of weeds and to aerate soil.

All plants grown in the ground will need a **good soaking** (1 to 2 inches of water) each week. Thunderstorms don't necessarily count! Keep in mind, however, that over-watered plants will also wilt. If in doubt, check the soil around the roots.

August

Lawn renovation is done now. Kill broadleaf weeds and crab grass in the beginning of August so that you are ready for seeding in September.

Make a simple **layout of your garden** so you know what areas are left for planting. Think spring: you plant spring blooming bulbs in the fall.

Keep a Garden Journal

Not only is it enjoyable to look back on yesterday's garden (especially if you include photos) but your journal will prove to be a valuable resource. Record which varieties you've planted and how well each one performed in your garden. Paste-in Behnke handouts pertaining to your plants so you'll remember when to fertilize, prune, etc. Note what measures you have taken to control certain pests, and the degree of success attained. Perhaps, better still, a garden journal is a place to keep seed catalogs, newspaper clippings and magazine articles, and a place to plan, sketch, hope...and dream.

Call Behnke's for more information: (301) 937-1100

ished pile), well-rotted cow manure, and meals (bone meal, blood meal, cottonseed meal, hoof meal, horn meal, fish meal, alfalfa meal). If you want to pick up a quick fix, there are commercial compost activators like Necessary® Organics and Ringer® BIO-CHARGE. However, if you forget or are too busy to create a "hot" or active compost pile, it will still decompose. Just allow more time. As long as the pile is sitting outside on bare ground the organisms will find it and slowly go to work.

A Place in the Shade

If you are considering building a compost pile your first thoughts should be about location, location, location. First, pick a spot that has good drainage so you don't drown your microorganisms and is flat so the nutrients won't leach out. Second, look for a place with a little shade that is near a water supply (hose) so the pile won't dry out too fast in the summer. Third, pick a location close to the garden so you don't wear yourself out when you want to use your finished compost. Fourth, settle on an area that is far enough away from trees so their roots don't steal the nutrients. And fifth, never build on blacktop or concrete; the microorganisms can't get to the pile and it impedes aeration. Some people stress hiding the pile from view, but that's up to you. If you build nice bins and keep the area tidy, I can't see anything wrong with the sight of a compost pile. Some people even grow pretty annual vines around them. However, if your landscape is well manicured and you don't want the bin to stick out, try a screen of plants or a nice wooden fence.

After establishing a location, you will need to decide what kind of bin you will build, if any. Your compost does not have any preconceived ideas of where it should be placed. Some people build bins, some create heaps, some dig pits and trenches, and still others de-

velop new ways. If you are interested in the different methods, you may want to get a book specific to composting. As for me, I am only discussing bins and heaps. Bins can be built out of cinder blocks, wood, chicken wire, snow fencing, bales of hay, or sod. Commercial bins can be purchased at almost any store selling lawn and garden supplies. Some books on composting will have diagrams for building specific bins. Use your imagination!

On the other hand, you can create a heap. A heap is just that, a pile of compost with no container. Either will work, but, in my opinion, a bin looks a little neater. In either case, when you build your bin or heap, clear away any sod. The bottom of the pile should rest on bare ground so the microorganisms and worms can get to it. The size of the pile or bin is up to you; although, something around 4 feet high, 4 feet wide, and 4 feet tall seems to be average. If the pile exceeds 6 feet high and wide, air cannot penetrate as well and the bacteria and fungi may begin to suffocate.

Now, you are ready to begin. You can add virtually any organic matter: garden wastes, grass clippings, kitchen vegetable wastes (including coffee grounds and tea leaves), manure, newspapers (only finely shredded and with black and white print), wood chips, ashes, and/or leaves. You can even add fertilizers such as rock phosphate and kelp or fish meal to make the compost

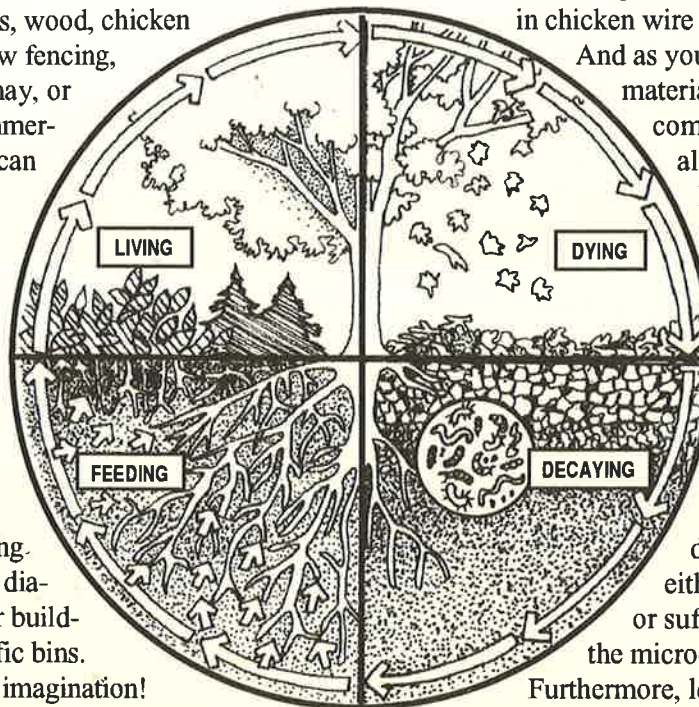
richer and save a step in the garden. If you find you have large amounts of one certain kind of organic matter like lawn clippings or leaves, you should set them to the side of the compost bin (perhaps in chicken wire cages).

And as you add other materials to the compost pile also add thin layers of these items. This practice will keep the pile from becoming matted down and either starving or suffocating the microorganisms.

Furthermore, leaves should be put through a shredder or run over by a lawn mower to break them down (whole leaves take longer to decompose). As you add organic matter, try to layer it with nitrogen-rich materials like manure or meals. The added nitrogen will heat up the pile and cause it to decompose faster. After throwing food scraps in the pile, you may also want to spade a little dirt or some grass clippings over them to help control flies and bees and deter any passing rodents.

Screening Your Garbage

Just as there are many things you should be composting, there are a few you shouldn't. To begin with, never compost plant matter that is diseased. Although many diseases may die in a compost, some require hot temperatures of 160°F or more for a certain period of time to kill them. So, to be on the safe side, you may not want to compost any plants suspected of having such prob-



(Continued on page 4)

lems. Never compost cooked meats, raw meats, fats, or meat-eater wastes. They attract animals and can cause health problems. Intestinal bacteria and parasites along with typhoid, paratyphoid, dysentery, salmonella, and hepatitis can survive in a compost heap. Avoid sunflower hulls and leaves from black walnut and Norway maple trees. They contain growth inhibitors that can be passed on to plants in your garden. Refrain from adding coal (it will not decay) and charcoal (which contains excessive amounts of sulfur and iron). And last but not least, do not add mud, sand, or gravel. They really don't add anything to your compost except weight.

Turn Turn Turn...

After you have your pile together, you will need to decide if you want an active or a passive pile. A passive pile requires little attention. It basically sits for one to two years and slowly decays. An active pile can be ready to be used in about 4-6 months. One of the keys to an active pile is good air circulation. To achieve good circulation, the pile should be turned, the more the better. A spading fork or manure fork works very well for

this chore. And if you have more than one bin side by side, you can simply turn the pile from one bin to the next. Turning the pile once a week would be great, but, if you don't get to it for 3 weeks, you can still keep it going (although, you may want to add some manure or other source of nitrogen to raise the level of activity after it has been sitting). Another key is the moisture. An active pile should be evenly moist without being swampy. Check your pile each week, and water it when necessary. If it does happen to dry out, use a little kelp extract to stimulate the activity. If you want to keep track of the temperature of the pile, tie an oven thermometer to a string and place it in the center of the pile. A good temperature for "cooking" is 150°F. Anything above 170°F will harm the microorganisms. If it gets this hot, turn it to cool it off.

If you turn your pile regularly and it heats up, it will begin to cool off as it is finished. When it is completely finished you may want to check the pH. Most of the time, a compost created from a variety of organic materials is neutral (pH7). However, if it is too acidic

(below 5.5) you should add some limestone (*not* hydrated lime—calcium oxide, it can burn and destroy good humus). Only adjust the pH if you know that it is off. Overliming can threaten the bacteria.

Just remember, in the end, we are all compost. And, if you want more information on compost, call the Home and Garden Information Center at 1-800-342-2507 and ask for fact sheet #245, or look for books about composting at your local library or garden center.

Information sources:

The Earth Works Group. *The Recycler's Handbook*. Berkeley, CA: Earth Works Press, 1990.

Foster, Catharine Osgood. *Building Healthy Gardens: A Safe and Natural Approach*. Vermont: Garden Way Publishing, 1989.

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