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## We're in Good Company!

Behnke Nurseries was recently named one of the top four nurseries in the world.

The trendy lifestyle magazine, *W*, lists Behnke's along with nurseries in Los Angeles, Milan, and London.

## Bromeliads — an Exotic Look Indoors

— by Mike Bader, Buyer/Manager, Houseplant Department

**B**romeliads are easy-to-grow indoor plants. They are greatly adaptable to air-conditioned surroundings and less-than-ideal light levels, and tolerant of the neglect imposed on them by the hectic pace of modern living.

Bromeliads (*Bro-meel-ee-ads*) are members of a large family of plants, including the well-known pineapple and Spanish moss—that eerie, draped companion of trees in our southern states.

Bromels, as they are nicknamed, are native to tropical America, and can be found growing wild in the southern United States perched on trees (*epiphytes*), clinging to rocks (*saxicolous*), or growing on the forest floor (*terrestrials*). Epiphytic species are commonly called “air plants” because they grow on trees, love moving air, and have scales on their leaves which are remarkable moisture absorbing organs that pull water out of the air.

Mother Nature spent a great deal of effort designing bromeliads to be pleasing to the eye. These plants have double appeal because many have brilliant blooms as well as ornamental foliage.

Beginning in mid-January, Behnke's will be offering a unique collection of bromeliads, ranging from the small starlike rosettes of the earth stars (*Cryptanthus*), to the huge incomparable urn plants (*Aechmea*), perhaps the most beautiful of all bromeliads.

An exciting introduction for 1999 is our assortment of bromeliad “trees” ranging from 18 inches to 5 feet tall. These are beautiful, artistic displays as well as functional supports. Many bromeliads are inhabitants of the tree tops, and it is only natural that we should attempt to put them back “in the air” in ways which simulate their native habitats. I have been purchasing tropicals for over 20 years and these asymmetrical arrangements of container, driftwood, and plants are the most delightfully pleasing and eye-catching I've ever seen!

Arriving in early February will be a wide assortment of tillandsias, which are particularly happy when placed in the air. Try a fun project with your children or friends by constructing a living mobile. Tillandsias can be hung singly or in a cluster by using nylon fishing line. Simply tie your plants on a single string or make your mobile as complex as you desire.

Make a living-flower vase with your silver vase (*Aechmea fasciata*), our most popular bromeliad. Once the flower has faded and been removed, the natural cup of the plant will hold sufficient water to keep fresh flowers bright for days.

Come see these remarkable plants this month in Behnke's houseplant department. While you're here, be sure to pick up our bromeliad care sheet to ensure your success! ~

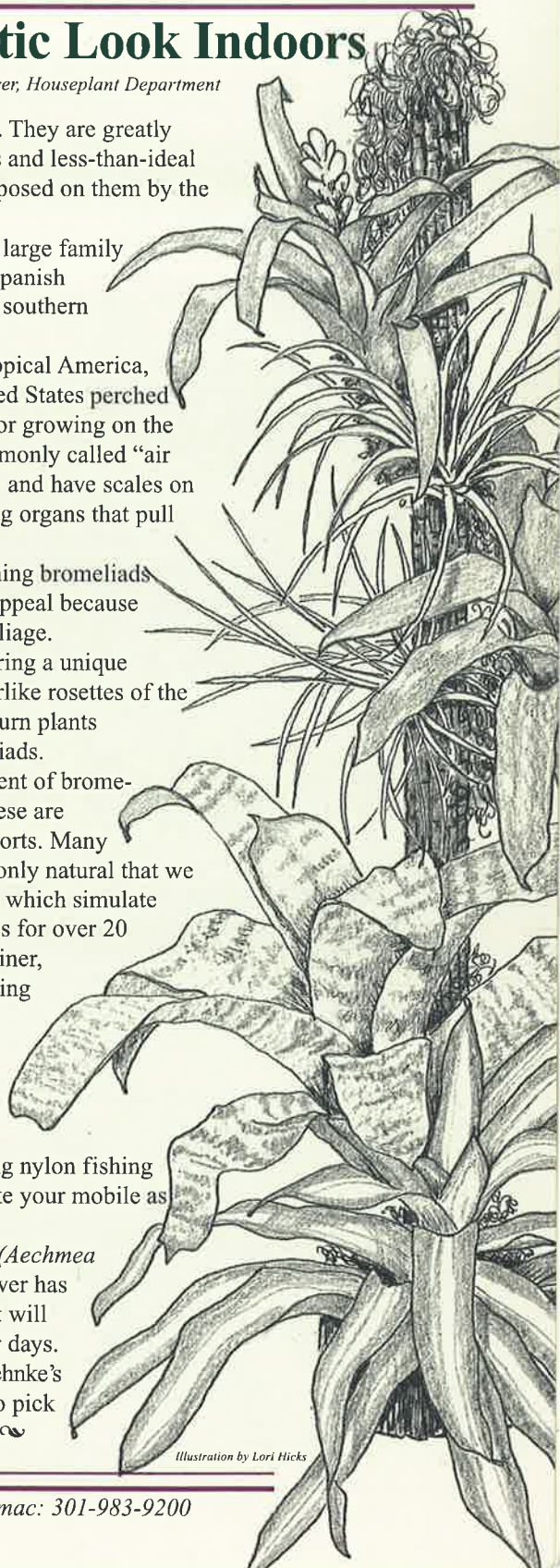


Illustration by Lori Hicks



## Deer — Threat or Menace?

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

At Behnke Nurseries, many homeowners ask how they can reduce deer damage to their gardens. Dogs can be an effective deterrent, especially if the yard has an electronic “invisible fence” so the dog is free to wander — deer learn to disdain a chained dog. If you don’t warm up to the idea of having the Hound of the Baskervilles roaming your yard all night, what other options do you have?

There are many deer repellents on the market. Repellents act to reduce, but not eliminate, browse (feeding) damage. It is best to begin to apply repellents each year before the problem becomes obvious. Once a feeding pattern has become established in late fall (winter-browse route) or early spring (summer-browse route), it will be hard to change the pattern for the rest of the season.

There are two kinds of repellents: *Contact Repellents* are applied directly to the plant and taste bad, and *Area Repellents* are applied near the plant and smell bad.

Three things will determine how well a contact repellent works: rainfall, how thoroughly the repellent is applied, and how hungry the deer are. Good coverage, especially to new growth, is important. (Contact repellents are most effective on dormant woody plants in the winter.) Note that they will reduce feeding damage, but not territorial marking-damage caused by antler rubbing. Follow label instructions regarding the need for reapplication. Remember that frequent or heavy rains may wash off repellent and also cause faster plant growth. Further, if the deer population is high or snow limits access to food, the deer may feed on treated plants even if they are rather unpalatable. In other words, the worse the problem, the less effective the solution. Consider rotating repellents: familiarity breeds contempt, and it’s better to keep the deer guessing. Note also that most contact repellents are not labelled for use on plant parts intended for human consumption. Start with Tree Guard® which has a very bitter taste and has performed very well in university-conducted field trials.

Area Repellents include bars of soap hung from susceptible plants at a spacing of every three feet, or mesh-bags of human hair, scented with cologne or aftershave. Behnke’s also carries commercially-prepared predator urine (“eau de coyote”) which can be hung on plants in attractive dispensers. A drawback of area repellents is that your neighbors may think that you have joined a cult. As with contact repellents, rotating is good. At some point the deer may realize there really aren’t any six-foot-tall coyotes in the neighborhood.

We also recommend utilizing plants that are not high on a deer’s hit parade of love. We encourage the planting of “deer resistant” plants, in very large numbers... Again, if deer populations are high, feeding on resistant plants may occur. For a list, pick up a copy of “Planting a Garden to Discourage Deer” at Behnke’s. Many gardening books, such as **The Well-Tended Perennial Garden** (reviewed in our November issue), also have lists of deer-resistant plants.

A few suggestions from various sources include: Kousa dogwood, spruce, lilac, boxwood, forsythia, *Pieris*, *Caryopteris*, rose of Sharon, American holly, *Nandina*, junipers, most herbs, black-eyed Susan, *Epimedium*, hellebores, astilbe, daffodils, lily-of-the-valley, and many ornamental grasses.

Deer Today, Gone Tomorrow: Preferred food sources (“victims”) include: fruit trees (including ornamentals like flowering cherries), azaleas and rhododendrons, yews, roses, daylilies, pansies, hostas, tulips, and tall garden phlox.

Fencing off valuable plants or an entire yard can help.

A radical solution is the classic electric fence (that ought to go over big with the condo association). Plastic-mesh fencing is cheaper, and said to be effective and “almost invisible.” Locally, you may see a nonelectric deer fence at Brookside Gardens, in Wheaton, Maryland. Although a ten-foot-tall fence was erected around the park to protect the horticultural plantings, the deer brazenly walk through the driveway entrance gate in broad daylight. A cattle-guard installed at the gate has reduced the infiltration. Detailed fencing information may be found in the publication “University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service Bulletin 354: Controlling Deer Damage in Maryland.”

Historically the white-tailed deer neared extinction in Maryland by the beginning of this century. Programs were instituted to reintroduce deer to urban areas. With the expansion of the deer-preferred woods-edge environment through the development of suburbs, this reintroduction experiment succeeded beyond anyone’s imagination. Careful planting and selective use of repellents and fencing will help you cope with this attractive nuisance. ~

*Note: a longer version of this article with additional references will appear on our website later this winter. Visit us: <http://www.behnke.com>*

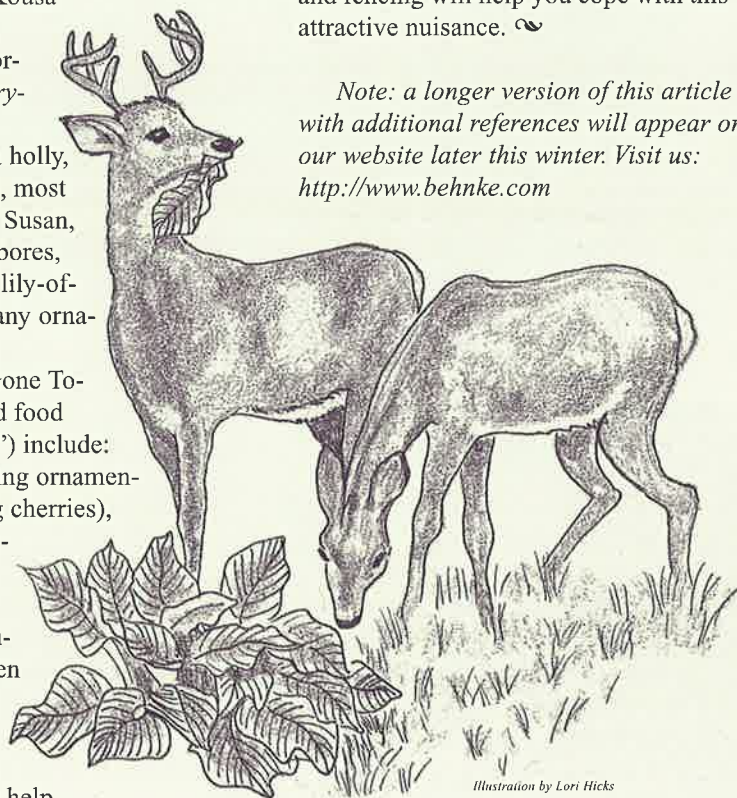


Illustration by Lori Hicks



## Putting Plants in Their Places

— by Cindy Hyle, Woody Plants Buyer

People often fall in love with a plant they see in a catalog or a neighbor's yard without stopping to ask if it is right for their garden. The wrong situation can spell trouble.

Precious leisure hours may be spent on a maintenance nightmare and still end in disappointment when the plant fails to thrive. Proper knowledge of the conditions in your garden will go a long way toward helping you choose annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees that grow strong and healthy with the minimum amount of upkeep.

The idea is to learn what type of site you have and what plants would grow well there. This is the direct opposite of a more common approach: finding a plant and attempting to force it into the wrong environment, only to despair when it becomes sickly or dies. Put the right plant in the right place — it's easy with a little observation and planning.

Before visiting a garden center, do your *home* work. A thorough appraisal of your site will help both you and a nursery expert select plants that will make the transition to your garden.

Consider the view from the windows of your home. Think about the changing seasons. Walk around outdoors. Is there anything you want to hide or accent? Do you spend a lot of time in a certain area in warmer weather? Do you need privacy? Would you get more sun if you cleared some overgrown trees?

Next, obtain a copy of your plat plan or draw a rough outline showing the house, other buildings, tall trees, patios, decks, wet spots, etc. Indicate compass directions so various exposures can be determined. Then note the following information on the drawing.

**Sun Exposure:** Indicate the path of the sun across your garden. Where is the sun during the hottest part of the day? Which areas get little or no direct light?

**Soil Conditions:** Indicate areas of extreme wetness or dryness. The right plants in these areas can prevent costly plant replacements or soil drainage improvements.

**Soil pH:** The degree of acidity or alkalinity of the soil can be determined with a do-it-yourself kit or through your county's Cooperative Extension Service. Once you know your soil pH you can grow plants that will be comfortable there, or you can amend your soil to adjust the pH. You'll need to test various areas, depending on the size of your lot.

**Location:** Plant roots can cause unsightly and expensive damage to pavements, foundations and water lines. Tall trees may interfere with telephone lines. Some plants are very intolerant of exhaust fumes from busy roads, or excess salts deposited by snow-clearing vehicles.

Now, set aside your drawing and think about what you want from your garden — beauty, bounty, or both? Fruit-bearing plants are a wonderful addition to a landscape. Song birds will be plentiful, in addition to the blooms and fresh fruit. Be prepared for a higher maintenance level, however. Untended fruit trees and berry bushes can be messy and disappointing.

If, on the other hand, you want to spend a minimal amount of time caring for your plants, make it very clear to the nursery person assisting you at Behnke's.

Strategically placed plants or hedges can prevent unwanted traffic, and thorny plants under windows, such as 'Dragon Lady' holly or pyracantha, will deter would-be burglars.

Time is another consideration when planning a garden. White pine trees may grow two feet per year, while a dwarf Alberta spruce may grow just two inches. How long are you willing to wait for the results you're after? You may decide to purchase the more mature version and the instant garden gratification it supplies.

If you select plants that are more in tune with your unique style you can avoid landscape design pitfalls. For example, if you wield a mean pair of pruning shears and enjoy neatly clipped hedges and sculptured shrubs, you'll want to avoid certain plants, such as forsythia or juniper, which are best left to grow free-form, sprawling as nature intended.

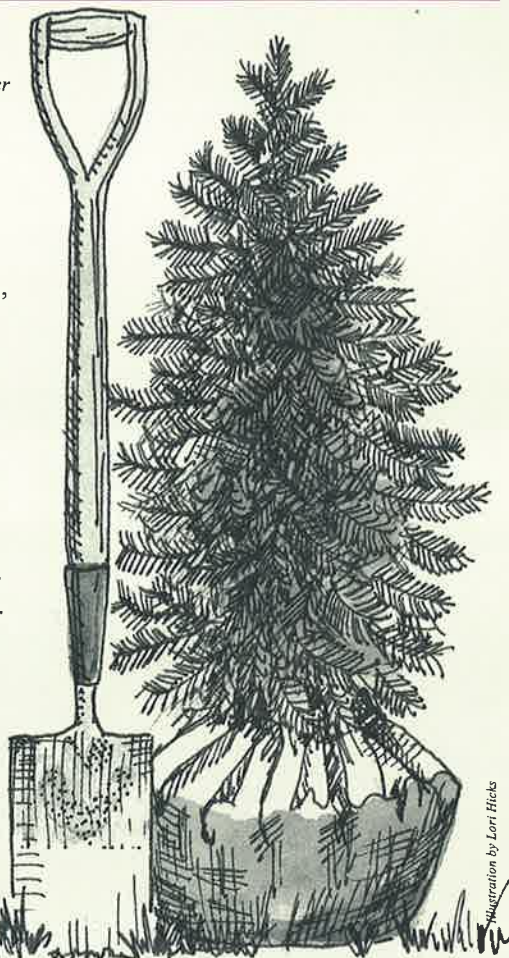


Illustration by Lori Hicks

When selecting flowering plants, pay attention to the flowering season, and the planting location. If you choose a winter bloomer, such as helleborus or witch hazel, you may miss its blooms because it's planted in a back corner that you do not frequent in cold weather. Crape myrtle flowers in July and August when many people are out of town. Lilacs are best planted close to a walkway or window so the heavenly fragrance can be appreciated.

When the time comes to visit the garden center and make your selections, you'll be glad you took the time to consider these points. It will streamline the selection process and you'll know what to expect in the years to come.

Use your drawing over and over — updating it as necessary. Continue to jot down your likes and dislikes — every garden is a work in progress. ♪

*Next time you visit Behnke's, pick up our "Putting Plants in the Right Place" guide and checklist.*



# 1999 Gardening

February 6th through March 28th, at our B

Illustration by Lori Hicks



## 6. SUCCESS WITH ORCHIDS IN YOUR HOME

Sunday, February 14, 1 pm

Free

Carol Allen, Behnke Staff

A houseplant that blooms for 3 to 12 weeks and requires very little attention? Our resident orchid expert will discuss a few of the thousands of orchids available and give tips for your success. Join us!

## 7. ARTISTRY WITH ANNUALS, TENDER PERENNIALS, AND BULBS

Saturday, February 20, 10 am

Free

Brenda Skarphal, Green Spring Gardens Park

Learn how to paint your garden with flowering bulbs, delicate perennials, and riotous long-blooming annuals. Tuck these seasonal sensations among perennials, shrubs, or use them in bold strokes on their own.

## 8. WORKSHOP: FUN & EASY FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS

Saturday, February 20, 1 pm

Fee \$25

Susan Karchmer, Floral Designer

In this hands-on workshop you will use the Flex-Vase, a stylish, goof-proof vase. Your selection of flowers and your design goal will determine the look of your arrangement. Pre-registration required.

## 9. NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS

Sunday, February 21, 1 pm

Free

Sue Dieter, Heartwood Nursery

The variety of woody plants native to our region is huge, from mighty oaks to delicate fringe trees. Sue will emphasize the value of utilizing these and other native selections in our gardens.

## 10. CAMELLIAS—EVERGREEN GLORIES

Saturday, February 27, 10 am

Free

Ray Watson, Cam Too Camellia Nursery

Through extensive breeding, these truly glorious shrubs with lustrous, deep-green foliage and beautiful flowers are now hardy in our region. Ray will share his knowledge and love of these wonderful plants.

## 11. THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF ALLIUMS

Saturday, February 27, 1 pm

Free

Susan Belsinger, Food Writer

From sweet onions and leeks to garlic and shallots — there is something for everyone in this versatile family. Growing, harvesting, storage and cooking will be discussed. A food demonstration and tasting will follow.

## 12. EVERGREEN PERENNIALS

Sunday, February 28, 1 pm

Free

Randy Best, Behnke's Perennial Buyer

A surprising number of perennials have foliage that lasts throughout the winter, providing interest and color in the cold-weather garden. Randy will discuss ideas for incorporating these useful plants into any garden plan.

## 13. EDIBLE LANDSCAPING — THE BERRIES!

Saturday, March 6, 10 am

Free

Jane Warner, Virginia Berry Farm

Backyards large and small can yield a delicious variety of fresh berries. Jane will offer suggestions for best varieties, best growing conditions and uses for all the berries you'll harvest from your garden!

## 1. HYDRANGEAS — THE PINK, THE WHITE AND THE BLUE

Saturday, February 6, 10 am

Free

Lewie Phillips, Berylwood Nursery

Hydrangeas have been loved for generations. Old varieties and new cultivars — these shade loving shrubs are gardener friendly and gorgeous! Come share the enthusiasm of a professional hydrangea grower.

## 2. WONDERFUL WATER

Saturday, February 6, 1 pm

Free

Kelly Billing, Maryland Aquatics

Explore the exciting options for adding water to your garden or home with portable water gardens, fountains and waterfalls — all without a pond. Experience the calming and restful effects of water without a lot of work.

## 3. ORCHID WORKSHOP

Sunday, February 7, 1 pm

Fee \$5

Carol Allen, Behnke Staff

Take this opportunity to repot your orchid under the guidance of an expert. Carol will diagnose problems and suggest a regimen of care for lovely, blooming orchids. Fee of \$5 per plant includes a new pot and soil.

## 4. COMPOSTING FOR BETTER GARDENS

Saturday, February 13, 10 am

Free

Jon Traunfeld, Home and Garden Information Center

Don't skimp on the basics! Learn the easy steps to a more beautiful, productive and rewarding garden through composting and proper soil preparation.

## 5. THE TOWNHOUSE GARDENER

Saturday, February 13, 1 pm

Free

Sherry Mitchell, Author, Naturalist

Even beginners can turn a tiny plot into a dream garden. Learn how you can extend your living space outdoors for entertaining, relaxing and enjoying nature.

# ing Seminars at Behnke's

*Beltsville Nursery. Space is limited, please call 301-937-1100 to reserve a seat.*

## 14. EDIBLE LANDSCAPING — THE FRUIT-LOVERS GARDEN

Saturday, March 6, 1 pm

**Free**

Terry Freed, Stark Brothers

Dwarf varieties of old favorites and new smaller-scale and disease-resistant fruit trees make having homegrown fruit a reality for any home gardener. Learn which varieties perform best and yield the most fruit.

## 15. WORKSHOP: FUN AND EASY FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS

Sunday, March 7, 1 pm

**Fee \$25**

See description of Workshop #8

## 16. LARGE EVERGREENS — SCREENS TO SPECIMENS

Saturday, March 13, 10 am

**Free**

Susan Martin, U.S. National Arboretum

Whether your garden needs an attractive focal point, an unusual specimen, or an evergreen barrier, the exceptional variety of evergreens will provide excellent solutions. Meet your gardening challenge well-armed with expert information.

## 17. FLOWER AND GARDEN PHOTOGRAPHY

Saturday, March 13, 1 pm

**Free**

Joe Higgins, Photographer and Botanist

Treasure and share your garden triumphs through the medium of photography. Learn the guidelines for lighting, composition and landscape close-ups to produce lasting images of beauty in the garden.

## 18. DESIGN FOR DRAMA WITH CONTAINER GARDENS

Sunday, March 14, 1 pm

**Free**

Eric Morrison, Behnke staff

Our container gardening expert illustrates how bold, colorful, multi-seasonal, moveable containers can be planted using annuals, perennials and woody plants.

## 19. THORNY THINGS — HOLLIES, BARBERRIES AND FIRETHORNS

Saturday, March 20, 10 am

**Free**

Phil Normandy, Brookside Gardens

Thorny though they may be, these plants fill the garden with color and texture all year long, from glorious spring foliage to glowing winter fruit. Don your gloves and add some prickly plants to your garden scheme.

## 20. BONSAI — BOTANICAL ART IN MINIATURE

Saturday, March 20, 1 pm

**Free**

Bill Spencer, Potomac Bonsai Association

Join Bill as he traces the history of this exquisite art form from its origins in the Orient to its current popularity throughout the Western world. He will share practical information on selecting a plant and creating your own miniatures.

## 21. PARADISE IN POTS

Sunday, March 21, 1 pm

**Free**

Wally Reed, US Botanic Garden

Create a moveable garden paradise for poolside or patio with lush, exotic and colorful tropics. Learn how to design a variety of containers, overflowing with verdant foliage and unusual flowers, to add a cool dimension to your environment.

## 22. THE WELL-TENDED PERENNIAL GARDEN

Saturday, March 27, 10 am

**Free**

Tracy DiSabato-Aust, Horticultural Author and Consultant

Much experimentation over many years led Tracy to these methods. Learn how to get the best out of your garden and keep plants looking great. Tracy DiSabato-Aust will remain after the seminar for a book signing. Copies of *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* will be available.

## 23. THE HELLEBORES

Saturday, March 27, 1 pm

**Free**

David Culp, Sunny Border Nursery

These wonderful, winter-flowering plants have attracted the notice of experienced gardeners for years. Learn the best conditions for growing hellebores, and which plants make the most effective companions.

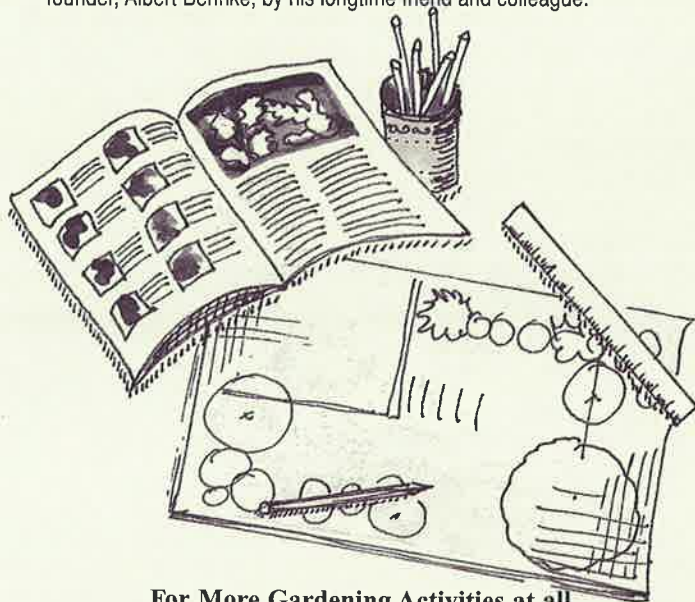
## 24. EASY PERENNIAL GARDENING — TIPS FROM A PRO

Sunday, March 28, 1 pm

**Free**

André Viette, André Viette Farm and Nursery

Learn techniques gleaned from a lifelong love of gardening. André's 'Start Clean, Stay Clean' approach to the perennial garden leaves more time to enjoy the beauty of your labors. Also enjoy a tribute to Behnke Nurseries' founder, Albert Behnke, by his longtime friend and colleague.



**For More Gardening Activities at all three Behnke Nurseries locations, see page 7.**

*All seminars and workshops are held at our Beltsville location: 11300 Baltimore Avenue (US Route 1), 2 miles north of Exit 25, Capital Beltway.*

*Seminars will be held in our Assembly Room, which is on the second floor of the Florist Building. We regret that this room is not yet accessible to handicapped persons. We will, however, try to accommodate anyone who may be inconvenienced.*



## The Kitchen Garden in Winter

— by Melodie Likel, Perennial Specialist and Horticultural Researcher

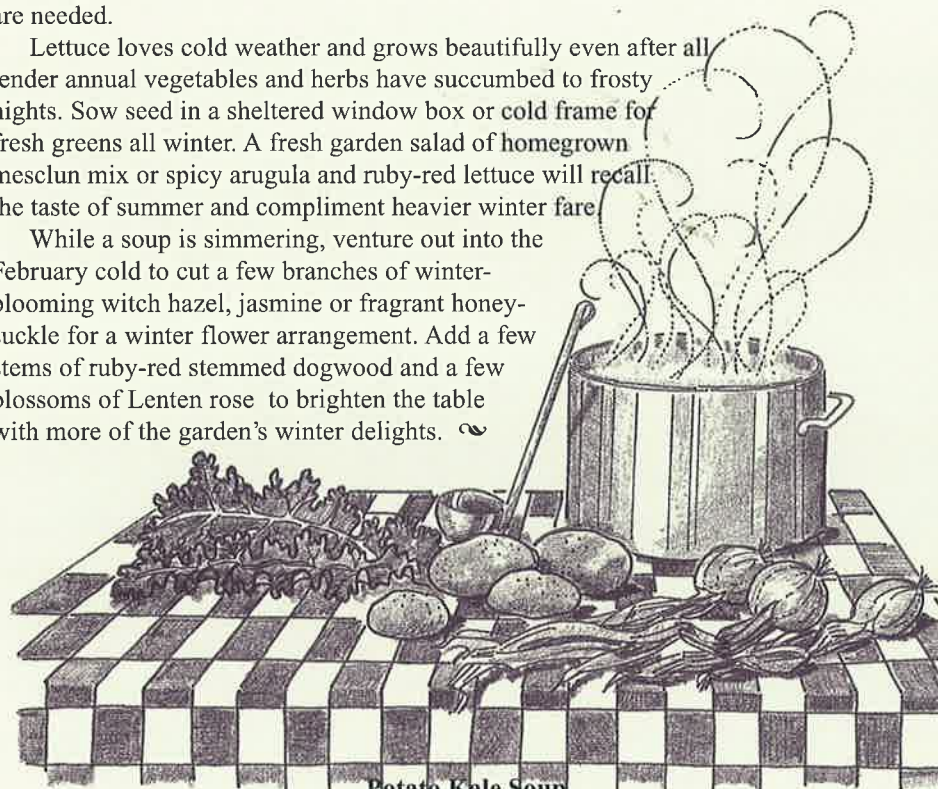
Although wintry weather makes the garden best observed from a sunny window seat, the garden's bounty can be enjoyed throughout the season. The onset of winter need not limit the variety of nutritious vegetables on our dinner plates, and long winter days are the perfect time for the leisurely cooking of comfort foods from the garden.

Root vegetables, such as parsnips, turnips and carrots, can be mulched and left in the garden to be harvested throughout the winter. Long white leeks, also well-mulched, last a surprisingly long time in the winter garden. Dig up a few when a delicious potato-leek soup will warm the body and soul. Fall-planted collards will yield well into the cold months, sweetening in flavor after frost. Kale, extremely cold-tolerant, can be harvested even from under an insulating blanket of snow. Cold-tolerant herbs, such as sage, parsley, thyme, oregano and (sometimes) rosemary, can be snipped all winter long to flavor hearty soups and stews.

The much-maligned Brussels sprouts add a healthy helping of dark green, leafy vegetable to winter menus. In late fall cut the plant at the ground, remove all the leaves and hang the stem upside down in a cool, dry spot. Simply cut off the sprouts as they are needed.

Lettuce loves cold weather and grows beautifully even after all tender annual vegetables and herbs have succumbed to frosty nights. Sow seed in a sheltered window box or cold frame for fresh greens all winter. A fresh garden salad of homegrown mesclun mix or spicy arugula and ruby-red lettuce will recall the taste of summer and compliment heavier winter fare.

While a soup is simmering, venture out into the February cold to cut a few branches of winter-blooming witch hazel, jasmine or fragrant honeysuckle for a winter flower arrangement. Add a few stems of ruby-red stemmed dogwood and a few blossoms of Lenten rose to brighten the table with more of the garden's winter delights.



Potato Kale Soup

2 medium Spanish onions  
3 carrots  
4 celery stalks  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil

5 large, all-purpose potatoes  
1 ham hock  
1/4 lb. kale, washed and coarsely chopped  
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Roughly chop the onions, carrots and celery stalks. Peel the potatoes. Cut four potatoes into large pieces, and dice the fifth. Place the diced potato in cold water to cover and set aside.

Sauté onions, carrots and celery in the oil in a heavy soup pot over low heat for ten minutes or until soft, but not browned. Add potatoes in large pieces and the ham hock. Add water to the pot to a depth of 2 inches over the vegetables and ham. Bring to a boil and simmer for 45 minutes.

Remove from heat. Remove ham hock, and dice the meat; set aside. Puree soup in a blender or food processor. Return soup to heat and bring to a boil. Add reserved diced potatoes and cook till tender. Remove from heat. Add diced ham and kale. Season with salt and pepper.

## Spring Job Fair

As our busy spring season approaches, we will be hiring for a variety of positions at each Behnke location. In addition to both full and part-time plant care positions, customer service representatives and cashiers, we will also have part-time Professional Sales Associate positions for



people with general gardening expertise and/or specific knowledge about a particular group of plants (hosta experts) or types of gardening (Williamsburg Gardens). We can never have too many experienced and enthusiastic gardeners on staff to share their knowledge with our customers. Many of our customers are new to gardening, and would love to have some expert advice as they make their plant selections. And you'll learn by being around some of the most knowledgeable plant experts in the business — and enjoy a generous discount on all your gardening wants!

If you think you might be interested in joining our team for the season, plan to attend one of our Job Fairs. It's an opportunity to meet with our recruiters and the managers of each department.

The dates and times are listed below, as well as on our Web page:

<http://www.behnke.com>.

**The 1999 Job Fairs will be held from 9 am to 2 pm at each Behnke location.**

Largo Production Nursery	Sat., Feb 6
Beltville Retail Nursery	Sat., Feb 20
Largo Retail Nursery	Sat., Feb 20
Potomac Retail Nursery	Sat., Feb 20



## Gardening Activities

In addition to our famous Spring Seminar Series, Behnke Nurseries is delighted to present a different gardening activity each weekend at all three locations—Beltsville, Potomac, and Largo. The topics and times are the same at all locations, and a Behnke staff expert will be available to answer your questions about plant care.

Unless a tuition is listed, all activities are free, but please call the appropriate store for more information and to reserve your place. Get a jump start on your gardening this year!

**Beltsville:** 301-937-1100

**Largo:** 301-249-2492

**Potomac:** 301-983-9200

### 1. HOLIDAY PLANT CARE

Free

Saturday, January 9,  
10 am and again at 1 pm

### 2. INDOOR TROPICAL CARE

Free

Saturday, January 16,  
10 am and again at 1 pm

### 3. DISH GARDEN CREATIONS

WORKSHOP - TUITION \$25

Saturday, January 23,  
10 am

### 4. WINDOWSILL HERB GARDEN

WORKSHOP - TUITION \$25

Saturday, January 23,  
1 pm

### 5. ORCHIDS IN YOUR HOME

Free

Saturday, January 30,  
10 am and again at 1 pm

### 6. SUCCESSFUL SEED STARTING

Free

Saturday, February 6,  
10 am and again at 1 pm

### 7. SPRING BASKET WORKSHOP

Free

Saturday, February 13,  
10 am and again at 1 pm

### 8. SPRING LAWN CARE SEMINAR

Free

Saturday, February 27,  
10 am and again at 1 pm

## Squirrels — One Pound Pirates

— by Vickilynne Westcott, Behnke's Potomac Staff

The very word makes many a backyard bird-enthusiast shudder. Squirrels—synonymous with bird-food thieves—crafty, ingenious little raiders who have successfully thwarted the most inventive “squirrel-proof” bird feeders ever devised by man. Squirrels—fuzzy, one-pound pirates capable of bringing a 200 pound man to his knees in frustration.

Well, at the risk of incurring the wrath and scorn of birders everywhere, I'm here to say I love those little bandits! Living in a third-floor condominium with a porch/balcony, my bird feeder attracts some wonderful birds that bring me much pleasure. And, as was inevitable, the squirrels also discovered the bounty, even if it is three stories up. Yes, they can be brazen little gluttons, at times so stuffed with bird seed from the feeder that they practically roll off the balcony. But they are also such lovable clowns!

Early this spring, there was only one squirrel who began visiting, obviously a new mom. Looking a little thin from keeping her brood fed, there was no way I could begrudge her some of the birds' food. Then I noticed that when she was visiting, a shy youngster was peeking over the porch roof watching her. It took several visits before he was brave enough to shinny down the siding to my porch. But finally the call of food overcame his fears.

After a couple of weeks, I realized that mom was no longer accompanying her kid. (She hasn't been back—perhaps having become a road casualty.) The little one lunched alone for about two weeks. Then I saw one, —no, two!!—fuzzy faces peering down from the overhang. Seems Jesse James brought his nest mates to share the loot!

The three litter-mates have now laid claim to my porch. Besides Jesse, the apparent leader of this little band, there is Stubby George, so named because he is missing the top third of his tail, and Nervous Nickie, the shyest of the crew. They scramble around, bouncing off the table and chairs out there, chasing each other around in circles—and, of course, growing quite sleek. With patience, I got them to accept my presence on the porch. They will now take shelled nuts from my hand and sit eating at my feet. The best treat, though, is a little peanut butter on a small piece of cracker. Talk about squirrel rapture!!

All of this crazy activity has not discouraged the birds, either. I make sure that there is plenty of food for them, too. Sometimes they have to work around the James Gang, but that doesn't appear to discourage them. One cardinal couple has rewarded me by bringing their youngster up to the porch and feeding him (or her) right there. Such a noisy, demanding child!

Before long, I will have to start weaning my little crew of bandits—and the birds, too, for that matter. I will be moving by the end of this year and they all need to find other local restaurants to mooch from. But, oh, how I will miss those three squirrels—those ever inquisitive noses and wonderful black eyes, the little paws that reach up and hold my fingers while they take a treat from me, and the ringside seat I've had for their balcony circus acts.

Backyard pests? Perhaps...to some. However, for me, they are a backyard bonus. I hope to cultivate another bandit gang at my new residence—and pray that my new neighbors will be as tolerant as those I am leaving behind! ~



Illustration by Lori Hicks

## Attracting a Variety of Birds to the Feeder

— by Ellen Schaffer, Perennial Specialist, Largo

*I*t's c-c-c-cold outside! Snow blankets the ground, trees bend and bow to the relentless whipping wind, rivers and lakes, long turned to slick glassy mirrors of ice, glisten in the daylight sun.

Many northern flocks of birds have moved south to our warmer climes for the winter and now are in search of room and board. Helping our avian tourists adjust to their new digs and enjoy their winter sojourn is simple and can be a very self-satisfying endeavor.

The best way to attract birds to your yard is to use different kinds of feeders to accommodate the varied tastes of the southern migrants. Some species of birds, for example, are very selective about what and where they eat, whereas others are not so picky. There are those that are shy and prefer to eat alone and those that opt for a communal setting, those that eat only from specialized feeders that discourage other species, those that visit feeders containing only certain types of seed or fruit, and those that will eat only from feeders high in trees or close to the ground.

The placement of bird feeders is determined by a number of factors. For your optimum enjoyment install feeders where they can be viewed from inside the house, accessed easily for maintenance, and where the mess that accompanies bird feeding (shells, bird droppings) will not be a problem. For the birds' protection place feeders within 20 feet of trees, brush piles, and shrubs. This will facilitate escape from predators such as cats and hawks.

Since birds do not like to compete with squirrels, place feeders at least 10 feet from tree branches. (Squirrels can jump 8 feet horizontally.) The addition of metal or plastic baffles on top of a hanging feeder or below a pole-mounted feeder (4-1/2 feet from the ground) will further deter squirrels.

In general, food should be placed in feeders rather than on the ground where it can easily become contaminated. Platform and tray-type feeders should have a screened bottom for drainage and hanging feeders should be covered to prevent rain and snow from spoiling seed.

Thistle and sunflower tubes; suet baskets; hanging, platform, and ground, mixed-seed feeders are available in our garden shop in various sizes and shapes, as well as a wide selection of bird food. So why not make your yard an avian winter resort? The rewards are endless — the flash of a bright red cardinal or blue jay against a snowy backdrop, a steadfast glide and perfect two-point landing, a telltale melody at dawn and dusk, the soar of a hawk, a congregation of doves, the eerie hoot of an owl....



Illustration by Lori Hicks

*Behnke's is named one of the four best nurseries in the world...see page 1.*

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