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Early in the morning you step out into the sun to pick a handful of dewy, sweet blueberries for breakfast. At mid-day, you harvest tender lettuce, cherry tomatoes and miniature bell peppers for a quick and easy meal. In the early evening, you gather fresh parsley, sage and basil for a light pasta with savory herbs; flavorful mesclun mix and edible flowers for a beautiful salad; and ruby-red, everbearing strawberries to top with crème fraîche or whipped cream.

Sure, you would like to have all the pleasures of vegetable and flower gardening without all the hard work. Possibly you're concerned about the investment of time required to prepare and maintain a large plot of land. Or maybe you no longer have the energy to tackle a large garden project, but do not want to give up the pleasures of nurturing a garden to maturity. Perhaps you simply don't have a large, sunny spot in which to grow vegetables. Container gardening resolves all these dilemmas. Tuck a few medium-to-large, attractive containers into sunny spots on patio, deck or just outside the kitchen. Plant with a variety of vegetables, fruits and edible flowers for a decorative display that will yield a bountiful harvest for months. The containers need almost no weeding and are in easy reach for family members of all ages and sizes — toddlers to grandparents — and provide a constant source of fresh food for family meals.

As a committed container gardener, I can attest to their ease of care and abundant harvest. In late July, my everbearing strawberry plants are pendulous with huge, red, ripe strawberries, the 'Red Robin' tomato plants are heavy with bunches of cherry-red flavor bites, the 'Jingle Bells' peppers are compact and bushy plants, decorated with both red and green little peppers, the mesclun mix is three-inches tall and ready to harvest, and the 'Sweet Slice' cucumber vines provide both decorative vining and a basketful of 6-inch long beauties. The terra cotta window boxes are filled with a mixture of culinary herbs for everyday cooking — rosemary, basil, oregano, tarragon, thyme, chives and parsley. And all this bounty is sitting just outside the kitchen on my south-facing deck.

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For your spring shopping convenience, all Behnke Nurseries locations will be open from 8 AM to 8 PM 7 days a week.

Illustration by Lori Hicks

Container Gardens, continued from page 1

Almost any container that is large enough to hold an ample amount of soil will do. I use anything that looks good in a particular place — terra cotta pots of varying heights, galvanized tubs, old baskets lined with plastic, even whiskey barrels. For instance, two 36-inch window boxes outside the kitchen door will rapidly provide baby lettuces for gourmet salads. Plant one-half box each week for four weeks. Harvest mesclun salad mix after 3 to 4 weeks and replant for a nonstop supply. Or consider filling a large hanging basket with some of the smaller vegetables, such as dwarf eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers. Add some trailing herbs and nasturtiums for an all-season display that provides tasty treats for the table.

'Heartland' or 'Husky' series tomatoes produce medium-sized salad tomatoes, and when planted with oregano and basil, make the basis for a light, fresh tomato sauce. Plant vining cucumbers in a large pot and add a teepee of bamboo stakes. The plants will cover the trellis and soon a crunchy harvest will be ready for salads and snacks. Add a few herbs to tumble out of the pot and add zip to salads.

Little 'Jingle Bells' peppers are ideal for container growing. The stocky plant, covered with red and green fruits, is as attractive as the abundant peppers are delicious. I chop the excess peppers and freeze them for sauces and pizza during the winter.

Experiment with other vegetables in containers. A deep plastic tub works well for growing leeks which, when planted in the bottom quarter of the pot, can be covered with soil as they grow, producing wonderful, white tender leeks in late summer or fall. 'Easter Egg' radishes planted in containers in mid-March will produce colorful radishes within thirty days. 'Dourga' eggplants produce clusters of tiny white egg-shaped fruits earlier than other varieties.

A strawberry jar planted with everbearing berries, such as 'Tristar' or 'Tribute', will produce a small harvest each day to top your favorite breakfast fare and is an attractive accent on deck or patio. You can pick the strawberries each day, or stop picking for a few days for a larger harvest at one time. Mine bear fruit from mid-May to the first frost.

Blueberries are one of the most ornamental shrubs in all seasons, and are quite at home in large tubs or pots. Blueberries bloom with tiny pink-white bells in spring, produce delicious, powdery berries in summer and glow with glorious foliage in fall. Plant 'Avonblue' with edible 'Lemon Gem' marigolds and lemon thyme for a colorful display and zesty meals.

The correct planting mix is important. Behnke's Container Garden Designer, Eric Morrison, suggests that you use Premier brand Baccto Light® potting soil for your containers. He likes it because it is pre-moistened, easier to work with, and because it holds more moisture than other mixes during a hot summer day.

Container plants do require careful attention. Since most of mine are planted in terra cotta for a coordinated look, once-a-day watering is a must in the hot months of July and August. So is a bi-weekly feeding of a water-soluble fertilizer. I use Schultz's Tomato Plus® for the strawberries, peppers and tomatoes. It makes an almost immediate difference in the plants. In just a few minutes every other day, I remove the faded leaves to keep plants looking their best, but there is not much else needed, except to pick the fruits and vegetables before they become too ripe.


For the sheer pleasure of having fresh fruits and vegetables right outside the kitchen door, take advantage of every sunny spot with colorful and productive containers overflowing with a delicious harvest. Try a few pots this season to enhance a busy life and keep the joy of gardening close to home. 




Illustration by Lori Hicks

FONA Garden Fair & Plant Sale

Join Behnke Nurseries as we celebrate spring and salute one of Washington's true treasures — The United States National Arboretum. The Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) will hold their annual **Garden Fair and Plant Sale** on Saturday, April 24, from 9AM to 3PM at the Arboretum, 3501 New York Avenue, NE, Washington, D.C. This plant sale, which is the second largest in the country, will truly have "something for everyone" — a vast array of plants, an excellent selection of vendors offering a wide variety of garden-related items, educational programs and demonstrations, and delicious food.

The emphasis at the Plant Sale will be to offer plants that do especially well in the Washington area. There will be many newly-introduced plants, winners of national awards, and many plants developed and introduced at the National Arboretum, all donated by Arboretum friends around the country. You'll find perennials, shrubs, trees, summer-flowering bulbs, plants for water gardens, fashionable new "tropical" plants, herbs, topiaries, and hanging baskets. In addition, there will be a silent auction of rare and special plants on Saturday morning, ending at noon. All proceeds from the Garden Fair help support the Arboretum's Horticultural Student Intern Program.

For more information, call 202-544-8733. 

Perennial Astilbe: In Astilbe the Night

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

As a gardener who owns a tree-covered lot, I am always on the search for plants that extend the bloom season. Sure, spring is a wonderful time in the shade garden. Every day there are changes as various perennials emerge from their winter's dormancy and explode into bloom. Ironically, most of the best color in the shade garden appears before the shade does. Bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinators tend to prefer sunshine, so many shade plants flower early to ensure seed set. (And you thought they were flowering just for you!) As the leaves come out and the shade grows denser, it becomes a challenge to extend the flowering season until July, at which point you go to the beach or hide inside until it cools down again.

One of the best season extenders is *Astilbe* (pronounced as in "a bee that is not moving"). The common name is "false spirea", so you may as well learn "astilbe". Most varieties give a great burst of color in May or June, with 6-inch to 24-inch flower clusters of white, pink, red or purple resembling upside-down cotton candy cones. Individual plants bloom for about three weeks, so planting an assortment will give you six to eight weeks of color. A few varieties bloom in mid-late summer. In addition to the flowers, some varieties have attractive bronze or reddish-tinted foliage. When in flower, heights range from one to four feet.

In a case of typical Behnke Nurseries Perennial Department over-achievement, we will offer about 35 different cultivars of astilbe this year, nearly 4,000 plants to choose from! Most of the cultivars originated in Germany or Holland, and have mellifluous names such as 'Obergartner Jurgens', 'Else Schluck' and 'Irrlicht'.

First, culture. Astilbes are shade tolerant. They will flower in full shade if it is bright, but the plants will be much larger and flower better if they get at least a couple of hours of direct sunlight. They will tolerate sun most of the day if the soil is moist and rich in organic matter. If they dry to the point of a hard wilt, the foliage will die back to the ground for the remainder of the year, but will pop up again the following spring. My neighbor has astilbe planted beneath a maple tree, a notorious competitor for water, and she is quite successful, with occasional watering and good mulch. My best looking astilbes serve as a backdrop for my pond, in a part of the yard that always stays damp. They tolerate wet soils, but not swamps.

Astilbes don't have many serious insect or disease problems. Thrips insects may attack the flowers in hot, dry weather, although they are tiny and you may not notice them. The main symptom is that your white flowers will be a bit on the tan side.

Astilbes are well-behaved, growing from a tight crown, and will stay where you plant them. They are most effective when planted *en masse*, five plants or more of the same or assorted varieties.

Although I would be delighted to tell you about all 35 cultivars (as if...), I will just mention a few to whet your appetite. Luckily, our well-researched and helpful descriptive signs at our astilbe displays will tell you heights, colors, and bloom times, to make your selection easy. All plants are blooming size, and division-propagated. Bloom time is best guess, and may vary by a couple of weeks from year to year.

- *Astilbe simplicifolia* 'Sprite' was the Perennial Plant Association Perennial of the Year in 1994. It is a low, ground cover type, about 15 inches when in bloom. It blooms in July or August with a delicate pink, wispy inflorescence. This variety was originally introduced in England by Blooms of Bressingham.
- 'Peach Blossom' is a delicate, clear, light salmon pink, with fragrant flowers held in dense pyramidal plumes. Heavy flower production is one of this variety's outstanding characteristics. It is 20 inches tall, with dark green, glossy foliage, and blooms in late June.
- 'Bremen' is a profuse bloomer with dark crimson-rose plumes. A splendid presence in the shady border. It blooms in June. It's about 20 inches tall in bloom.
- 'Etna' erupts with dazzling, intense red plumes that are held over dissected foliage. This beautiful variety is one of the best reds. Blooms in late June through early July, 24 inches tall.
- *A. taquetii* 'Purple Candles' (Also known as 'Purpurkerze') gets three to four feet tall, has deep, purple-red, almost violet blooms. Its bloom time is July or August. ☞

We look forward to helping you with your astilbe selections. When visiting our stores, pick up our new astilbe variety list. Note that our best selection is from mid-April to early-June. Happy planting!!

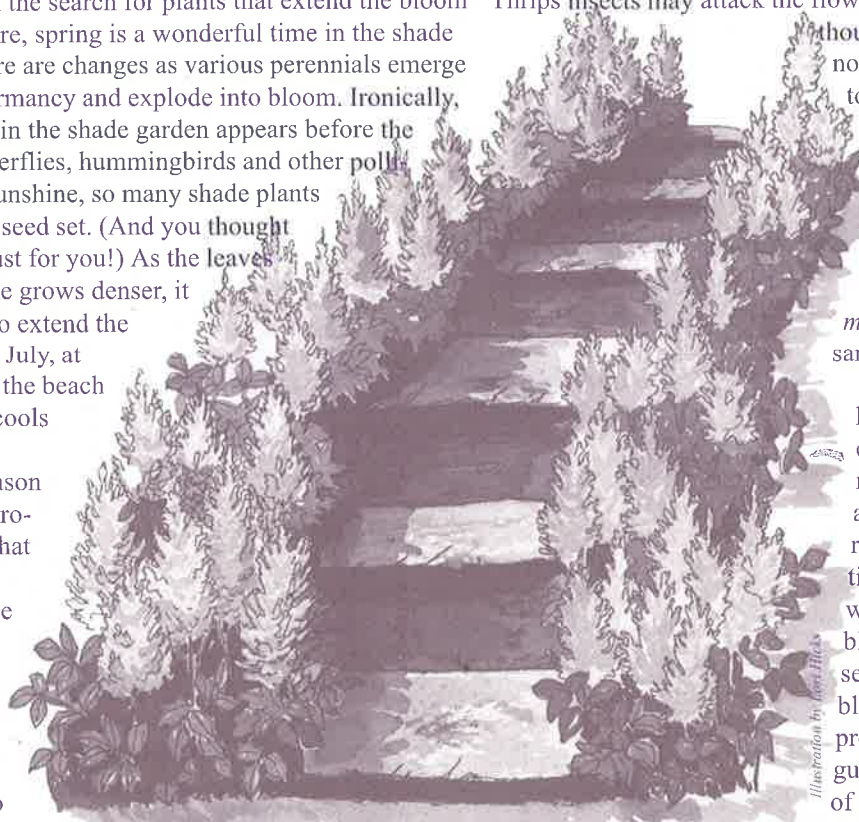


Illustration by Peter Hill

Designing For Drama — A

I remember well the late spring afternoon a few years back when a favorite customer called to ask me to meet with her for landscape advice. She and her family had outgrown their old home and had fallen in love with a stately older house situated on a 2-acre lot. This lady loved flowers, and years ago I designed, planted, and cared for her family's first garden — a lively mix of colors and textures.

My customer-friend now desired something a little different. She had come to admire the simple elegance of white, especially when used exclusively. She wanted me to design a white garden, with all the elements in the garden, including trees and shrubs, reflecting that theme. She explained that she and her family would gather in the garden at the end of the day, and most of the family's entertaining was done in the evenings. She knew that while a darkening sky could distort a garden's color scheme, white flowers and foliage would seem to glow in dim light and would even take on an iridescent quality in the twilight hour. And with proper lighting, the effect would be enhanced.

I began the garden by creating a framework of flowering trees and shrubs, using native species whenever possible.

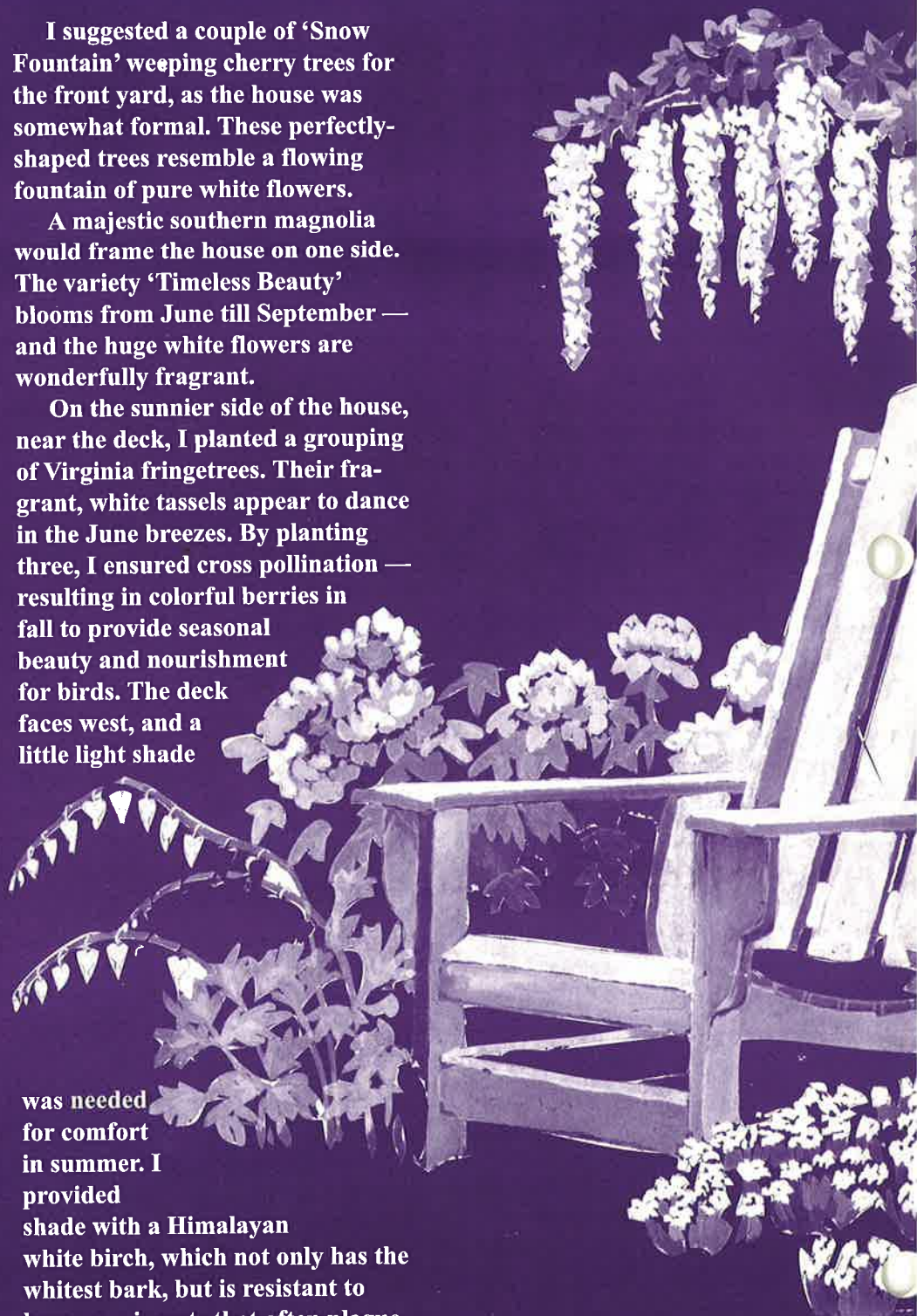
Later I would add a few perennials, such as helleborus, peonies, astilbes, daisies, irises, and hostas, that would bloom in succession all season long. Annuals could be planted in May to provide spectacular patches of white all summer.

I suggested a couple of 'Snow Fountain' weeping cherry trees for the front yard, as the house was somewhat formal. These perfectly-shaped trees resemble a flowing fountain of pure white flowers.

A majestic southern magnolia would frame the house on one side. The variety 'Timeless Beauty' blooms from June till September — and the huge white flowers are wonderfully fragrant.

On the sunnier side of the house, near the deck, I planted a grouping of Virginia fringetrees. Their fragrant, white tassels appear to dance in the June breezes. By planting three, I ensured cross pollination — resulting in colorful berries in fall to provide seasonal beauty and nourishment for birds. The deck faces west, and a little light shade

was needed for comfort in summer. I provided shade with a Himalayan white birch, which not only has the whitest bark, but is resistant to borers — insects that often plague birch trees.



White Garden By Moonlight

— by Helmut Jaehnigen, Woody Plants Specialist



Illustration by Lori Hicks

On the other side of the deck, toward the shadier side of the house, I planted a few of the cold-hardy, fall-blooming camellias. 'Lu-Shan-Snow' was the lone survivor of approximately 1000 camellias that died during the record-breaking cold winters of the late 1970's at the U.S. National Arboretum. This variety is fast-growing to a height of up to 20 feet. It's evergreen and produces copious quantities of white flowers from October to December.

For the railing of the pool I chose *Wisteria longissima alba*, with its fragrant hanging columns of white flowers in May. To extend the bloom season, I included the native sweet autumn clematis. Another good choice would have been *Clematis languinosa candida* which is more spectacular but not fragrant. On the far side of the pool, I planted the crape myrtle variety 'Natchez', which blooms during the entire swimming season. Also around the pool I included a group planting of the best white landscape roses, 'Iceberg', more carefree than most roses and slightly fragrant. In the sunniest area I planted a grouping of hardy hibiscus 'Albert Behnke' which blooms from July to September and provides quite a show with large saucer-shaped flowers of brilliant white.

In the wooded areas, the existing native white dogwoods would be supplemented with the white version of the well-known redbud tree, which does remarkably well in semi-shade. Myriad white flowers cover every branch of this tree. Another fine plant for a lightly-wooded area

is *Aesculus parviflora*, which I fell in love with when I saw large groups of this gnarled, low-branched, scrubby little tree in full bloom at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. It needs some sun so it's best along the edge of the woods. Also around the edge of the woods I planted groupings of the *Pieris japonica* 'Sarabande' and 'Purity'. Both are low-growing and have more and bigger flowers than any other variety. No wooded area is complete without the beautiful mountain laurel. I planted the variety 'Snowdrift' with the purest white flowers.

My friend adores fragrant flowers, especially lilacs, so I included a group of double-flowered white ones. She loves their fragrance and uses the branches for big bouquets. I also supplied her with plenty of lily-of-the-valley and sweet woodruff, both white-flowering groundcovers with deliciously scented blooms.

For a neat edge to borders throughout the garden, I planted *Iberis* 'Snowflake' an easy-to-grow, evergreen perennial. The crisp white flowers command attention in the moonlight.

My friend is thoroughly enjoying her moon garden. Its haunting beauty is unforgettable — and makes a perfect place for her and her family to recover from the cares of the day. ☾

The next time you visit Beltsville, be sure to visit our young Moon Garden, a new display garden created by our Garden Designer Steve Mott.

Pest Alert: The Asian Long-horned Beetle

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Plant Specialist

Do you recall the devastation caused by the gypsy moth as it marched through our area in the early 1980's, the ubiquitous Japanese beetle, and Dutch Elm Disease? These and many other "imported" problems cause great harm to our landscape and gardens every year, but we are now under the threat of a new and unwelcome Chinese import — the Asian long-horned Beetle. Since these beetles are not native to the United States, there are few natural predators to control their deadly spread.

This 2-inch long, black and white beetle is native to China, Japan and Korea. Although they pose no threat to humans, their larvae burrow and live just underneath the bark of a tree, girdling it, and damaging the water and nutrient conducting structures, thus starving the tree. The

larvae are active in the spring, feeding on the heartwood of the tree until they mature into shiny-black adult beetles with white spots and distinctive long antennae. After finishing with one tree, the adult beetles fly to another, infesting it with eggs. The only known control has been to destroy the infested trees in the winter, when the adult beetles have died and the larvae are dormant.

The Asian long-horned beetles were first detected in Brooklyn, NY, in 1996. They were most likely introduced into the United States in infested wood crating or packing materials used on imported cargo. The infected trees in Brooklyn were cut down, then removed and taken to Long Island to be salvaged for firewood. Unfortunately, the wood was not burned soon enough and a second infestation was established in the Amityville, NY area. Nearly 2,300 trees in the Brooklyn/Amityville area have been destroyed so far. In July 1998 another

infestation was found in the Chicago area, where 30-year old maples, horse chestnuts, ashes and elms are being cut down and burned in an effort to stop the spread of the beetle. It is estimated that 80% of the trees in the 14-square-mile quarantine area of Chicago will be cut down over the next several weeks. The beetles have probably moved to other areas as well, but the damage is not yet apparent.

That's where you come in. Pay close attention to the trees in your area, and watch for signs of beetle infestation. Look for suddenly dying trees with large cankers (diseased or decaying areas of the bark); 3/8" diameter round exit holes randomly distributed on the infested portion of the tree; piles of coarse sawdust at the base of the trees or on limbs next to the trunk; or heavy sap flow from wounds.


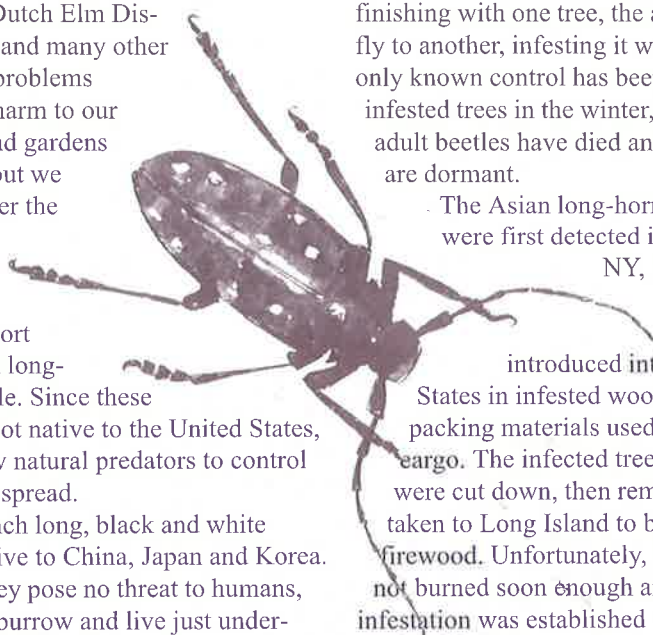
It is unlikely you will spot an Asian Long-horned Beetle this growing season. If you think you have spotted one, however, call the Maryland Home and Garden Information Center at 1-800-342-2507. This is one pest we want to eliminate before our local trees are devastated. 

Illustration by Lori Hicks



Gardening Activities

Vegetable Gardening for Everyone

Saturday, April 17, at 1 PM; Location: Beltsville, Largo & Potomac

Our experts will discuss small space vegetable gardening and preparing the soil for a bountiful harvest. Bring your questions and leave prepared for the most successful vegetable garden ever!

Chesapeake and Potomac Iris Society Median Iris Show

Saturday, April 24, 1 to 4:30 PM; Location: Beltsville

This annual showcase spotlights the dwarf early blooming iris, a jewel of the garden. Members of the Society will display their best blooms in an astonishing array of colors and flower forms.

Spring Perennials in the Stock Garden

Saturday, April 24, 1 PM; Location: Largo

Join Randy and Terri at our Largo Nursery's Trial Gardens. You'll see mature specimens of our perennials — the plants from which we propagate the perennials destined to bear the Behnke label. Randy and Terri will be happy to answer questions.

New Rose Cultivars

Saturday, May 29, 10AM and again at 1PM; Location: Beltsville

Join Helmut Jaehnigen as he leads you through thousands of Behnke roses and introduces you to some of his newest discoveries, and old favorites.

Bonsai Show & Auction

Saturday, May 29, 9AM til noon; Location: Beltsville

The Potomac Bonsai Association will hold their 23rd annual Bonsai Auction in our Assembly Room. This is an opportunity to admire and purchase both completed bonsai and bonsai-in-training.

Coming up in June:

Daylily Walk - Saturday, June 19, at Largo

Water Gardening Weekends:

Largo: Saturday and Sunday, June 12 and 13

Beltsville: Saturday and Sunday, June 19 and 20

Potomac: Saturday and Sunday, June 26 and 27

Memories, Milestones and Miracles

Behnke Nurseries is proud to be a part of Memories, Milestones & Miracles, a partnership to help increase breast cancer awareness and raise funds for breast cancer re-

Last year the efforts of this worthy partnership donated \$133,000 to the Kormen Foundation, and this, the second year, promises to be even more successful.

search and support through The Susan G. Kormen Breast Cancer Foundation. Last year the efforts of this worthy partnership donated \$133,000 to the Kormen Foundation, and this, the second year, promises to be even more successful.

The program will feature the "Accent Miracle Collection" impatiens, an exclusive mixture that includes three pink shades of the popular "Accent" impatiens. This collection will only be available through participating nurseries and garden centers, and 10% of all retail sales of this collection will be donated to the Kormen Foundation. Behnke Nurseries will offer this collection in both 12-inch hanging baskets and in our popular four-packs. Join with us in this partnership to increase breast cancer awareness and move closer to a cure. ❧

Exciting Changes at Behnke's Largo

— by Barry Burrows, Store Manager, Largo

By the time you read this, our garden center in Largo will have a new layout and design to enhance your shopping experience. It is a more logical layout, that is, woody plants and perennials are now displayed together according to their sun needs. Thus you will find trees and shrubs wanting full sun adjacent to perennials which also want full sun. You will find shade-loving perennials and shrubs in their own separate area.

No longer will it be necessary to ask, "What can I plant in a spot that gets no sun?" All the appropriate plants are grouped together. Similarly, if you have a new house with no mature trees and thus get sun all day, the plants you need are grouped together.

You'll find displays of companion plants throughout the nursery. If your soil is acidic, look for displays of acid-loving plants. If you need foundation plants, displays will suggest appropriate shrubs and perennials for year-round interest and color. If you are planning a water garden, our expanded aquatic displays will be of interest. And because great gardens often include fountains and seating, you'll find concrete and wooden accessories intermixed with the plants.

Watkins Park Drive, along the front of our Largo garden center will have colorful beds of annuals to greet you as you arrive. You'll find plenty of inspiration here!

Inside, the Garden Shop has been expanded with a more complete selection of tools, seeds, fertilizers, pest control supplies, and books. And the houseplant greenhouse has a full selection of blooming tropical plants to add color to your deck and home. Be sure to visit Behnke Nurseries in Largo this spring season. We look forward to seeing you! ❧

Gardens at Behnke's Beltsville

— by Lori Mutobaya, Store Manager, Beltsville

Perhaps you're in need of design inspiration or maybe you just appreciate a beautiful garden — whatever your motive, you'll love meandering through the new theme gardens at our Garden Center in Beltsville. Behnke's Garden Designer, Steve Mott, comes to us with a degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Oklahoma State University; he interned at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, and has had plenty of exposure to beautiful landscapes. Among the new gardens he designed for our customers are a Butterfly Pavilion and Moon Garden. The Butterfly Pavilion features woody plants, perennials and annuals, including herbs, that attract, shelter, and nourish butterflies — a delight for all ages. The Moon Garden is, of course, at its best during and after sunset, and features a variety of plants selected to reflect the glow of the moon, or otherwise be at their best in the evening hours. (See pages 4 and 5.) We hope you'll visit us soon at our Beltsville Garden Center and discover these, and several other, wonderful new gardens. ❧

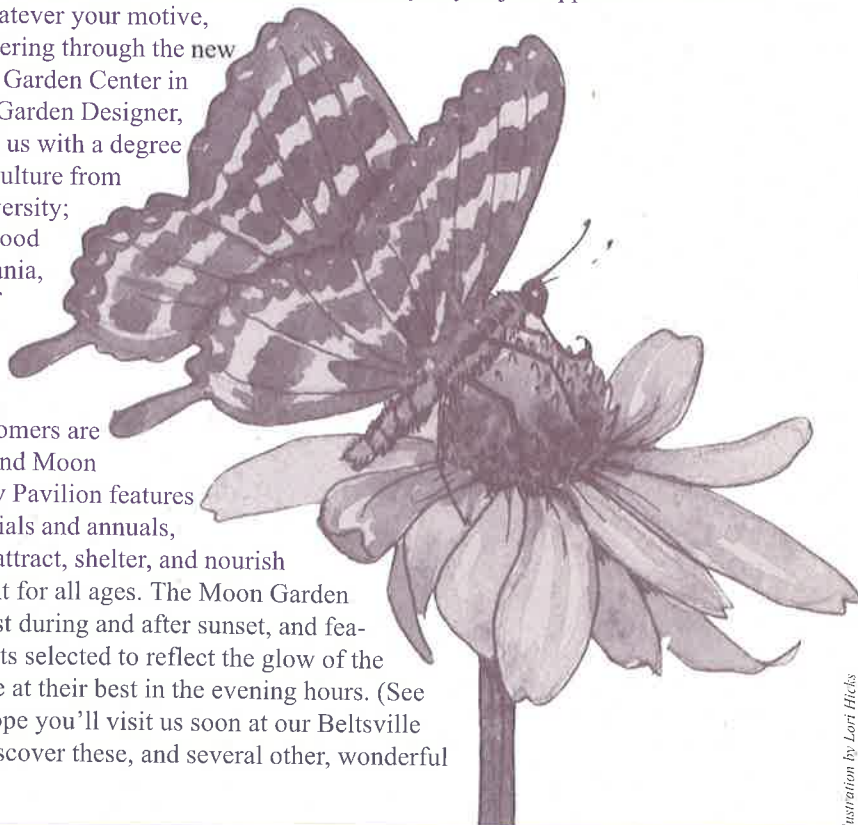


Illustration by Lori Hicks

Book Review: *The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*

— Reviewed by Chris Upton, Behnke Nurseries Garden Design Consultant

The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants was first published in 1975. It has since gone through four incarnations culminating in this, the fifth edition. It is a spectacular work and possibly Michael Dirr's last edition. I hope not. I have come to look forward to the new revisions.


Michael Dirr is a professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia and has carried on an obsessive love affair with woody plants for the last half century. He frequents arboreta, gardens, and nurseries, and communicates with hundreds of researchers, nurserymen, horticulturists, and plant enthusiasts around the world. He publishes frequently in trade and academic journals, and occasionally in the popular press. **The Manual** is the distillation of his encyclopedic knowledge.

The book is organized as an alphabetic treatment of species; *Cornus florida*, for example is the flowering dogwood. Each major species is described in exacting detail: its physical appearance, its culture, diseases and pests which regularly attack, propagation techniques, and its native habitat, with frequently a reference to the most recent survey article in the literature. To my mind, however, the most interesting sections are those which discuss the various cultivars (Dirr discusses almost 90 cultivars of the flowering dogwood!), and

a section he titles "landscape value." The treatment of cultivars is so up-to-date that there is occasional mention of a cultivar which has yet to become readily available, though of course Behnke's stock of "new plants" is the best in the Washington area!

For each species that he treats, Dirr includes what he describes as a discussion of its landscape value. These entries alone are worth the price of admission! Cleverly he has found a way to insert his informed opinions and intuitions into what has become the standard reference for woody plants in this country. In these short paragraphs are observations about plants' performances in various climates, opinions about where plants ought to be used, and ought not to be used, pleas for the increased use of under-utilized plants as well as admonitions against the overuse of cultivars which may have as yet unrecognized downsides.

I bought my first copy of **The Manual** in 1977 and in the ensuing years I doubt that a stretch of more than two weeks has gone by where I did not have occasion to consult it. More usually I refer to it daily. My decisions about plant selection have been influenced tremendously by it. I have good specimens of *Styrax obassia*, *Parrotia persica*, and *Clereodendron trichotomum*, which I learned about first in the Manual. Since

the book is now a standard text in horticulture programs throughout the country, it has tremendous influence on the selection of plants grown and utilized, yet because of its organization and style it is accessible to anyone. Take advantage of it. 

The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants

By Michael A. Dirr

Softcover: \$48.80

Hardcover (by special order only): \$63.80

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants

Their Identification,
Ornamental Characteristics,
Culture, Propagation and Uses



Michael A. Dirr

Check out the results of our 1998 Tomato
Taste-Off at www.behnke.com!

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