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Introducing
Heuchera 'Midnight Rose'

Discover the Rewards of Native Plants

by Miri Talabac and Larry Hurley

Whether you'd rather see a diverse meadow in place of a monotonous lawn or just have a few more curious critters visit your little patch of ground, native plants have recently been, well, gaining ground. After having lost so much, however, it may be hard to imagine the forest primeval when a squirrel could skitter from Maryland to Missouri in the treetops and never touch the ground! (Do those of you with bird feeders wish that they would stay there?) But regaining some of that lost ecology can be surprisingly straightforward and justifiably rewarding. Integrating native plants into your landscape can be quite easy – many of your favorite garden plants are native to North America, and a considerable number are found naturally in our nursery's home state of Maryland.

We make it simple for you. We have designated trees, shrubs, aquatic plants and perennials that are known to occur naturally in Maryland as *BaySafe* plants. For guidance we refer to *Maryland Native Plants: A Master Checklist*, compiled by Joseph Metzger Jr. The list is available online from the **Maryland Native Plant Society**, www.mdflora.org, along with a lot of other information under the "Publications" section.

Our goal is to help you beautify your home and business landscape, not ecological restoration, so our focus is on ornamental qualities. We therefore offer the most beneficial, ornamental, and versatile species and cultivars of natives. Straight species will get you the closest equivalent to a wild plant, and cultivars can bring you more ornamental interest. Any thoughtfully designed planting will beautify a space, but natives will do the job looking right at home and tying the building in naturally with the landscape.

In addition to bringing beauty to the garden, native plants also encourage wildlife, which we feel is the most important reason for using them. While most people know that the Chinese butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) is a great source of nectar in the summer and fall for butterflies, most don't realize that it doesn't serve as a food source for the larvae. Animals

Continued on Page 2



Swallowtail Butterflies love "Joe Pye weed," *Eupatorium* 'Gateway.' Photo by Larry Hurley

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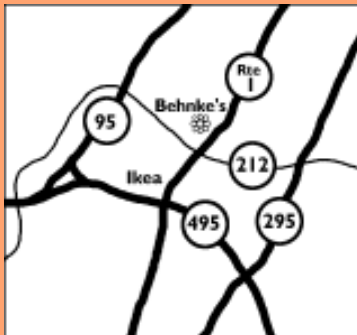
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HOURS

Garden Center hours change seasonally. For the most current information, please consult our website, www.behnkes.com or call specific store locations at the numbers listed below.



BEHNKE'S AT BELTSVILLE
11300 Baltimore Ave. (U.S.1)
Beltsville, MD 20705
Two miles north of
Capital Beltway Exit 25
(same exit as Ikea).
301-937-1100

Landscape Division
301-937-1100 ext. 6733

BEHNKE'S AT POTOMAC
9545 River Road
Potomac, MD 20854
Two miles north of the
Capital Beltway on River Road.
301-983-9200
Florist 301-983-4400

"Native Plants" from Page 1

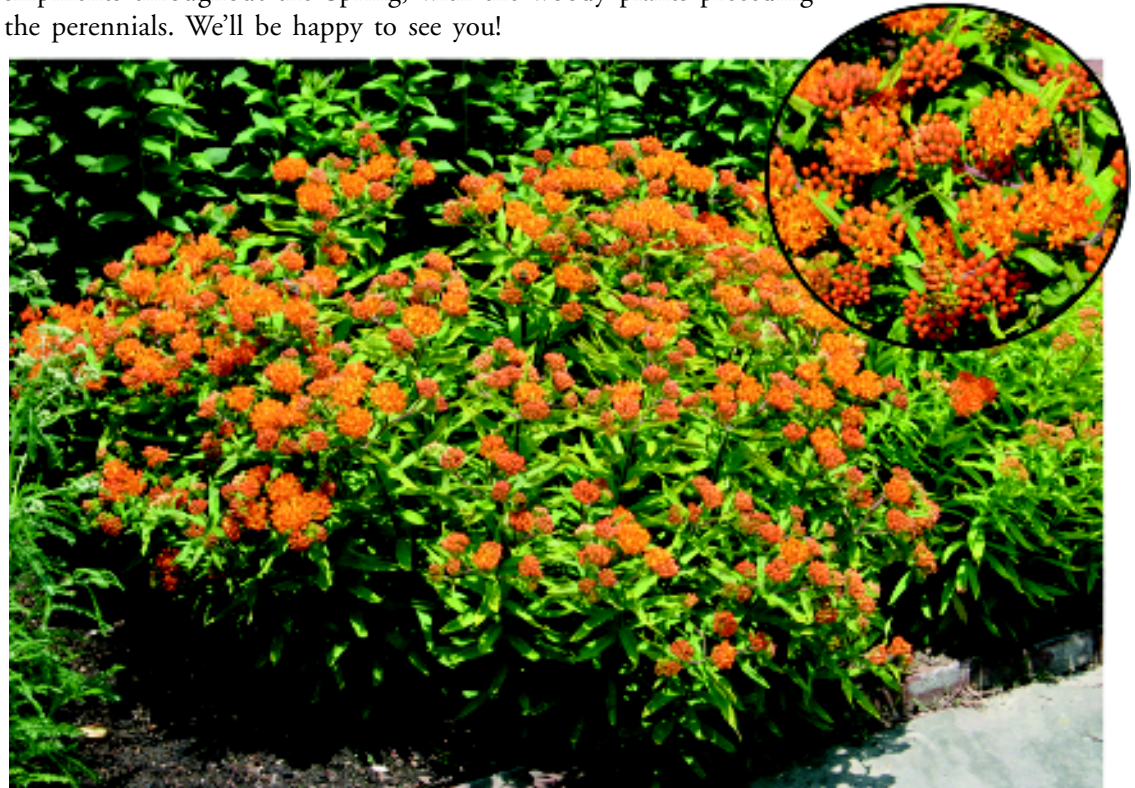
may stop by for food but if they can't find what they need to support their young they will not stay in the garden. Therein lies our goal – to reintroduce to gardens the plants upon which many insects and other animals depend, and in turn entice back the animals that rebuild the food web and ecology of this great land on the shoulders of the Chesapeake Bay. Who knew that playing in the dirt could be this inspirational?

At Behnke's, for easy "down-to-earth" identification, we have a *BaySafe* logo that appears on plant signs to identify our Maryland native plants. Like a great portion of our stock, most of these are "Behnke Grown." Instead of a single "natives" section, they are displayed categorically (native trees with the rest of the trees, for example) throughout the garden center. Experience has shown us that most gardeners come looking for plants of a certain size, color or use, and will select a native if appropriate. We find that it's easier to identify the type of plant to fit your needs (and your sun and soil!) first, and then show you which of those happen to be native.

For those who prefer to browse a collection of natives, this year at our Beltsville location we are carrying a selection of North American plants in the *American Beauties* program – a joint effort by perennial and woody growers that will display the plants with distinctive pots and labels. This program is endorsed by the **National Wildlife Federation**. If you're willing, you can even join the certifiable! Backyard Wildlife Habitat certification, that is – just visit their website (www.nwf.org) for more information.

Visitors to the Perennial Department will also see plants with *American Natives* labels. These are plants that we grew at our Lothian, MD nursery, from starter plants obtained from Wisconsin's Prairie Nursery. If you always wanted a "Little House on the Prairie" garden, gather up some of these plants.

Keep a weather eye out this Spring! Woody plants begin arriving in earnest throughout March. Perennials start trickling in by early March, and really rush in for the end of March into early April, weather depending. *American Beauties* will arrive at Beltsville in several shipments throughout the Spring, with the woody plants preceding the perennials. We'll be happy to see you!



Butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, is great for sunny, well-drained locations and is a food source for monarch butterfly caterpillars.

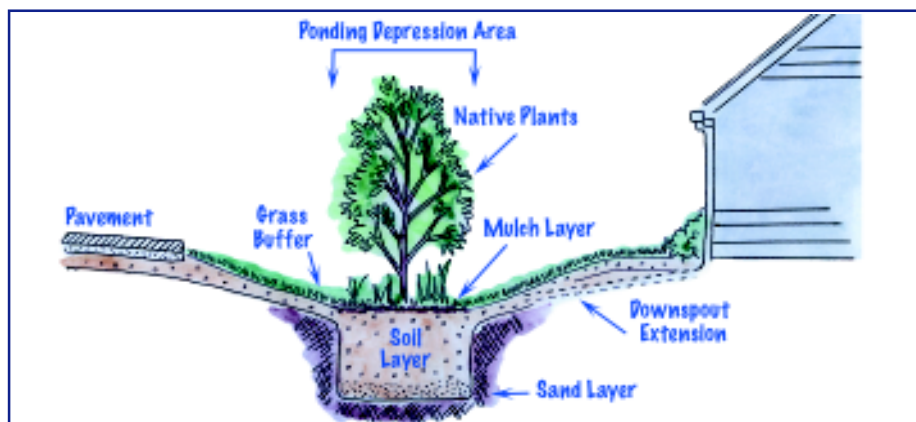
Create a Rain Garden

by Christy Rees, Design and Landscape Services Manager

Development in Maryland and Virginia has exploded in recent years and we have witnessed the conversion of rural areas to urban. This conversion has created increased impervious cover, such as roads, sidewalks and roofs. This in turn has increased the amount of storm water runoff. Problems created by runoff include increased pollutants and temperatures in waterways, and increased flooding.

A current practice used to minimize the impact of storm water runoff is bioretention. Rain gardens are a form of bioretention that can be implemented on an individual level and have a significant impact on water quality locally and regionally. A rain garden collects water runoff and stores it, permitting it to be filtered and slowly absorbed by the soil. This is a small contribution that anyone can make to help improve the water quality in our region.

A rain garden should be placed so that impervious surfaces drain into the depressed area. Impervious surfaces can include; a patio, driveway, roof (downspouts), large lawn or any other surface that water does not penetrate.



COMPONENTS OF A RAIN GARDEN

A **grass buffer strip** around the garden will slow the velocity of the runoff and filters particulates from the runoff.

A **mulch/organic layer** provides for the decomposition of organic material and helps in the removal of metals from the runoff. Shredded hardbark allows the maximum surface area for binding and resists floatation and washout.

Native plants will use the runoff for moisture and nutrient requirements. Plants should be selected on their ability to cycle and assimilate nutrients, pollutants and metals.

A **soil layer** is where the native plant roots will collect the moisture and nutrients for their growth. The soil layer will also absorb heavy metals, hydrocarbons and other pollutants.

A **sand bed** beneath the soil layer further slows runoff. The sand helps prevent anaerobic conditions in the planting soil.

A **ponding area or depression** of the garden will provide the storage needed for the runoff. The surface area must be level for maximum infiltration.

A **berm** that is at least 6" of soil that works like a dam to pond the runoff.

Learn more about rain gardens, or get help designing or installing one — call Behnke's Design and Landscape Services at 240-473-6733.

Small Space Vegetable Gardening

by Marian Parsley, Annuals Buyer

Growing quality vegetables in a limited space has become increasingly popular. Seed producers compete to introduce compact growers suitable for the small plot, rooftop or balcony garden. Choose varieties that include the words "pixie," "tiny," "baby" and "patio." Although bred to be compact plants, fruit and yield may be normal.

Check the label for the mature size: you will be surprised at the eventual size of some of the space-saver varieties.

Check the label for mature size: you will be surprised at the eventual size of some of the space-saver varieties. Vining crops that can be trained up supports will take up even less space: consider pole beans, vining cucumbers and squash.

When planning any vegetable garden, site selection is most important: at least six hours of direct sunlight daily is essential. Shade-grown vegetables will be less productive and of poor quality. Space limitations suggest the options—from a small ground plot to a raised bed or even a medley of containers. An advantage of raised beds is ease of maintenance. You control all aspects from plant size to soil type. Vegetables need a soil rich in organic matter—flavor is affected by the quality of your soil. If you are really limited in space, try containers. They easily fit on a balcony or porch and are portable.

Regular watering is essential. If not properly watered, vegetables will not fill out. Some vegetables, such as tomatoes will crack if suddenly provided water after struggling without it. Rain will help but is often inadequate, especially for containers. Consider a drip irrigation system—most are easily installed and offer the great advantage of water going directly to the roots.

Try some space saver vegetables this season: your taste buds will thank you.

Blurring the Boundari



Gardening can be a lot like cooking, and although each of us has our own tastes, both practices share a love of diversity. Plant groups can be a lot like food groups – shrubs, perennials, tropicals, bulbs...meats, dairy products, vegetables, starches. Not often do you see a meal consisting of just one of these groups. And you probably wouldn't want to, after all – it isn't as nutritious or interesting to the palette. The same is true for gardening; you don't often see a yard with only annuals or only shrubs. Gardeners know that incorporating different plants gives the garden structure, seasonal interest, and an ever-changing quality that brings it to life even more so than the growth of its denizens.

Photo Courtesy of Proven Winners® - www.provenwinners.com

And so, in the spirit of sharing recipes or just exploring other flavorful dishes, we invite you to experiment in your kitchen of sorts—from sweeping garden beds to cozier courtyards, container oases on the balcony or the planters on the deck. The size of your plate may limit your portion, but it can still impress with artful presentation and unique flavor. We like to call it “fusion gardening,” and like the fusion described as blending different cultural dishes,

it adds to the richness of our experience.

Some of the simpler plant combinations may be more familiar – mixing vines in order to get more seasonal interest out of the same space. For instance, climbing roses make great ladders for clematis—varieties blooming together make for pleasing color combinations and those that bloom separately extend the flowering season. Clematis also pairs well with climbing hydrangeas to add splashes of color to those shadier spots. Consider annual and tropical vines as great companions to provide extra color without long-term competition.

In the Woody Plants Department, one popular request is for a flowering evergreen shrub, often intended for hedging or foundation planting. In this case, most options would not respond well to such pruning or would have many flowers pruned off. I enjoy offering a compromise...an evergreen to fit the job and smaller shrubs, perennials, annuals or bulbs to tuck in amongst them to add flower color. This is especially effective since many shrubs will not bloom “all season” with the abandon this sort of blending will achieve.

This gorgeous mixed border at the Mohonk Mountain House (NY) features smoketree (*Cotinus*) with shrubs and annuals.



es and Stirring the Pot



With container gardening, I like to go one step further, mixing woody plants with annuals, perennials and even tropical foliage. Although some cold-tolerant plants such as English ivy have crossed over into houseplant territory because they don't require the levels of cold exposure that they endure outside, most cold-hardy outdoor plants *do* need their winter experience to survive. Container gardening is nonetheless inherently risky for otherwise cold-hardy plants—roots tend to be less cold tolerant than above-ground portions, and unexpected death may occur. We will help you select woody plants and perennials that have the best chance for survival.

For warm-season accents in your containers, visit the tropics! Just as some “annuals” are really frost-tender perennials, so can we treat the tropics we normally keep indoors. Many tropical plants are no more expensive than annuals when it comes to sacrificing them to the cold and starting over in the spring, and can give you up to six months of interest outdoors.

Try mixing your houseplants in containers indoors the same way you would design mixed containers outdoors. You still have all the different ingredients – shrubs, trees, vines, trailers and herbaceous flowers to work with. As with any mixed planting, keep in mind that the plants should be

able to handle the same growing conditions in terms of light, moisture, temperature and fertility. Terraria and dish gardens have been the most widely recognizable techniques, but there are plenty of decorative pots and unique objects out there that beg to be planted. If you



are so lucky, a home or business atrium is the epitome of indoor “container” gardening!

Form, texture and color are arguably the most attention-getting aspects to a great mixed planting, but don't forget the more unexpected touches. Scent, not only from flowers but crushed foliage encourages exploration. Outdoors, the greater diversity will also draw in wildlife and reduce pest outbreaks. And no one can argue the element of the surprise at seeing a garden accented with a hardy palm or banana, croton or canna, or a hosta that seems to have magically sported new flowers because of a bulb flowering through its leaves, or a lawn bursting with color as crocus emerge in Spring.

Be adventurous this year and try some new tastes – you might just find something delicious!

—Miri Talabac, Manager, Woody Plants, Behnke's at Beltsville

Upper left: Clematis intertwined with cotoneaster at a garden in Cambridge, England.

Above: Ornamental millet, dwarf flowering tobacco and daylilies delight in Montreal.

Earth-Friendly Solutions

By Mike Bader, Buyer

Maintaining an organic lawn and garden is an excellent way to ensure the health and safety of your family, pets, neighborhood, wildlife and the earth. We live in an age of environmental awareness and an increasing preference for consumption of food products grown organically. Calling in an air strike from a spray gun loaded with noxious chemicals is pretty effective, but at what price? I'd like to introduce you to a few alternatives.

Cockadoodle DOO from Pure Barnyard utilizes a special dehydration process to create a safe, low-odor, weed-free, and slow release fertilizer from good, old-fashioned chicken manure. It's chemical-free so it's safe to use around pets and kids on lawns, annuals, perennials, roses, vegetables, shrubs, trees and even houseplants. In addition, more of our customers are trying Pure Barnyard's weed control made from corn gluten meal, a by-product of the manufacture of cornstarch. A pre-emergent herbicide that affects only sprouting seeds, it is safe to use around any mature or established plants. Unlike chemical herbicides, corn gluten meal does not affect beneficial insects, soil organisms, or aquatic life, and it contributes important natural nutrients to the soil. Apply in early Spring when you see the first bright yellow forsythia in bloom.

Another product making a strong come-back is milky spore from St. Gabriel Laboratories. It is a naturally occurring bacterium that primarily affects

Japanese beetle grubs, and will not spread in the lawn unless grubs are present in the soil. The more numerous

the grubs, the faster milky spore is established, and for this reason chemical controls should not even be used. Milky spore is harmless to humans, pets, birds, fish, beneficial insects, may be used in vegetable gardens, and will not affect ponds, wells or streams. This material must be put down Spring, Summer and Fall for two years to build up the maximum amount of spores in the soil. Then it is guaranteed to remain viable for ten years.

Holly-tone from Espoma is our #1 organic plant food. Behnke's carries the entire line of "tones," including Rose-tone, Plant-tone, Garden-tone, Flower-tone, Tomato-tone, Bulb-tone, Tree-tone, Turf-tone, and now, two new ones, Palm-tone and Citrus-tone. Generations of gardeners have come to trust Espoma, the largest manufacturer of organic based plant foods with over 75 years of experience. In 2007, Espoma is introducing three new products for insect, disease, and weed control made from natural and food grade ingredients that are proven effective and safe to use.

Neem or neem oil from Greenlight is extracted from the seeds of the neem tree. The neem tree supplies at least two compounds with insecticidal and fungicidal activity. This botanical insecticide is most effective against actively growing immature insects, including mites, so frequent applications may be necessary. Also known as Rose Defense it controls blackspot, powdery mildew, and rust, the major diseases of roses. Botanicals degrade rapidly in sunlight, air, and moisture making them less harmful to people, pets, and beneficial insects.

Behnkes will continue to expand our earth-friendly solutions to combat virtually all the challenges gardeners face during the growing season.

Holly-tone (top of page) is our #1 organic fertilizer, and was the first in a top quality line of organic "tones." At left: Cockadoodle Doo and Rose Defense are excellent products that are both highly effective and safe to use.



From the Top

by Mike Behnke, Behnke President and CEO



Welcome to spring at Behnke Nurseries. We exist to bring beauty to your deck, yard and garden. Whether you view your "outdoors" as an environmental retreat or as an "outdoor living room," we'll help you realize your dreams.

First and foremost, Behnke Nurseries means the finest quality and widest selection of plants possible. Whether new, or tried-and-true, we are likely to have it this Spring. We continue to grow most of what we sell, so our quality is top notch.

Our improved signs make it easier to find what you want, and our new cardinal red uniforms make it easier for you to find us! Your checkout at Behnke's will be faster thanks to new cash registers and streamlined credit card validations.

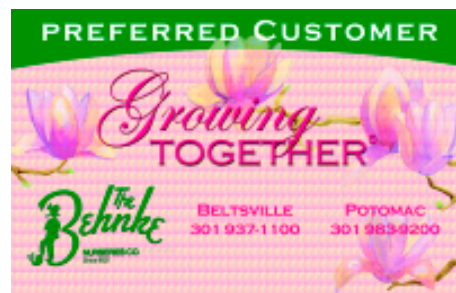
If you haven't signed up for our Preferred Customer Card, do so at our website, www.behnkes.com, or at our check outs. For a \$15 annual fee, you earn 10% off the regular price of all plants bought at our garden centers.

Like the look but don't want to do-it-yourself? Our landscape designers and installers will work with you to synthesize your ideas into a living dream. Spring is the busy season: make your appointment now.

Spring is the time, Behnke's is the place.

Save 10% on Every Plant Purchase

Now you can add "best value" to the list of reasons Behnke's has been the local gardener's favorite nursery since 1930—quality plants, knowledgeable assistance and the widest selection.



Behnke's Preferred Customer Card helps us reward gardeners who appreciate the great selection and top quality that has made Behnke Nurseries the premiere garden center in the Washington D.C., area. Enroll in our new 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).



Behnke's is pleased to accept your used plastic pots and flats for recycling. Drop them off at either of our two locations.

25% off our complete selection of **YEOMAN** Hand Tools, with this coupon.

YEOMAN
Quality Garden Products

**Behnke Nurseries carries a complete selection of Yeoman Garden Tools:
Pruners, Loppers, Shovels, Rakes,
Trowels, Shears & Hand tools.**

Introducing *Heuchera* 'Midnight Rose'

by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Terra Nova Nurseries, a renowned plant tissue culture lab with worldwide distribution, recently released a new cultivar of *Heuchera*, named 'Midnight Rose.' 'Midnight Rose' was discovered at Behnke Nurseries as a random mutation (or "sport") in the Spring of 2004. Terri Poindexter noticed an odd plant amongst a crop of *Heuchera* 'Obsidian' which we were growing from small plants called "liners," originally purchased from Terra Nova.



Heuchera is a low growing, semi-evergreen perennial. Sometimes grown for its delicate spikes of flowers, more frequently it is grown for its foliage, which is most showy in the cool weather of spring and fall. 'Obsidian' has leaves which are about as close to black as a plant can get. The mutation in 'Midnight Rose' causes a random speckling pattern on the leaves, that make the black leaves appear to have been splashed with bright pink paint, especially on new growth in spring.

It took two years from its discovery for the plant to come onto the market late last year. It is still in short supply. We will have about 50 for Spring, and hope to have more for early Summer and Fall.

Terra Nova promoted the plant at the annual meeting of the Perennial Plant Association in Montreal, and it caused great excitement. We expect to see it all over the world in coming years as we travel around, poking into other people's gardens and garden centers. 'Midnight Rose' is destined to become an "industry standard."

Terri Poindexter and her discovery, *Heuchera* 'Midnight Rose.'

It's Easy Being Green! (page 6)

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