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The Best Offense is a Good Defense

By Mike Bader, Buyer

A garden should be a peaceful sanctuary, a place where we can feel connected to nature and where our spirits can be refreshed. But as most gardeners have learned sooner or later, Fall and Spring are peak periods for plundering and inflicting havoc by our furry four-legged fiends, uh, I mean friends.

In Fall, the squirrel—a rodent (or rat with a fluffy tail)—is “Public Enemy Number One” to many flower bulb enthusiasts. These animals like to dig things up, including your freshly planted daffodils, even though the bulbs contain certain compounds that irritate their mouths and have a terrible taste. Funny thing is (ok, not that funny to some), they won’t eat them, they’ll just dig them up. One good solution is to place a sheet of chicken wire right on top of the planting just below the soil’s surface making it virtually invisible. The bulbs will be smart enough to find their way right through the wire in the Spring.

Especially popular to squirrels are gardens littered with bulb-scented debris, such as those papery skins. It is scent, after all, that guides them to the hidden feast, not memory cues such as “six hops from the big tree on the right.” A good garden clean-up followed by a heavy watering will stop the squirrels from smelling the bulbs and remove traces of recently disturbed soil (a visual clue that they use). In addition, they don’t like muddy feet.

Although this may contradict common gardening sense (and annoy the heck out of you), feeding squirrels peanuts or corn in tree feeders during their Fall nut-gathering and your bulb-planting period, may minimize damage to your bulb gardens. In theory, this offers them some easy pickings and discourages them from digging for harder-to-find nourishment, like bulbs.

continued on page 2



*Snow covered pansies,
see page 8*



The Behnke GardeNews

is published seasonally.

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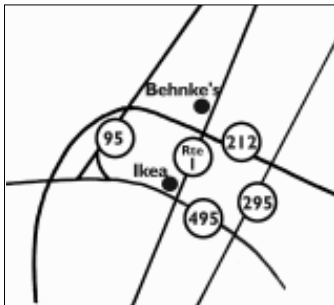
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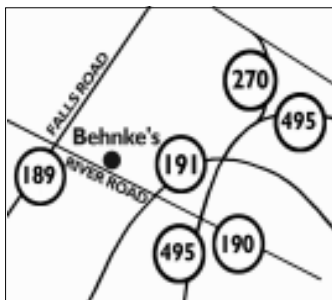
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Where there's a squirrel, there's a way. Whether in your flower beds or conquering a squirrel-proof bird feeder, squirrels can be a frustration to gardeners.

the animal doesn't take a bite, like it, and continue to try the rest to see if there is another good bite somewhere.

Narcissus (daffodils) are animal-resistant, and planting bulbs animals don't like will greatly improve a garden's overall survivability in problem areas. Behnke's will again be offering many more animal-resistant varieties in early September. They include: allium (ornamental onion), chionodoxa (glory of the snow), colchicum, eranthis (winter aconite), fritillaria, *Galanthus nivalis* (snowdrop), *Hyacinthoides hispanica* (Spanish bluebell), hyacinthus (hyacinth), leucojum (snowflake), muscari (grape hyacinth), ornithogalum, oxalis, and scilla.

Some home remedies include mixing six raw eggs in one gallon of water with 2 teaspoons of antitranspirant (such as Bonide® or Wilt-stop®). The smell of decomposing eggs keeps the deer away while being too faint a dilution for humans to detect. A hot sauce spray mixing two teaspoons Tabasco sauce in one gallon of water with two teaspoons of antitranspirant provides a taste deterrent to deer and other small animals. Both recipes must be reapplied after heavy rains. Read the Wilt-stop label for plant limitations.

Essential to arriving at a defensive plan, you must start by identifying the creature that is causing the damage and then learn a little bit about its habits. There is really no one magic solution for your animal pest problem. Our customers swear by this one or that one (or sometimes just swear). Often what works in one garden doesn't work in another. If deer are truly starving, they will eat just about anything, including tree bark. Behnke staff can help each of you find your own answers. Experimentation is the key...and certainly worth a try. □



A bulb with bedhead; *Allium christophii*, the Star of Persia.

Good Defense, continued

Deer are the greatest threat in the Spring when, after a hungry Winter, they look for anything green, young, and tasty. From the deer's point of view, a fence is the best deterrent...a high one. It needs to be at least seven feet high (adding an overhang of chicken wire will discourage them even more). Better yet, the most effective deer fence is a double fence, as deer can either jump something very high, or something very wide, but can not do both at once. Two fences (one high and one moderately high) spaced about three feet apart will do. The deer will see the two fences and instinctively won't jump.

Deer and animal repellents are the most frequently purchased animal deterrents at Behnke's. These sensory products, which you spray onto and around your plants, seek to dissuade the unwanted garden diner by offending his/her sense of smell and taste or exciting his/her sense of fear and caution. To succeed with these products, you have to spray early (before they start munching), and regularly during the season (especially after heavy rains). Your coverage has to be complete and regular so



Meet Christy Rees

As the manager of Behnke Nurseries' Landscape Design Department, Christy Rees oversees our design team and personally meets with clients to design landscapes for homes and businesses. She is tightly focused on the success of her projects, with the goal of matching the right plants and hardscapes to the site.

Christy attended Penn State and earned a bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture, with additional work in geography and business, and is an active member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Since moving to this area seven years ago, she has worked as both a designer and project manager, so she is very well-acquainted with the quirks of our climate, soils and plant requirements.

She has worked on a broad range of commercial projects including restaurants, town home developments and office parks, but her focus at Behnke's tends toward "high-end" residential projects. As a landscape architect, she is particularly well-versed in designing hardscape installations such as walkways, decks, retaining walls, gazebos, ponds and so on.

Her work as a project manager gave her hands-on experience with the installation of her designs and helps ensure the quality of the final product, as well as to develop a good feel for the timeline of your particular installation.

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Ornamental Cabbage and Kale

by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Ornamental kale is becoming increasingly popular with gardeners looking for a cool-season ornamental to compliment pansy plantings. They are at their best in late Fall, and depending on the weather, may look good into the following Spring. Round-leaved types are called ornamental cabbage, while lacy-leaved types are called ornamental kale, but generally we use the generic "ornamental cabbage and kale" as the culture and uses are the same.

According to Gerald Klingaman of the University of Arkansas, "kale" is the Scot's version of "cole", the Roman term for the vegetable, which originated in the Mediterranean area. (Giving us the term "cole crop" for the kale/cabbage/broccoli vegetable group, "cole slaw" and so on). It eventually made its way to Japan, where people selected colorfully-leaved plants for ornamental purposes. Ornamental kales were brought to the United States in 1929 as a result of a USDA-sponsored collecting trip to Japan, and they

first appeared in US seed catalogues in 1936. Most cultivars sold today were bred in Japan, and there are called "leaf peonies."

Cool weather is required for good coloration. According to the University of Massachusetts, temperatures below 50 degrees cause the loss of chlorophyll, which allows the underlying purple, pink and white coloration of the leaves to become more prominent. Very cold temperatures in winter or heavy snows will tend to shorten their ornamental life. Some years, they look good into April, while other years they are pretty ratty by Christmas.

They are biennials, which means that they have leaves the first season, then form a flower spike in the spring. The yellow-flowered spike is generally considered to be of minor ornamental value. Ornamental kale and cabbage are quite attractive when planted in autumn mixed containers with pansies and ornamental grasses, or when used



en masse in the ground with pansies. Like bulbs, they are less attractive when planted in rows like frilly little soldiers.

Ornamental kale is available at our garden centers in early to mid-September, but will be more colorful at the end of the month or in early October. Be sure to watch for it and add it to your fall-color palette! □

A Beautiful Lawn is More

A broad expanse of lush, cool green grass, uniformly cut, cries out for bare feet and self-satisfaction. Throughout the hot Summer months, the cool green blanket frames our homes and gardens, and provides relief from information overload. Carefully nurtured expanses of verdant softness create the desire within us to surround ourselves and play in the gentle embrace of the lawn. Well-maintained lawns provide security from fire and pests, and raise the perceived value of our largest investment, our homes.

Trying to achieve this easy-on-the-eye miracle requires a plan and some commitment and effort. Understanding what you are planting and the needs of the grass; knowing the timing of each step; investing in preparation, and committing to a definite series of steps is necessary in order to



The ideal cool season lawn, Hidcote Manor, England.

achieve a picture-perfect look. Your lawn is your attempt to hold back the natural progression of things, and you will have to invest time and resources in order to keep nature at bay.

The long hot Summer with little rain has left many with a dormant expanse of dust and crabgrass interspersed with dried-up clover and sleeping dandelions, unless you have turned on the sprinklers or the rains have come. Using precious water without a plan has left you with a bigger water bill and more problems than you might think. Disease, insect proliferation, and stressed turf come from random waves of water—worse from everyday artificial deluges from automatic sprinkler systems. And, of course, the summer weeds thrive from attempts to “do good.”

To establish a lawn you need some information about grass types and plant needs (including the role soil plays), a simple timeline of actions, and some amount of work and resources. The general information about grass plant types is easy, the information about soil and its role is important, the time-line directs the work and eliminates procrastination; the work provides exercise, and the resources include tools, fertilizers, soil amendments, and project accessories. Establishing a lawn and maintaining it is akin to using a recipe to bake a pie. Making sure you have everything you need, from the right tools to the correct ingredients, *before you start*, is the key to success.

Soil is the single most important factor in determining the success of your lawn. Soil that does not contain microbiological life is simply dirt and is dead, as will be the lawn sooner or later. It is critical that soil have at minimum organic matter content of at least 2%. Remember this is a minimum! Soil should have 5% or more organic matter for optimal performance. Organic matter is habitat for beneficial microorganisms. The organic matter habitat is food as well as home. Beneficial microorganisms eat organic matter and release nutrients to the grass, while antagonizing pests and diseases. Additionally, beneficial microorganisms promote good soil structure which relieves compaction, and keeps the root system thriving and working for greener and healthier blades of grass.

All plants depend on beneficial microorganisms to: deliver nutrients and water from the soil to plants; protect plants from pests and disease; and build good soil structure so air and water reach roots in proper proportion. My grandfather, Albert Behnke, told me that “a plantsman spends a nickel on the plant and a dollar on the hole (soil).”

Grass plants derive energy from sunlight. Although we sell it as “plant food,” fertilizers are actually sources of elements that plants need to make proteins and tissues, like the calcium and zinc in your vitamin and mineral supplements. Some plants need relatively little light: we call them shade plants. Your lawn is not one of them. Turfgrass species prefer full sun, although sometimes you can coax a stand of grass to thrive in partial shade. Much trouble, aggravation and cost comes from trying to have a traditional lawn in the shade.

...than Meets the Eye

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

Grass species used in the Washington, DC area fall into two broad types: cool season and warm season. Most of us have cool-season grasses; a few have chosen the warm-season approach: zoysia grass. It is simple to know which you have. If your lawn greens up when the temperatures of late Spring turn hot, and stays green with little water and little mowing until cool weather returns in Fall, you have a warm-season grass. Drought-tolerant zoysia grows in full sun, out-competes weeds and welcomes comparably short mowing. Its shortfall is that, from October until May, the lawn is dormant (brown). The most important thing to remember is that your prime fertilizing time is in late May, as this is when your grass is actively growing. The Maryland Co-operative Extension is a good resource for zoysia lawn care and other detailed lawn care information.*

The majority of us have some assortment of cool-season grasses. Some try bluegrass, others have found that fescues work quite well, especially when the lawn is in active use. I recommend you avoid ryegrass as its rapid germination is not enough to compensate for its disease problems and general appearance.

Cool-season grasses grow actively in the cool of Autumn even when we think it is too cold to be outside; cool season lawns establish much easier when the seed is sown in the Fall rather than the Spring. When the heat of Summer comes and rainfall is sporadic, these grasses go dormant—they go to “sleep,” allowing undesirable vegetation to move in. The trick is to prepare the soil well, to add microbial life to well-aerated, non-compacted soils, to fertilize using the proper amount at the right time, and to mow high in the heat of Summer. The plan of action for cool season grasses starts in early Summer with an assessment performed from May to July. Assuming that you are not installing a lawn from scratch, but trying to renovate an existing lawn, your assessment is one of broad estimations of the percentage of desirable grass versus weeds. You will need to determine the types of weeds. Broadleaf weeds such as dandelion and clover, versus grassy weeds like nutsedge and crabgrass are noted, as you will need to attack them with different products. The removal of unwanted plants provides a challenge if you are

trying to have a completely organic lawn, and may require an initial application of synthetic chemicals to speed your renovation. The ultimate goal, however, should be the establishment of an organic lawn with no synthetic additives. There is a broad spectrum of care from completely organic to massive chemical applications. Usually the chemical route is mandated by compacted, “dead” soils which require environmentally unhealthy amounts of fertilizers and pesticides to maintain the struggling grass plants.

Weeds should be attacked throughout this period of time, and the complete removal of unwanted species should be completed by the end of August. Mike Bader, our garden shop buyer, recommends Bonide Weed Beater Ultra® for broadleaf weeds and Monterey Nutgrass ‘Nihilator’® for nutsedge. If you have a crabgrass infestation because you did not apply a (preventative) pre-emergent herbicide in Spring, Mike suggests a crabgrass killer such as Bonide MSMA Crabgrass Killer® or Ortho Weed-B-Gon Crabgrass Killer for Lawns®. Applications of pesticides can and will pollute our waterways if not used correctly. If you must go this route, follow the directions to the letter.

Labor Day signals the next step in renovation. Mow the lawn short, and, if you have bluegrass you will want to dethatch with a hard rake or power dethatcher. Also, to improve air and water infiltration to compacted soil, consider renting a core aerator which pokes dime-sized holes to a depth of around four inches. You must have moist soil, which means you may have to water the lawn thoroughly first. Lightly break up the corings with a rake, and leave them on the lawn. Apply



Above: Zoysia lawn — green in summer drought and brown in cool weather. Below: Fescue lawn in August. This cool season grass will green up with rain and cooler temperatures in fall.



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Fall and Holiday Events



Behnke's Fall Color Weekend

Thursday - Sunday, October 4th - 7th.

Mums, pansies and other seasonal plants color up your fall, along with everything you need for Halloween. Our garden center in Beltsville will feature a straw maze for the kids, and on Saturday, food and entertainment. Visit our website at www.behnkes.com for more information as the event draws closer.



Beltsville Christmas Shop

Holiday Open Houses

Shop for unique gifts and decorations and choose from greenhouses filled with Behnke Signature Poinsettias.

Our annual Holiday Open House at Beltsville will be Thursday evening, November 15, from 6:30 to 9PM. Select decorations and gifts from our Christmas Shop, see our poinsettias, and enjoy light refreshments and music. We'll also have local craftspeople exhibiting and selling their wares.

Our open house at Potomac will be during the day, Saturday November 17th. View our holiday decor and enjoy light refreshments throughout the day.

Lawns, continued from page 5

the grass seed of your choice (e.g., "Behnke's Best" grass seed mixes) following directions on the package, and then broadcast organic matter to a depth of not more than 1/8" over top. This would be an excellent time to set up the habitat for the soil food web with broadcast spreader applications of Behnke's Pogo Organics Beneficial MicroOrganisms Granular Compost®. Spreading the granular compost and a light layer of Leaf Gro® to keep the grass seed from drying would be a good solution for a large area.

The hardest part of lawn seeding is keeping the seed moist for ten to fourteen days. If it rains and stays cloudy for a week, you will be fortunate; however, bright, hot September days require a light watering in the morning and perhaps midday and again in the early afternoon. The seed cannot dry out, not can it sit in water, so a light syringing is the order of the week, until the grass germinates and is up and an inch tall. Watch out for days with low humidity and/or wind, for this will dry out your planting faster than you will expect.

An application of fertilizer is appropriate for the formerly untended lawn at this point (say, early October). Having already introduced beneficial microorganisms with the Pogo Granular Compost, you can continue down the organic path with Organica's Kelp Booster: Step Two.® A non-organic option is to apply Turf Trust® slow-release fertilizer at half rate. In November fertilize the lawn with Organica's Step One: Lawn Booster 8-1-1® or Turf Trust®, per label instructions. Mow for the first time when the grass is about 3 inches tall, removing about a half inch. Thereafter, mow no lower than three inches. Throughout the Fall, apply one inch of water per week if there is no rain.

In Spring, when the forsythias are half-through blooming, apply Cock-A-Doodle-DOO® brand corn gluten as a pre-emergent herbicide for the organic lawn program, or Dimension® for crabgrass control for a longer period of time. (Do not sow additional grass seed at this time if you have applied these herbicides, as it will kill your germinating grass seed.) Apply the Granular Compost again in Spring so that the soil life can work in partnership with your grass. Through next Summer add one inch of water once every seven to ten days. Mow the grass high during the Summer; at least three inches for cool season grasses. Correct mowing with sharp blades and correct water rates and amounts will reduce or eliminate your need for fungicides and insecticides. Remember: healthy plants can fight their own battles if placed in the right place with the right help. □

**For more information on zoysia and other lawn grasses: <http://www.hgic.umd.edu/content/onlinepublications.cfm>*

Water Conservation in the Landscape

by Christy Rees, Landscape Design
Department Manager

You do not have to let your shrubs, trees and lawn wilt and die to conserve water, nor do you need to have a yard composed of rocks and gravel to have a water-efficient landscape. In fact, you can have lush, colorful and functional landscapes that are full of plants, turf and flowers and use substantially less water.

Low water or water efficient landscaping is often called “Xeriscaping.” The term Xeriscape was created by Nancy Leavitt in conjunction with the Denver Water Department in 1981. The goal then and now is to develop sensible gardening methods which ensure water conservation. The word, Xeriscape, comes from the Greek word “xeros,” meaning dry combined with the word, landscape. Originally developed for drought-afflicted areas, the principles of xeriscape today have an even broader application. Xeriscapes do not have a single look – almost any landscaping style can be achieved. The principles of Xeriscaping can be applied to all or part of a yard, in any geographical region of North America. The seven principles of Xeriscaping are not unique and you may already be using one or more of the principles in your landscape. However, by combining all of the principles you can maximize your landscape water conservation.

If properly designed and installed, xeriscapes can be lush and full of color and texture. By following the strategies below you can create a beautiful landscape while substantially conserving water. If you would like more information on Xeriscaping or if you need help planning, designing, or installing your landscape please call the Behnke Landscape Design & Installation Division at 240-473-6733.



The Seven Principles of Xeriscaping

1 Planning and Design

Making the transition to a xeriscape begins with a plan or design. The goal of your design is to minimize water waste, group plants together with similar light and water requirements, and place them in an area in your yard that matches these requirements. For instance place high water-use plants in low-lying drainage areas, near downspouts, or on the shady side of the house (usually the north side). Sunny areas (especially on the south side of your home or a fence), sloped areas and areas that are exposed to the wind would be better suited for plants which need less water.

2 Soil Analysis and Improvements

Soil analysis will determine if soil amendment is needed. Ideal soil will drain quickly and store water at the same time. This can be achieved by amending the soil prior to planting by increasing the amount of organic material in the soil and keeping it well aerated. With native plants, soil amendments do not need to be nearly as extensive, as they prefer soil that is not too rich.

3 Limited Turf Area

Reduce the size of turf areas as much as possible, while retaining some turf for open space and functionality. When re-seeding your lawn try to look for water-saving species. Turf areas should not be cut too short — taller grass shades the roots and helps retain moisture.

4 Appropriate Plant Selection

Appropriate plant selection keeps the landscape more in tune with the natural environment. For the best results select plants that are native to the region. Of course an entirely native plant pallet is not necessary, you can also look for plants that are non-invasive, drought tolerant and are well-suited to the conditions in your yard.

5 Mulch

Cover all soil surfaces around plants with mulch. Mulch helps retain soil moisture and temperature, prevent erosion and block out competing weeds.

6 Irrigation

Avoid over-watering! Soaker hoses and drip irrigation systems offer the easiest and most efficient watering because they deliver water directly to the base of the plant. This reduces water loss from evaporation. They also deliver the water at a much slower rate which encourages root absorption and reduces pooling and erosion.

7 Maintenance

Low maintenance is one of the benefits of Xeriscaping. You will still need to prune, weed, fertilize, control pests and adjust your irrigation system over time. Proper maintenance preserves the beauty of the xeriscape landscape.

The Wonderful World of Pansies

The colorful pansy reigns supreme from Fall through Spring. The name “pansy” comes from the French “pensée” meaning “remembrance” or “thought;” and thus, traditionally, when someone was presented with a pansy, the giver was saying “I’m thinking of you.”

The pansy has perhaps the widest color range of any garden annual, including red, purple, blue, pink, yellow and white, and one of three basic color patterns: a single, clear color, a single color with black lines radiating from the center, and the most familiar, a one or two-tone flower with a dark center, known as a “face.”



Clear pastel shades are very effective planted en masse.

by Marian Parsley, Buyer

Pansies will grow 8 to 10 inches, with a similar spread. Mass planting yields an impressive display. They grow best in full sun to light shade, in rich, loamy earth which is moist but not soggy.



Snow Angel® Pansies

Pansies have been a specialty at Behnke Nurseries since the 1930s, and our quality is well-known. This year, we’re offering a new series of pansies from Ball Horticultural Company: the Snow Angel® pansies. This series promises to be particularly strong over the winter when fall-planted, even as far north as cold-hardiness Zone 4.

Be sure to join us for *Fall Color Weekend*, October 4 through 7 (see page 6). The Behnke Signature Fall collection includes our outstanding fall garden mums as well as a plethora of pansies in colorful seasonal varieties, such as ‘Trick or Treat,’ ‘Halloween’ and ‘Skyline Copperfield,’ which are sure to put you in an Autumn frame of mind.

To show your support for your favorite football team, plant pansies in team colors! Plant yellow, white, red and black to show your support for the University of Maryland, or, if you are a Baltimore Ravens fan, you can plant black, yellow, purple and white. Of course, Redskins fans can purchase yellow and red.

Pansies begin to arrive at Behnke Nurseries from our greenhouses during the second week of September, and are available through October and into early November. Remember to stop in!

See Page 4
Achieve a Picture-Perfect Lawn this Fall!

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