

Inside

3

**Helmut's Picks:
Choosing a Fresh Cut
Christmas Tree**

4

**Book Review:
The Plants that
Shaped Our Gardens**

Insert

Holiday Events:

Holiday Open House

Poinsettias On Parade

**Herbal Soaps
Workshop**

Gifts for Gardeners

From Ordinary to Ornate

Transform Everyday Greenery into Holiday Decorations

—by Randy Best, Horticultural Specialist

Is your garden a gold mine of holiday decorating possibilities? The traditional greens used in many wreaths, swags and other decorations, Fraser, Douglas and Balsam firs, may not grow well in this area, but many gardens have an abundance of material that is readily suited for Christmas greenery displays. It's very easy to add your own distinctive touch to a purchased, basic evergreen wreath by using what I call "clippings" from the garden. These are short, 6- to 8-inch pieces of material that are incorporated into wreaths, swags or roping. When using fine-needled material such as cypress or juniper, I always love to start with a contrasting background color. The darker the background color that you use, the more the layers on top will seem to "pop." Very dark, green-leaved hollies, such as 'Ebony Magic' or 'Nellie Stevens', or one of the blue hollies, such as 'Blue Princess', create a wonderful background. Layer these into the base wreath or other form and now you are ready to start adding contrasting greenery. At this point, I like to put in blue or green-needled material, such as 'Naylor's Blue' leyland cypress, 'Wichita' juniper, 'Pfitzeriana' (Pfitzer) juniper, 'Seagreen' juniper or 'Buffalo' juniper. After that layer is added, it's time for the artistic portion of the wreath, the addition of the bright colors and exciting textures that will make your wreath different from every other.

For yellows, you could use variegated English holly, 'Gold Lace' juniper, golden hinoki cypress, yellow twig dogwood (stems), or golden weeping willow. If you would prefer more red material, try berries from nandina and winterberry holly or stems from red twig dogwood. And, for unusual-looking material that is really neat to use, I like leatherleaf mahonia, the little fuzzy buds and branches of deciduous magnolias, branches and buds of weeping goat willow, Harry Lauder's walking stick, twigs from American beech, and also twigs from birch trees. I've even used boxwood, azalea cuttings, green-leaved aucuba, and of course 'Little Gem' magnolia branches. Oh, and don't forget these beauties: blue atlas cedar, and deodar cedar.

Because this is fresh material cut from your garden it will last longer than purchased greenery. Furthermore, to assure that everything is well hydrated before you begin assembling your creation, submerge the greenery in a solution of Prolong® for two to three hours. If the branches are too large or too numerous to accomplish this, stand the cut ends in a bucket of solution so that the stems can absorb as much as possible. Leave the branches in the solution for several hours or

continued on page 2

The Behnke GardenNews

is published seasonally.

MANAGING EDITOR:

Judith Conway

HORTICULTURAL ADVISOR:

Larry Hurley

LAYOUT\DESIGN\ILLUSTRATION:

Lori Hicks

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Randy Best

Judith Conway

James Dronenburg

Lori Hicks

Larry Hurley

Melodie Likel

Susan O'Hara

Kevin O'Toole

HOLIDAY SHOPPING HOURS

November 1 - 27:

Open Daily: 8AM to 6PM

CLOSED THANKSGIVING DAY (NOV. 28)

November 29 - December 23:

Monday - Saturday: 8AM to 8PM

Sunday: 8AM to 6PM

CHRISTMAS EVE (DEC. 24) 9AM - 5PM

CLOSED CHRISTMAS DAY (DEC. 25)

NEW YEAR'S EVE (DEC. 31) 9AM-5PM

CLOSED NEW YEAR'S DAY (JAN. 1)

(CALL, HOURS SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

BEHNKE'S AT BELTSVILLE

11300 Baltimore Ave. (U.S.1)

Beltsville, MD 20705

(Two miles north of
Exit 25, Capital Beltway)

301-937-1100

BEHNKE'S AT LARGO

700 Watkins Park Drive

Largo, MD 20774

(Between Central Avenue
and Route 202)

301-249-2492

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



overnight. This will help them to last even longer. After it's assembled, spray your creation with Wilt-Pruf® antitranspirant (for outdoor use only). Generally, my wreaths last a good three to four weeks outdoors with no special spraying or watering. (Note: Purchased greens, such as bagged holly or magnolia branches, will benefit from similar treatment — be sure to cut an inch or so off the old stem off before placing the material into the solution.) If you are displaying your greens on an outer door, hang them on the outside of the storm door — they need the cold temperatures to help them stay fresh.

So, go ahead and buy the base wreath. Most of the other material can come straight from your garden. It's amazing what a palette of color and texture your garden will afford you. Just look around and don't be afraid to experiment. It would even be a good idea to plan ahead, and install plants into your landscape that will supply your Christmas greenery needs for years to come. You can turn a small investment now into a luxurious display later. And remember, hand-crafted wreaths are unique and make wonderful gifts!

Furthermore, I find there is an added bonus to using natural materials in my holiday decorating. After the holidays, I take all of my decorations down by New Year's Eve (this is a family tradition). And, since I use natural materials, I can recycle and put them to good use. Evergreen boughs can be placed over pansies to provide excellent protection from heavy snow and ice or thrown in the compost to be returned to the garden later on as rich, fertile organic matter. (Note: Take care to remove any metal wreath forms or wire from your boughs.) Oh, how wonderful the holidays can be, naturally.

Editor's Note: You can watch as Randy demonstrates his ability to turn everyday greenery into one-of-a-kind holiday decorations. Attend our Holiday Open House in Beltsville or Poinsettias on Parade in Largo. See our insert "Holiday Events" for more information.

New! Shop for Behnke-Quality Christmas Trees and Greenery at 5 locations!

In addition to our three Garden Center locations in Beltsville, Largo and Potomac, you can now shop for your holiday trees, wreaths and greenery at:

Bowie Town Center:

Route 197, 1 mile west of Route 301

and

in Potomac:

at the intersection of Travilla Road and Glen Road

Shop now through December 24, 2002

Christmas Trees: Helmut's Picks and Tips

—by Helmut Jaehnigen, Woody Plants Specialist

Helmut Jaehnigen has personally selected Christmas trees for Behnke's for many years, always insisting on the freshest trees available. Fresher trees hold their needles longer, and supply that nostalgic, one-of-a-kind fragrance we all associate with a picture-perfect holiday setting. We asked him to give us his own thoughts on the best cut Christmas trees.

"A **Fraser Fir** is definitely my first choice for a cut Christmas tree. Its soft, shiny, dark green needles, wonderful fragrance, and straight trunk make it a winner. The well-spaced, strong branches make it easy to reach into the interior of the tree to decorate, and the soft needles are kind to your hands.

But best of all, a Fraser fir will stay fresher inside the house than any other tree. I often keep mine until the end of January, and it doesn't even drop its needles when I take it outside.

As its name implies, the Fraser fir belongs to the fir family and is native to only a few mountain tops in North Carolina with elevations between 4 and 6 thousand feet. It can't be grown below 3 thousand feet because it needs the cooler climate and good drainage of the mountains.

"The **Canadian Balsam Fir** is a close cousin to the Fraser and also has a nice straight trunk.

Canadian Balsam has a good piney fragrance and its needles are shiny and soft, although they may begin to drop by New Year's Eve. Not a bad trade-off for a less expensive tree.

"The majestic **Noble Fir** comes from the cool Pacific Northwest, generally from Washington state.

It needs the mist that comes from the ocean to develop its strong branches and sturdy trunk. It has long, well-spaced, stiff branches of shimmering silvery green that will support even the heaviest ornaments. In addition, the Noble fir has a straight trunk, a fragrance reminiscent of a woodland forest, and long-lasting needles.

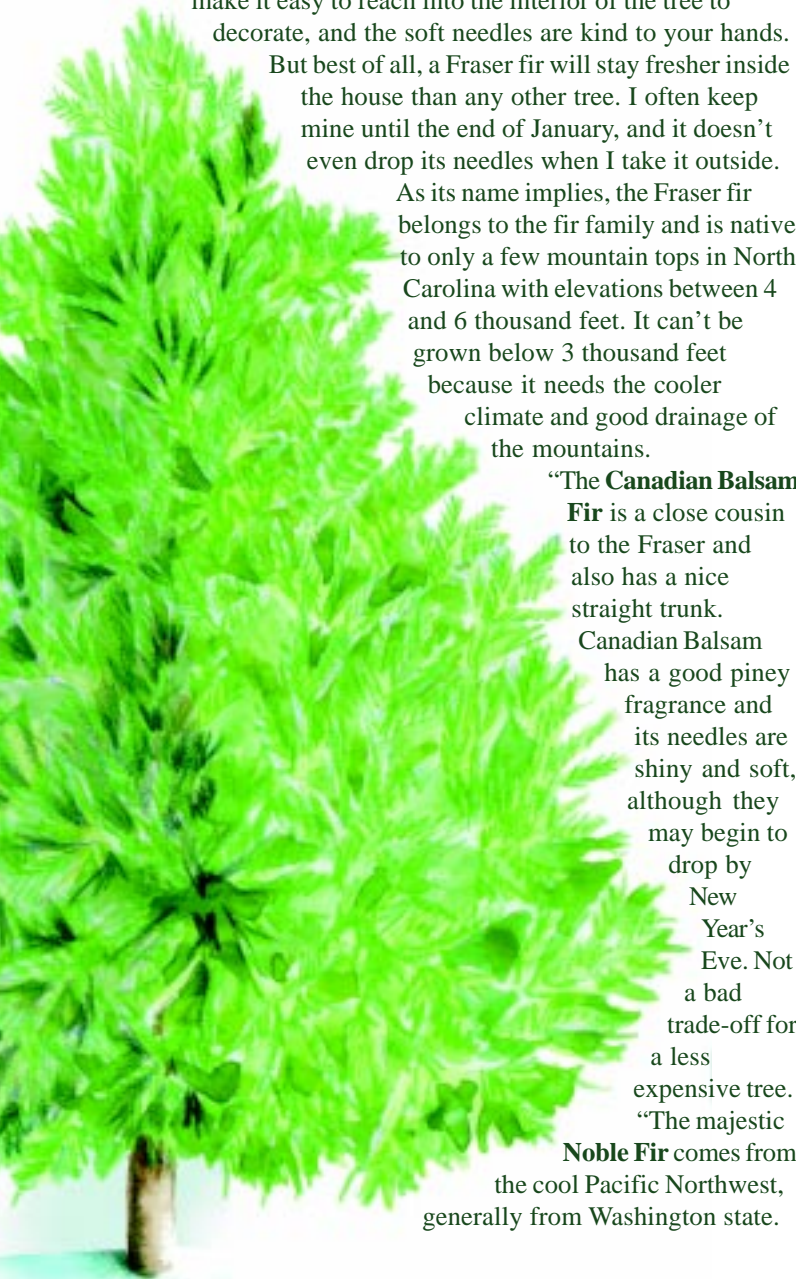
"The **Douglas Fir** has long needles and a sweet orange-like fragrance that fills the room. This tree is long lasting and keeps its needles well. Because it is full and compact, only the outermost branches hold ornaments, making fewer ornaments go a long way.

"**Blue Spruce**, the elegant aristocrat, has storybook appeal — branches are stiff, easy to decorate, and strong enough to hold very heavy ornaments. The needles are short and beautifully blue. The trade-off here is that the breathtakingly beautiful blue spruce is more expensive and will not last as long as the Fraser —but it is a good choice for luxurious color and a perfect Christmas tree shape.

"**White Pines** provide you with extremely long, soft, almost feathery needles. The tree is very full and compact, and again, the decorating is limited to the outside branches. It is less fragrant than firs, with a piney scent.

"No matter which tree you decide is right for your home, plan to purchase it as soon as possible. Almost all trees are cut in November, and the sooner you begin to care for your tree, the longer it will last. At Behnke's, we spray our trees daily to keep them as fresh as possible. We'll carefully put a net around your tree, before we load it on your car, so that the branches won't be damaged during transport. We'll also make a fresh cut at the bottom of the trunk so your tree can absorb the most water. At home, you can plunge your tree into a bucket of water (with an added tree preservative, such as Prolong®) and leave it in a shady spot outdoors, with the net still intact. Cut the netting off the day before you want to set up your tree so that the branches can relax. When you're ready to bring it in the house, you will have a fresh, fragrant and well-hydrated tree that will hang on to its needles longer than you thought possible.

"Buying Christmas trees and greens has always been a most enjoyable job. The trees and greens at Behnke's are grown in three major regions. For Fraser firs one would visit farms around Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, above 3 thousand feet. This year there was an unusually late frost in May in North Carolina. Some areas were hit hard. Fraser firs suffered damage as the tender new growth froze. Those trees needed to be sheared back and cannot be sold this year. Douglas firs are grown almost locally, in Western Pennsylvania. Balsam firs are plantation grown in Eastern Canada. Ours come from a family-owned plantation where everybody gives their trees personal care. The result is an almost picture-perfect tree."



Holiday Events

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE AT BELTSVILLE

Thursday, November 21, 2002, 6 to 9PM

Join us for an evening of fun and sparkle— and kick off the holiday season in style! Enjoy the lovely strains of harpist Jim Dronenburg as he serenades you with traditional carols, and nibble on festive goodies as you meander through the rooms and greenhouses.

Shop for original gifts— local artisans display their wares, including hand-turned wooden sculpture, herbal soaps, pottery, candles and a blacksmith's ironworks.

Be inspired by wreath and bow making demonstrations—Randy Best shows you how to create unique holiday wreaths and swags using unusual evergreens and other surprising materials from the garden. (6:30 and 7:30)

Children can participate in several fun craft activities, such as creating their own holiday cards and gift tags. They can even assemble a special gift for grandmother or teacher!

Join us for fun and good cheer — we look forward to seeing you!

HERBAL SOAP WORKSHOP AT BELTSVILLE

Saturday, November 23, 2002

10AM to 12:30PM; or 1:30 to 4PM

Discover the pleasure of making old-fashioned soaps from oils and fragrant herbs. You'll create and take home your own soaps, which are perfect to keep for yourself or give as gifts. Please bring protective goggles, rubber gloves, and an apron.

Tuition (\$30) includes all necessary materials. Please call to pre-register: 301-937-1100.



POINSETTIAS ON PARADE AT LARGO

Saturday, November 23, 2002, 10AM to 4PM

Acres of greenhouses filled with 50,000 blooming poinsettias!



It isn't the distinctive paper cover, printed with the Behnke name, that makes a Behnke Signature Poinsettia. It's the serious poinsettia growers at our Largo production greenhouses who grow the most perfect poinsettias available anywhere — they stand as the benchmark against which all other poinsettias can be measured.

Take advantage of this once-a-year opportunity to see our fabulous poinsettia greenhouses in Largo. You'll tour our production greenhouse brimming with Behnke Signature Poinsettias at their peak. Professional growers will be on hand to answer your questions and describe the process which brings the plants into bloom on schedule. Bring a camera so that you and your family can take advantage of this perfect backdrop for your holiday photos!

Randy Best will be on hand to demonstrate the art of creating unique holiday wreaths (noon) and swags (1PM) from a variety of natural material from the garden (see page 1).

Please join us for this fun annual event!



Gardeners' Gifts

Gardeners love to give — seeds, cuttings, divided bulbs — even the inevitable giant overgrown zucchini. At Christmas, it's their turn to receive, and Behnke's has no shortage of neat stuff to delight the gardener in your life, who by December, is probably showing signs of withdrawal. Choosing the perfect gift can be a challenge, however, so keep in mind that a Behnke Gift Certificate (available online or in our stores) is always a most welcomed gift.

Garden Tools and Accessories from the Rumford Gardener:

Gardening tools for children. Encourage the gardener-to-be in your life with tool sets which combine durability with ease of use for the garden, beach or backyard sandbox. Colorful yet sturdy construction.



Gardening tools for adults. Keep useful tools at hand with a half apron and three favorite tools. For houseplant enthusiasts consider a deluxe indoor gardening set with everything you needed to care for indoor plants: canvas mini-tote includes three mini-hand tools, pruner, floral snips and premium plant mister.

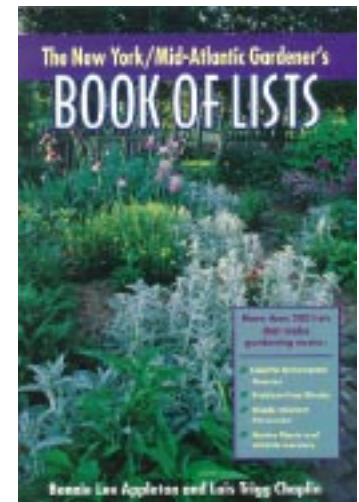
Or choose from several garden kneeler sets. Pictured set includes comfortable kneeler pad, quality die-cast aluminum trowel and cultivator, a set of copper garden plant labels and wax pencil.

Pruners manufactured by Felco of Switzerland. Once available only to professionals, Felcos are the standard by which other pruning shears are judged. They have precision-aligned blades which are hollow ground to cut cleanly. All parts are easily serviced or replaced so you won't need to buy a new pair every year as you would with other shears. Behnke Nurseries offers more than a dozen models of Felco pruning shears, plus replacement blades, springs, sharpeners, and belt holster (pictured).



The Loadumper Yard Cart. This is an all purpose, premium-quality, ergonomically-designed yard cart made with a structural tube steel frame that is powder coated for rust resistance. Its heavy duty polyethylene tub is non-corrosive and provides 8 cu. ft. volume capacity for handling any number of hauling applications. Unique patented design allows for easy dumping, and superior stability. Unlike a standard wheelbarrow, the Loadumper frame, because of its "support forward" design can negotiate garden steps without it scratching or scraping.

Bird Feeders, shelters and accessories from the Audubon Society. Audubon is proud to connect people to birds and nature with quality, field-tested products. Feeders are handcrafted of natural cedar — are easy to fill and clean and are designed to attract more birds. A deck mounted birdbath will provide hours of delight for birds and their fanciers.



A sourcebook and workbook in one, *The New York/Mid-Atlantic Gardener's Book of Lists* has all the answers. With more than 200 lists of plants grouped by their horticultural characteristics and uses in the garden, this is the one-of-a-kind guide to putting less work and money into your garden and getting more out of it.

Book Review: The Plants that Shaped Our Gardens

By David Stuart;

Reviewed by John Peter Thompson

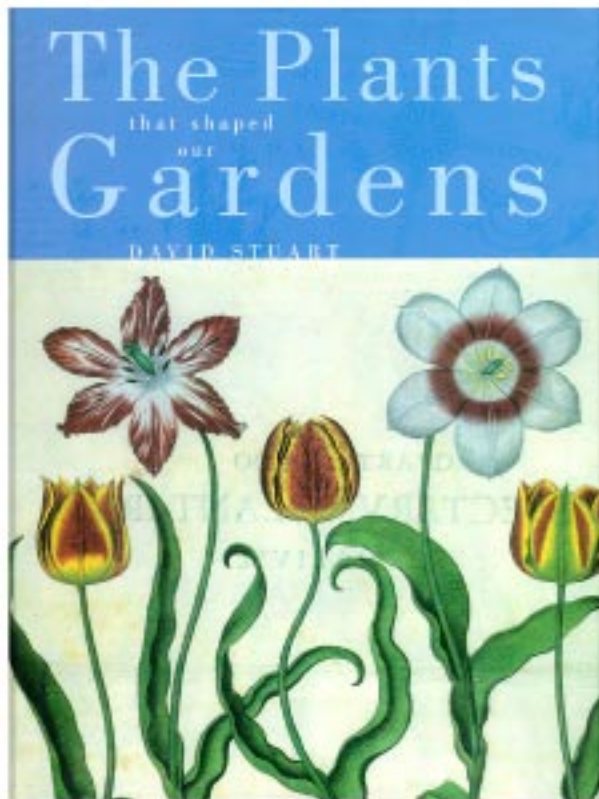
David Stuart is a biologist, botanist, columnist for the *Sunday Times* and nurseryman. He has written a book which combines tales of great adventure with history, landscape architecture information and great illustrations—what more can you ask for in a book?

The Plants that Shaped our Gardens is ideal for plant enthusiasts and beginners alike, and will hold one's attention as few books of any genre will. The author's meticulously researched information on exploring, collecting and disseminating plants from around the world is a collection of stories of pirates and merchants, Indians and janissaries, planters and kings, all of whom, for their own particular reason, came under the sway of the plant kingdom and its insatiable desire to conquer the world. We readers tend to see the world through a human-centered view. The author suggests that the plants have diabolically used mankind to assure their viability and distribution across planet earth. We see beauty—the plants see their continuing viability. It is an unequal partnership.

Set in 10 chapters, the author takes us through the chronological exploration of the people who collected plants and the influences these collections had on garden design from the 16th century to the present day. Learn of Thomas Blaikie and his

adventurous expedition through the Alps; savor tales of danger, such as near blind men roaming the Rockies in search of plants, or Leonhardt Rauwolff, a doctor from Augsburg, Germany, who sets off to discover the great gardens of the Turks and the Ottomans, and his violent encounter with a "well-armed Turk;" and admire the resourcefulness of collectors such as Robert Fortune who, dressed as a native, steals plants (*Hosta fortunei*) by employing a sticky material on his clothes to collect seeds.

The Plants that Shaped our Gardens offers plenty of adventures to keep the reader entertained, combining great storytelling with technical detail. It is written for all levels of interest, and the beautiful plates and reproductions are compelling, intense and dramatic. This is the perfect gift for someone on your Christmas list!



11300 Baltimore Ave.
Beltsville, MD 20705-1923

Address Service Requested

**Holiday Open House at Beltsville,
and Poinsettias on Parade at Largo...
See "Holiday Events" inside!**

PRSRT STD U.S. POSTAGE PAID Suburban, MD Permit No. 1136
