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Designer Poinsettias for Dazzling Displays

— by Marian Parsley, Horticulturist

*I*t's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you grow! If you peek in the greenhouse of your local garden center you will see holiday poinsettias ablaze with color.

There are dozens and dozens of poinsettia varieties in existence. At Behnke's, we strive to bring you a dazzling selection which includes the old traditional favorites along with the best and most surprising of the newer colors and forms. We grow nearly forty varieties of beautiful poinsettias!

But selection is only the beginning. We are proud of the tradition of excellence behind every poinsettia we grow. Each Behnke poinsettia is hand planted using only the best quality cuttings. Once rooted, each plant is hand pinched and sculpted like a work of art, to produce a uniformly pleasing shape. Finally, each plant is hand tied to reduce breakage in handling. Simply put, Behnke poinsettias are the finest plants available.

continued on the back cover



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HOURS

Garden Center hours change seasonally. 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 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****Correction**

In the Fall '04 issue of *GardeNews*, John Peter Thompson inadvertently implied in his article on Pumpkins that the ancient Celts celebrated their New Year on October 31. In fact, the holiday was celebrated November 1, which is the modern All Saints Day.

Herb Ornaments Spice Up Holiday Gift Shop

— by Larry Hurley

Among the many things you'll find in our Holiday Shop this year is a set of round, blown-glass tree ornaments representing "Herbs of the Bible." There are a total of six ornaments, priced individually, in each set. They make great gifts for the gardener, or perhaps they would spruce up your own Christmas tree. Of the six in the set, three *are* mentioned in the *Bible* (coriander, dill, and myrrh) and the other three would like to have been (tansy, catmint and thyme).

Here is what I can tell you about these herbs without doing a whole lot of pesky research. Although some of these herbs have culinary uses, all of these herbs seem to have a myriad of medicinal qualities. There are many excellent herb books available, including *The Big Book of Herbs* by Art Tucker and Thomas DeBaggio, and *Herbs of the Bible* by James A. Duke.

Coriander does double duty, as the seed is used in cooking in the Middle East, China and India, and the foliage is that "love-it-or-hate-it" herb, cilantro (ugh). It is an annual herb, easily grown in our area. Dill is another annual herb, easily grown here. It tends to self seed in the garden if you don't keep an eye on it. Beyond the use of the seeds to impart character to the ever-popular dill pickle, young leaves are nice when mixed with yogurt, cucumber and tomato as a refreshing summer salad. Myrrh is the gummy sap from a Middle Eastern tree, and not used as an American garden plant, at least not in our area. It is fragrant and used in incense, and was applied in a salve to purify the dead in Jewish ritual. As a gift of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus, it is said to foretell the passion of Jesus.

Tansy is a perennial, with yellow button-like flowers. Although sometimes grown as a garden plant, it can spread aggressively and it appears on invasive plant lists. Oh, and it's poisonous. Probably best to admire it on the ornament. Catmint is a cousin of catnip, and is commonly grown as a perennial garden plant. Behnke Nurseries carries a half a dozen cultivars in season. Most have that "cottage garden" kind of look, with grayish-green foliage and blue flowers. Not as attractive to cats as catnip, it may still entice the occasional stray cat to the yard. Thyme is the best of the bunch, serving as a nice ornamental perennial or as a seasoning (or both in some cases). There are a number of species, of varying fragrance (caraway, lemon, orange, rose, etc.), often with attractive flowers in the white/pink/purple tones, or foliage with white or golden variegation.

Check out Behnke's Holiday Shop. In addition to these herbal ornaments you'll find a complete line of gifts and decorations, including hand made crafts from the Chesapeake Woodturners.



Three designs from our "Herbs of the Bible" collection. From left: Tansy, Catmint and Dill.



Meet: Patricia Manke



Patricia Manke and her new best friend, Ricky.

Patricia turned up one day at Behnke's Garden Center at Potomac looking for a market for her hand painted "garden chairs." Both the chairs and the artist were quite appealing — she ended up selling her chairs and landing a job!

Patricia has quickly become an asset to "Potomac," and she enjoys the diversity of her job. She is the manager of both the Annual and Perennial departments, where she cares for plants and customers and keeps the beds and shelves fully stocked. Patricia also is involved in the Holiday Shop during the fall months.

Although she was born in Texas, Patricia grew up all over. She says, "Since my father's position as an engineer for McDonnell Douglas required a lot of traveling, we lived all over the US and in Europe. I attended 13 schools by the time I graduated from high school."

Patricia and her husband, Dean, live in Bethesda, just a few minutes from Behnke's. They have a son, 26.

When her son was born, Patricia stayed at home and worked as a seamstress for a ballet company. These days, Patricia likes to paint in her spare time, and of course, also enjoys gardening. Golf and bike riding are other favorite activities.

Holiday Happenings

You're Invited to a Holiday Open House

Let us entertain you with fun and sparkle as we once again kick off the holiday season in style at our Annual Holiday Open House at Behnke's Beltsville location on **Friday, November 19, 2004 from 6 to 9 p.m.**

Enjoy the lovely strains of harpist (and frequent GardeNews contributor — see pages 4-6) Jim Dronenburg as he serenades you with traditional carols and whimsical melodies. Nibble on festive goodies, meander through our breathtaking poinsettia greenhouses, and browse our Holiday Shop.

Shop for original gifts, too. Visiting local artisans will display their wares. One example is The Chesapeake Woodturners, who will be demonstrating their unique craft of turning naturally-felled timber into original works of art — with plenty of items available for sale. We'll have something special in store for the little ones, too, so bring the kids!

Similar celebrations are planned for the other two Behnke Nurseries locations. Largo will have an Open House in conjunction with their Poinsettia Tours on **Saturday, November 20, 2004 (see below)**, and Potomac will hold their Holiday Open House on **Sunday, November 21**. Check our website to view more details as they become available, or call each store directly.

Poinsettia Greenhouse Tour at Behnke's Largo

Saturday, November 20, 2004 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Acres of greenhouses filled with 50,000 blooming poinsettias! Don't miss this opportunity to see our fabulous poinsettia greenhouses in Largo. You'll tour our production greenhouse brimming with Behnke Signature Poinsettias at their peak. Bring a camera, if you wish, and take advantage of this quintessential holiday setting!

Free Seminar at Riderwood Retirement Village

Behnke Nurseries will present a seminar, "Poinsettias, from A to Z," in the lobby of Montgomery Station at the Riderwood Retirement Village in Silver Spring, Maryland. The seminar will be presented twice: from 10 to 11 a.m. and repeated at 7 to 8 p.m. on **Thursday, December 9, 2004**. Poinsettias will be available for purchase before and after each seminar. Reservations are required, so please call 301-495-5700, or e-mail Patricia Myers Mets: PMets@ericksonmail.com to reserve a space.

Hear it Through the Grapevine



Connect to the Behnke Grapevine to be alerted to special events and promotions at all Behnke Nurseries locations. You may elect to be contacted through e-mail or snail mail, your choice. We'll drop you a postcard or send you an e-mail to keep you informed of sales, promotions and special events that may not be advertised elsewhere.

Simply do one of the following;

To be contacted via E-mail:

E-mail us at:
behnkes@behnkes.net
and type "Grapevine" in the subject field.

To be contacted via US Mail:

Mail your name and address to:
Behnke Nurseries/Grapevine
PO Box 290
Beltsville, MD 20705



The Plant Ghosts of

Let's remember the plants of Christmas past. They aren't with us the way they used to be. The reason? People's houses then were **cold**, by our standards. Early houses had fireplaces—the earliest had huge, walk-in hearths—which did triple duty in cooking, washing, and heating the room. The open fireplaces sent huge quantities of heat up the chimney, rather than into the house. In the 1700's, stoves started to come in, and the houses could be heated more efficiently. Furnaces came in by the late 1800's, but windows were uninsulated—ditto the walls and roof! (They used far less light than we do, too. More later.)

People thought nothing of this; it was the norm. They just wore more clothing. But these conditions—not freezing but cold by our standards—let them do a lot of things that we find hard today. They kept all sorts of plants in their windows, which tended to have nice deep sills. Things like primrose, cyclamen and gardenia were very



Christmas cactus

popular, because these plants *need* cool night temperatures and a fair bit of temperature change between the day and night. They forced bulbs more easily, because the bulbs were not blasted by our hot, dry air. The average cooler house of yesteryear had far more humidity. As a general rule, the plants that were favorites then were favorites because they did well in those conditions.

Some plants, such as geraniums, survive today. They can take the dry heat; they were desert plants to start with. But

“Let the windows be well stopp'd up at night, so that water does not freeze, and there needs no fire”

—*Advice over two centuries old.*

the Christmas cactus, for example, needs a cool-night temperature, or failing that, a long period of darkness, to set bud. Lamplight across a warmer room wasn't enough to mess with their little green minds, but electric light is. The best place for a Christmas cactus is, in fact, an unused room that you don't go into very much. (Quite a few orchids, by the way, also like a day-night temperature change.) They could have roses in sunny windows, and gardenias too. Gardenias will take night temperatures down into the high 50's without dropping their buds—but in a modern house, drop they will.

People—including my own great-grandmother, in Adamstown, Maryland—grew citrus trees, orange and lemon, in large tubs. Down they went to the basement for the winter, and stayed dormant. More affluent people put them in rooms with large south windows, and they did not go dormant. The trees did very well in the cold. Often there was a bay tree or a pot of rosemary upstairs on the windowsill. These will dry out at the drop of a hat nowadays.

And to add a nasty non-holiday note, you will find that a hot, dry house encourages the spread of spider mites and/or mealy bugs. Give your plants the occasional mist or a shower right in the tub to stave this problem off, *this is a crutch not a cure*, and consider putting gravel in their saucers or trays to let a little water stand in without rotting their roots off.



Pile on the wood!

But let it wh

We'll keep our Ch

The grizzled of pelt among us, of my age and older, will remember Christmas greens lasting longer. This isn't just a reminiscence — with forced air heat things dry out quicker. If you have the time, take your Christmas greens and mist them or lay them in water for an hour or so on occasion. You can also give greens a misting of Wilt-Pruf™, which cuts down on transpiration of moisture into dry air. You can't untrim your tree and do that to it—but you can make sure that its pan of water is full at all times. And, *with a living tree*, try to lower the temperature of the room.

of A Christmas Past

—By James Dronenburg, Plant Specialist



**The wind is chill,
mistle as it will,
Christmas merry still.**

—Herrick

Outside and in, we trim with greens. Henry Mitchell (whose columns for the Washington Post have been reprinted in three books, *The Essential Earthman*, *One Man's Garden*, and *Henry Mitchell On Gardening*—these are must-reads— see page 6) in his time mentioned five generally accepted “traditional” greens—rosemary, bay, holly, ivy and mistletoe. He personally considered yew, box and juniper “equally necessary.” Odd, very odd, that he did not mention four others, mainstays around here, pine, spruce, *Magnolia grandiflora* and crowsfoot. And occasionally you see

wreaths and swags of mountain laurel used. Most of these greens will last longer with lower temperature and more humidity — even the greens used outside will benefit from the occasional sousing-down, and/or a bit of Wilt-Pruf™ applied after the soaking.

We still trim our houses, but we tend to use things like poinsettias which are bred and greenhouse-grown for modern conditions. We couldn't grow these ourselves. (You *can* bring a poinsettia into flower. Put it in a room where there is no light between sunset and sunup. But let it get one good flash of light in the middle of the night, and pfui! It thinks it's summer and cramps up, at least for that night. If you're in that room with the lights on regularly, the thing will not color up.) And we buy holiday plants to throw away, because we can. Because the plants are there, easy and available. Gardenias, cyclamen and chrysanthemums are still here—but are grown to be thrown away after flowering.

Your great-grandmother would have had fits at the very idea of a throw-away plant.

Amaryllis are with us still; they are tropical bulbs with a waxy covering on their leaves, and take no guff from anybody. Let them flower, keep watering and fertilizing for the months it takes until the foliage goes yellow on its own, and your bulb will last longer than you will, and multiply. These days the mini-amaryllis are the rage. They take up less space, can be used as a centerpiece, and are very forgiving. These mini-amaryllis come from species that actually have been in general circulation for over a century, did you know? I had one in the late sixties, from my junior high school librarian; it had been passed along in her family forever. Thought I'd never lose it...gave away the babies...lost it. Rats.



Cyclamen

We have filled the space our ghosts left behind. Orchids are popular nowadays, especially the forgiving, high-temperature ones like phalaenopsis. They are spectacular in the variations available now, and bloom for months. Other plants, like kalanchoe, have made the transition by being bred down to a better size and lots more colors. (An old fashioned kalanchoe is fire engine red and about two feet high.) Being succulents, hot dry air holds no terrors for them. But...

Would you like to try your hand at the things your grandmother had for the holidays? Make a cool spot in your house. It may be as simple as turning down the air flow or the baseboard in one room, and shutting the door; it may be rigging your curtains so that they can be shut at night with your plants *between them and the windows*. I have, in my own house, two rooms so shut off, and in them I can put forced bulbs and they last and last; in a still room, the fragrance is unbelievably good. I buy cyclamen for the holiday season and they bloom until April or May. Some of the orchids, the miltonias and the tiger orchids, like the cool. Overwintering plants like gardenia, brugmansia, and Christmas (Thanksgiving, Easter) cacti will thank you profusely. And you can enjoy the “ghosts” of Christmas past once again.

A Gardening Book Wish List

— by James Dronenburg, Plant Specialist

With the Christmas/holiday season coming up, there are a number of books I'd recommend. Most of them I have, some I would love to have...

The first and foremost of them—any books by Henry Mitchell, who for years wrote the “Earthman” column for the Washington Post. The three I have are *The Essential Earthman*, *One Man's Garden*, and *Henry Mitchell on Gardening*. They are cheaply and easily available in reprint. Two other books he wrote are *Washington: Houses of the Capital*, and *Any Day*.

Then, you really need to investigate Vita Sackville-West's garden writing. She and her husband restored—and I use that term loosely—Sissinghurst Castle, and made the gardens that are, and have been, one of the three most famous gardens in England since the 1950's to the present. For years she wrote a garden column; which were anthologized into four books, now out of print, and the anthologies were anthologized (!) into one book that *is* in print, *Vita Sackville-West's Garden Book*, currently available. She deals with the unusual things and in prose that borders on poetry. And she mentions plants that are still rare today on this side of the Atlantic. If you'd like to discover plants that your neighbors don't have, Vita is a must. You do have to take some of it with a grain of salt, though; remember England's winters and summers both are less extreme than ours. This means that some things that were easy for her are **not** for us in the Washington, D.C. area, and vice versa. As a case in point, she had to grow *Magnolia grandiflora* as a specimen wired to a wall, for protection—whereas they are quite happy here.

For years I have haunted used-book stores, and recommend any edition of the *Wise Garden Encyclopedia* from WWII on. There is a lot of practical information on propagation and growing. Granted, it does not have the newer stuff; there is fifty years' worth of roses, mums, daylilies, all the new stuff from China and Japan and Mexico, that is not covered, but the average price is \$5—and it is well, well worth it.

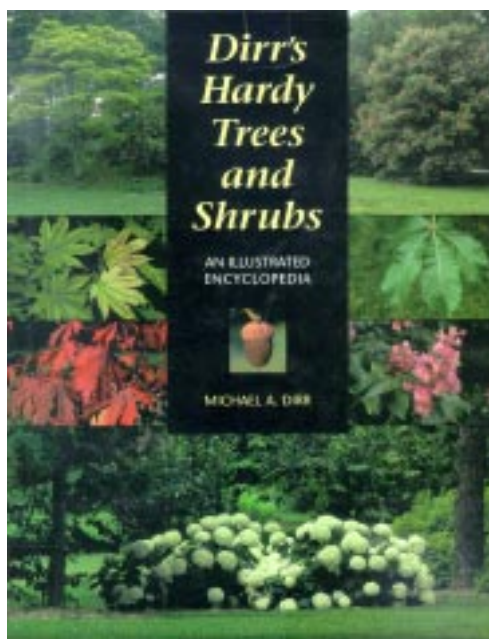
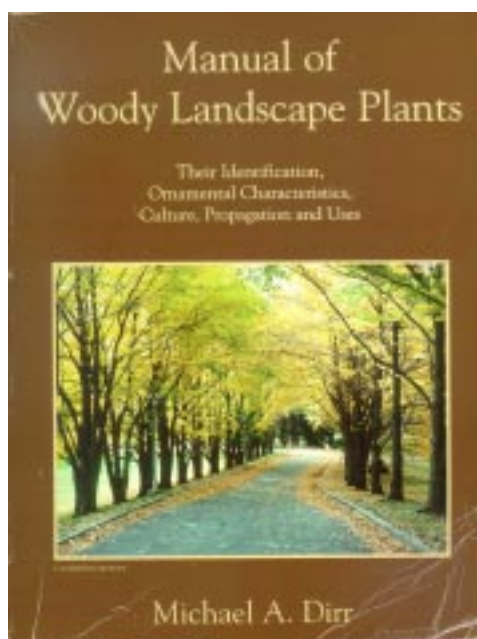
For those with a historical bent, I recommend the Dover edition of *Gerard's Herball*—the revised & expanded edition, circa 1633. It is a Dover facsimile edition, and you have to get used to some of the script, but after the first couple of pages, it is no longer daunting. The woodcuts alone are spectacular. Brace yourself for the price—it was \$75 ten years ago.

While in the neighborhood of antique books, they have a whole series of Gertrude Jekyll's books out in re-print now. Miss Jekyll was one of the foremost writers of the turn of the last century, and she, along with William Robinson, were the initiators of the modern mixed style of gardens. The prose gets a bit purple, but that was the way they wrote in those days. Her ideas are good. In a nutshell: keep it reasonably simple and natural looking, as opposed to geometrical bedding. Formal walks, informal planting. Mix things. There are rules for using color in gradations, to make an overall picture. Anything with Jekyll's name on it is worth getting.

Having gotten through Miss Jekyll's prose, you might tackle Robinson's *The English Flower Garden*. Stylistically it makes Jekyll seem modern, but it is *the* work from which modern gardening is descended. There is some practical information, but brace yourself for the more-than-occasional blast of brimstone against some horticultural practices (many of them now a century dead anyway.) For the older ones among us, imagine W.C. Fields with his dander up, in print, and you've got Robinson.

Which brings me to the Big Two References, which I really believe everyone should have. The first is actually two separate books, Michael A. Dirr's *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* and his *Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (pictured at left). The first, in its many editions, is primarily text with the occasional line drawing. It is the first-line reference here at Behnke's. For the most part, those starting out will do well to buy an older edition in a used book store; the newest edition tends to have more modern

continued next page





Winter Care of Fountains and Statues

Extreme and rapid changes in temperature and humidity may affect your concrete fountains and statues adversely. Concrete has an inherent tendency to expand and contract with climactic conditions. The ideal solution is to store your fountain or statuary away from direct exposure to the winter elements. A garage or basement would be perfect. A small fountain may be brought into your home as a charming way to humidify the air indoors during the winter. If however, these are not feasible options for you, read on for a few tips to help your concrete pieces survive the wintry weather in one piece.

At Behnke's, we carry top quality garden accessories manufactured by Henri Studios, with weather in mind. The concrete mix contains fiber and mechanical additives, which enhance the elastic qualities of the concrete. Occasionally, normal surface shrinkage cracks may sometimes appear, but Henri concrete pieces will not sustain serious weather damage if these simple steps are followed:

Fountains and Birdbaths

1. Drain fountain thoroughly
 2. Remove the statue and pump, storing them inside if possible.
 3. Fill the bowl(s) or shell(s) with an absorbent material such as towels, blankets, etc.
 4. Cover the entire fountain with a fountain cover. Should condensation droplets form on the inside of the cover, the material will absorb them.
 5. Small fountain and birdbath bowls may be inverted so that water will not pool inside. Do not use antifreeze in fountains.
- Do not allow fountains or statuary to sit in freezing and thawing water.

Concrete Planters

Planters may be left outdoors providing the drainage holes are not plugged or otherwise obstructed. It may help to make sure there is at least 2-4 inches of pea gravel, sand or broken pottery on the inside bottom to prevent soil from clogging drainage holes.

Statues

Statues with designs that may retain or collect water should be covered or stored.

Tables and Benches

Table tops and bench seats are best covered during the winter.

Book Wish List, continued from page 6

cultivars of, say, hollies, azaleas, camellias, etc.—but the species information is the same, and might as well be gotten cheaply. Save your pennies for the other, what I call “Coffee Table Dirr”—far less information but hundreds of pictures of mature specimens of many of the plants mentioned in the Manual. You won't find it in a used book store, because unlike the prior edition Manuals, no one wants to get rid of it. It is most useful not by itself but with the other Dirr.

Then, Armitage's two books, *Herbaceous Perennial Plants* and *Armitage's Garden Perennials*. I am not crazy about Armitage's books, but they do have a lot of information in one place. As he writes out of Georgia, his preferred perennials seem to be the ones that can take the Southern climate. You won't find the rarer stuff here, as you often do in Dirr—but then again, you can never have all the information in one reference.

I end with a disrecommendation; I dislike mightily the books by Martin and Rix. I have yet to find enough information or organization in them to justify the price, even in a used book store.

Redskins Ticket Giveaway

Congratulations to Lisa Matt, of Silver Spring, Maryland, who was the big winner in the Behnke Nurseries recent Redskins Ticket Giveaway! Lisa receives two tickets to the November 14 home game of the Washington Redskins vs. the Cincinnati Bengals. In addition to the tickets, Lisa also receives two passes to a pre-game VIP tailgate party sponsored by radio station WJFK and two pre-game sideline passes to watch the teams warm up for the game. Thanks for shopping at Behnke's, Lisa!



Designer Poinsettias *from front cover*

First, an anatomy lesson. The part of the poinsettia that most of us consider the flower is actually a modified leaf, call a bract. Bracts are red, pink, white and so on. The function is to attract a pollinator to the flower, or after extensive plant breeding work, to attract a customer to the cash register!

The bracts are carried in a circle around the top of the stem. At the center of the circle are the actual little flowers, or cyathia, the size of small peas. When you buy the plant the cyathia may be closed tight in bud; open and revealing flower parts — usually attractive with a golden contrast; or dropped out — that is, gone, dropped off, out to lunch.

For best color in your home, try to buy your plants with tightly budded or open cyathia.

While red varieties continue to be the favorite, more unusual colors are gaining in popularity.

'Monet', which has peachy-red bracts, is sure to be a topic of conversation at your holiday table. In the last few years varieties such as 'Strawberries n' Cream' have become available. The distinct cream and dark pink color, combined with the unique serrated leaves and bracts, are sure to attract attention. For you 'Jingle Bell' connoisseurs we are happy to introduce 'Shimmer Pink' (front cover illustration).

The pink bracts are randomly splashed with cream speckles, set off by dark green foliage. For the traditionalist we offer many choices of red varieties from 'Freedom Red' (standard) to 'Autumn Red' with bold red bracts and dark green foliage. During your visit to Behnke's be sure to

check out 'Chianti Red'. This late season novelty variety offers rich wine-colored serrated bracts. The cyathia are replaced by brightly colored "nectarines" and add to a strikingly unique appearance. Another relatively new poinsettia which has quickly gained popularity is the 'Winter Rose' family (pictured at right). These plants feature a unique flower form which resemble a rose. The plants are available in five colors: red, white, pink, deep pink and marble. 'Winter Rose' poinsettias make charming hostess gifts for the holidays.



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*Hear It Through
the Grapevine!*

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