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—Marian Parsley and Larry Hurley



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As a casual holiday plant buyer, you walk into our greenhouses at Christmas and are overwhelmed by the waves of color from our poinsettias: red, white, pink, marble.. You select several poinsettias to complement your décor, maybe even a couple of blue-or-yellow-painted, or glitter-covered poinsettias if you happen to feel that plants are incapable of feeling embarrassment. Perhaps you then pick up a Christmas tree, a wreath, maybe a Behnke nutcracker or ornaments from our Holiday Shop, and move on to other holiday shopping.

Except for the hopelessly horticulturally addicted, few people know there are practically as many varieties of poinsettias as there are Elvis impersonators, and about as easy to tell apart. The names are pretty cool, though, for plants.

Actually, there are many unique colors and shapes of poinsettias. Luckily for you, each year we at Behnke's trial many new varieties, and present the best to you so that you have one less thing to worry about. Rest assured, Behnke's growers are bringing you the best of the old as well as the boldest of the new. Below are some of the more interesting varieties from a list of over 40 that we are growing for Santa this year. (Santa outsourced to save on fuel costs.)

Jargon alert: a reminder that the "petals" on a poinsettia are actually modified leaves called "bracts," while the flowers are the little guys in the center, borne in structures called "cyathæa." That's just the way it is; blame the botanists. Note also, the best selection of unusual colors and forms is early in the season, say before mid-December. We find that our customers tend to be creative when decorating their own homes early in the season, and more conservative when giving poinsettias as gifts later in the season, tending to select the traditional red varieties.

Lastly, many of us have trouble spelling "poinsettia," and hardly anyone pronounces it correctly. Usually it comes out as point-setta, instead of poin-set-ee-a. We just call them "points" for short.

continued on back cover



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Listen Saturdays-8-9:30am

Meet: The Behnke Boy

— as recalled by Sonja Behnke Festerling

Just about everyone east of the Mississippi is familiar with the Behnke Nurseries logo, which features what we call the "Behnke Boy" forming part of the "B."

Many would be surprised to learn that the logo was designed in the early 1950s by a teenage Sonja Behnke Festerling at the request of her father, Albert Behnke.

Sonja was a natural artist, and was always drawing, painting doodling, etc. and loved to be involved in any art projects that came up at home or in school. In high school Sonja enjoyed learning about and working with pastels, water colors and charcoal and it became evident to her parents that she possessed considerable talent. (Unfortunately, Beltsville in the 1950's was a long bus ride from the nearest art school in Washington D.C., so Sonja's skill was "home grown.")

One day, Sonja's father challenged her to put her talent to use in a way that would benefit the family business. He asked her to design something that would jazz up the sign along Route 1. "Since I was all of 16 or 17," Sonja says, "I groaned. But groaning didn't work in those days! Everyday my father would ask me how I was coming along."

Finally, inspiration struck and Sonja remembers drawing the boy with a straw in his mouth, placing him in a familiar pose with a shovel and making him into a part of the "B" in Behnke. She gave her drawing to her parents and forgot about it. One day a short time later she was surprised to see her design has been made into a new sign along the highway!

The logo, which is used by Behnke Nurseries to this day, is one of the most familiar images in the Washington metropolitan area.



Preventing the Winter Spread of Invasive Plants

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Horticulturists always talk about "four season interest" and "winter character" when designing a garden. For instance, we natter on about the beautiful seed heads of miscanthus grass, bravely standing in the snow. Because miscanthus has been escaping into the wild in many parts of the country, we recommend that you remove the seed heads and bag them with the trash before the seed scatters to the winds.

Although it is impractical to remove berries from plants like Japanese barberry or Japanese holly, you should bear in mind that birds eat the berries and spread the seeds outside of the garden. When buying new plants, consider substituting native viburnums or inkberry for some of the more invasive plants commonly sold. The website of the Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council, or the Maryland Invasive Species Council will tell you more about invasive species in Maryland and surrounding states.

A Legacy Continues – The Behnke Holiday Shop!

by Maria Reynolds, Marketing Manager



From top: blown glass ornaments, etched glass hurricanes, beaded wreaths and garlands; the ornaments used to decorate the Love Tree are located alongside it; Mrs. Claus presides over her lighthearted display.

There is so much to explore in the coming season. Not only do we continue to carry the highest quality plants, we have the most exciting gifts and home décor as well. Visit Behnke's new Holiday Shop at both our Beltsville and Potomac locations.

Wreaths on your door—and so much more!

Consider being creative with this traditional door decoration. Use it as a centerpiece on a mantel or table. Place the wreath at the center of the table and add exciting elements to the empty center. A hurricane or large candle holder looks great! A yummy candle scent can add so much to the feel of any room or occasion. (Keep your wreath away from the flame.) You'll enjoy the many examples of different colors and themes in the Holiday Shop. If you would like to try a smaller scale of this look, a candle ring can work wonders.

Trees that sparkle from top to tip!

Our Victorian Village captures the distinguished feel for the traditional with a contemporary flare of color and texture. Here we have a selection of ornaments that really pick up the light beautifully. A translucent ornament not only gives a certain third dimension—it leads your eyes with the dance of color.

Have a "Berry Merry Christmas" with our many berried wreaths, garlands, picks and sprays. Have you tried decorating your tree with picks and sprays? It truly adds an element of depth and texture—and it's fun! You're sure to be inspired by many of the trees in our shop. The decorations used on our sample trees can be found on racks nearby, making it very easy for you to duplicate our beautiful trees at home.

Whimsical delights for young and old!

The "Enchanted Winter" portion of our shop delights one and all with fairies and snowflakes at every turn. Here's a tip for a spectacular tree: decorating a tree from the inside-out is key! Start with larger ornaments towards the inside then work your way to the tips of your tree with smaller more detailed pieces. You'll get professional results and an unforgettable tree.

What treats are in store for you in the Candy Cane Forest? Santa is celebrated by one and all but, how 'bout "A Bit of Applause for Mrs. Claus?" The wonders continue..Capture the magic!

Holiday Events At Behnke's Beltsville

Holiday Open House: December 2nd, 6 to 9PM

Wreath Decorating, Poinsettia Coloring, Door Prizes, Music and Fun for all.

Holiday Music & Artisans: December 3rd, Noon to 2PM

Holiday Singers ("The Glowing Strings"); Chesapeake Woodturners demonstration.

Holiday Music & Artisans: December 10th, 1 to 2PM

Holiday Singers (Christin McVoy); Chesapeake Woodturners demonstration.

Holiday Music & Artisans: December 17th, 2:30PM

Holiday Singers (Elizabeth Seton High School Choir); Chesapeake Woodturners demonstration.



Christmas In

— by Jim Dranenburg

Growing up in Frederick, Maryland, we had a white Christmas fairly regularly. These days in the Washington metro area, forget it. Snow doesn't stay on the ground most years until January. That being said...why not deck your yard for Christmas with plantings?

Obviously, pansies and winter cabbages/kales are "normal" winter plantings, with very little of the holidays about them, I really don't like most winter cabbages, but consider pansies indispensable for the garden. Set out in late September, as soon as the weather cools, they will bloom all through the Fall (barring Barbi), all through the Winter except for the hardest cold snaps, and then all through the Spring. I grow my pansies in a brick walk, instead of a flowerbed. My brick walks were laid in a herringbone pattern, not diagonally but straight along the direction of the walk. After every one and a half bricks along either side of the walk, there is a half brick deliberately left missing and filled each Fall with a pansy plant. As the walks have a raised railroad-tie edge, the plants are quite protected from wind and bloom like fools, with essentially no care.

But that's not my subject. Here I'm talking about things specifically for Christmas. There are all sorts of things that stay green at the least, and even some that may flower.

Hellebores of almost all sorts stay green in the winter. If you want holiday blooms the only one that would possibly oblige you is the Christmas rose, *Helleborus niger*, and only in a freak year. Most of the others are early-Spring bloomers. But they do stay green. They range from the large, toothed leaves of *H. x orientalis* (the easiest), to the taller but finely dissected *H. foetidus*, and the subtly variegated hybrids with *H. argutifolius* in their ancestry. Wintergreen, sold potted for the holidays, is prettier outside than in. Try some. It has berries like little half-inch apples, of a fire engine red, on a plant maybe four inches tall and a deep green.



Hamamelis jelena, above, and *Hellebores niger*.



If you are one that considers the little things, consider hardy cyclamen. Their leaves, green or marbled, will come up in the fall, stay through the winter, and die down in late spring. The flowers are just like the cyclamen you buy in the greenhouse — but the plants and flowers are tiny — at most four inches tall. *Cyclamen hederifolium*, the most commonly available, is an Autumn bloomer, but

others, including *Cyclamen coum* with rounder leaves, bloom in the early Spring, and occasionally in a warm spell in winter. Of greater size are the white-veined arrowhead leaves of *Arum italicum pictum*, which come up in the Fall too. A hard freeze will put the leaves down on the ground, but they will come back up when it warms. I am just getting to know other kinds of *A. italicum*, some with blotched/clouded variegation — these are available by mail, usually not locally.

Among ground covers, a jugs will stay fairly reliably green until the hard frosts of January, as will most liriopes and periwinkles. The native Allegheny pachysandra is a subtle thing of greens

and browns, and several of the creeping sedums will, after their fashion, stay green.

You can get a few shrubs to flower — I have a Japanese pussy willow that will occasionally break bud before Christmas in a warm year, and *Prunus mume*, the Japanese flowering apricot, which comes into sporadic bloom in warm spells and is quite amenable to being brought into the house in a **cold place, not hot and dry**, to open its flowers. Similarly, we had an early witchhazel, *Hamamelis vernalis* (the brick red form) that opened its flowers for us in

Your Garden

y, Plant Specialist



Frederick on any warm day after the New Year – and that in the lee of a north wall. Most of the witchhazels you see are *x intermedia* hybrids, and bloom a bit later. (The pay-back is that their flowers are bigger.)

Occasionally a winter honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) will bloom in the Winter, rather than waiting for March, as will the white forsythia. This last isn't all that showy, but it is fragrant.

You can plant berries that will last. Hollies go without saying. If you don't have the space for a full-sized tree you can keep them in bounds with pruning. Hollies can stand quite a bit of pruning abuse, because unlike most evergreens, they can sprout from old wood. English, American, and hybrid hollies are available that bear red, orangish or yellow berries. Plain green or variegated leaves. Spiny or not so spiny. Some will stay relatively small. Most hollies come in male and female, and you need one of both to have berries. However, if you see an English holly with berries in your block, you can plant one too because there is a male doing the duty somewhere nearby. The same goes for American holly. Failing that, get *Ilex 'Nellie Stevens'* – it can berry without a male. *Skimmia japonica* looks like a three-foot, spineless holly, but the berries (on the female) are much larger. Beautyberries are great – also large; plant with caution because they do grow. Their lavender berries will last through the new year. I don't care as much for the white-berried ones – they tend to turn brownish in the hard cold. I can also recommend *Kerria japonica* in all its forms for its wonderful, jade-green stems in the winter, and the various colors of "twig" dogwood.

And I really have to plug a daffodil called 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation.' It is a King Alfred-type daffodil, and small, but it was in bloom last Christmas at Brookside Gardens, and for me a week later. Brookside's curator, Phil Normandy, said that this was the second earliest year for them. (Good heavens, what was the earliest?) They are

inexpensive and available in season by mail, and we occasionally carry the dry bulbs in the Fall at Behnke's.

I end this Christmas article with a plant straight out of

legend – *Crataegus monogyna*, and within that species a plant from a specific source – the Glastonbury Thorn. According to the legend, when Joseph of Arimathea came from the Holy Land to spread Christianity to Britain (and some say also, bringing with him the Holy Grail) he landed at Glastonbury on Christmas Day, chunked his staff into the ground (who hasn't done this with a shovel, to keep it handy) and asked God for a sign that he was doing the right thing. The staff promptly rooted, budded and bloomed. There has always been a thorn at Glastonbury descended, by tradition, from this thorn. And you don't have to go to England to see one, either. At the National Cathedral there was a thorn raised from a cutting of the Glastonbury thorn. (Thorns are, by the way, normally grafted; for something supposedly associated with holiness, they are devilish hard to root.) It lived for many years, and then died, but not before cuttings had been taken from it to the West Coast, and one brought back and planted. That cutting, now a tree, survives to this day, and two or three living cuttings have again been taken and rooted at the Cathedral. Like the original, it is

supposed to bloom on Christmas Day, which is a bit less likely here than in England, as our weather is a little colder. The thorn at Glastonbury, however, has been observed to have bloomed on Christmas day, and in the presence of English royalty.



Skimmia, above, and Red Twig Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*).



Eva Cassidy's Day Job

by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Many of you are familiar with the music of Eva Cassidy, who died of cancer in November of 1996. At the time she died, she was just making a name for herself in the Washington area, having completed a CD with Chuck Brown, and a concert CD, "Live at Blues Alley." Her music has grown in popularity. Listeners of the BBC included her version of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" among the 100 best songs of the 20th century, and Amazon.com recently reported that Eva's CD's are their overall number 5 best seller in music for the last 10 years.

Few of you know that Eva Cassidy worked full or part-time at Behnke Nurseries for fourteen years at our Largo, Maryland nursery, between 1981 and 1995. With the sale of the Largo property and the move of the greenhouses to Lothian this year, it seems like a good time to recollect Eva's years at Largo.

When I started at Largo in 1984, Eva worked for the "Growing" department, as a transplanter. She performed general greenhouse work; watering, transplanting seedlings; pinching and tying poinsettias, and all of the other various things that greenhouse staff do. My recollection is that she was a petite blonde, very quiet and shy, and very hard working. Eva's sister Anette, was also working part-time at the nursery while she completed a nursing degree, and her mother Barbara divided her time between transplanting at Largo and working in the Christmas Shop at Beltsville.

Eventually, Eva transferred to the Woody Plants production department (the first woman on the crew), which gave her a chance to work outside and get more exercise. In those days, our peat moss came in 6 cubic foot bales, loose on a semi. They were unloaded by hand, and stacked in the warehouse. We looked like a bunch of ants. Including Ant One, me, muttering to myself and dragging a bale, and Ant Two, Eva, with a bale of peat as big as she, balanced on her shoulder, climbing up a mountain of bales. She was only 5' 2", but loaded truckloads of trees right alongside the guys.

In addition to toughening up physically, I think being the only woman on a crew of nurserymen toughened her up mentally as well, and perhaps gave her more confidence to perform. (How much worse could an audience be?) Nursery work is hard and dirty, and not particularly glamorous.



It includes a lot of potting, watering, weeding, and moving heavy plants around, in all weather. An excellent incentive to further develop talents like singing!

Her supervisor, Dave Nizinski, gave her some additional duties, including woody plant propagation. She made a lot of cuttings, especially leyland cypress. Many of you have plants in your gardens that were originally produced by Eva.

After her initial cancer surgery, she made an effort to stay covered up while in the sun, and did more indoor work. She did some data entry. Computers were definitely not her first love—I remember many a conversation with Eva that included the question: "Did you remember to log in?" She also used her artistic talents to make some of the signs we had around the nursery.

As she became busier as a musician, she moved to a part-time position at the nursery, and eventually, she left to devote herself full-time to her career. It was only a few months before the cancer reappeared, and she died just as she was becoming a "name" in the Washington music scene. There are still a few of us "old timers" here who worked with Eva Cassidy. Whenever I hear one of her songs, I think of the young woman transplanting in the greenhouse. She is gone, but she left us the gift of her music.



Don't Garden Without It: New Preferred Customer Card

Behnke discount card rewards loyal customers with discounts and other benefits



A perfect holiday gift for gardeners – a year of discounts at Behnke's!

With your new Behnke Preferred Customer card in hand, you can save money every time you shop at Behnke's! You love to garden, and prefer to shop where you know you will always get the best quality plants, the most knowledgeable assistance and the widest selection. Now you can add best value to the list of reasons Behnke's has been the local gardener's favorite nursery since 1930.

Our new card helps us reward our valuable customers who appreciate the great selection and top quality that has made Behnke Nurseries the first choice among local gardeners. Enroll in our new Preferred Customer Program today and start enjoying many wonderful benefits, including:

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- Automatic subscription to the Behnke GardenNews.

To become a Behnke Preferred Customer, simply fill out the form below and bring it to Behnke's. (Applications are also available in our stores, or online at www.behnkes.com.) Membership is \$35 per year. You will receive your membership card and two key tags. You will also receive two \$25 Behnke Gift certificates. The first will be mailed to you within 90 days, and the second will follow later in the membership year.

Behnke Preferred Customer Card Application Form

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Signature _____ Date _____

For Office Use Only

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(Date of Enrollment mm/dd/yy)

Affix Barcode

Membership is \$35 per year. Members will receive two \$25 Behnke Gift Certificates over the course of the membership year. To receive membership discount, your Preferred Customer Card must be presented to the cashier at check-out. The 10% discount is applied to regularly priced plants. Cardbearer will receive the Preferred Customer discount or sale price, whichever is the greater discount. Cardholders may be notified via email* of members-only offers, coupons, events and sale opportunities. Membership and membership cards are non-transferable and non-refundable. Membership runs for one full year from date of enrollment and is renewable. Lost membership cards can be replaced for a \$3 fee. You must be at least 18 years of age to enroll. Behnke Nurseries reserves the right to change or discontinue the Preferred Customer Program at any time.

*Privacy Policy: Any personal information, including telephone number, US mail address, and email address, which is given to Behnke Nurseries will be kept in strictest confidence. We will not use your telephone number to solicit sales, and we never sell or share your customer information with anyone, for any reason. You may unsubscribe from our mailing list at any time, and we will purge your information from our system.

Poinsettias, from page 1

A Few Of The Many Varieties Of Poinsettias You'll Find At Behnke's this Holiday Season

'Chianti' -we had a few of these last year and they were very flashy, especially early in the season; rich, deep red serrated bracts, the cyathea are particularly showy, featuring peachy orange accents.

'Cortez Electric Fire' -electrifying red bracts contrast dramatically with the dark green leaves.

'Heirloom Peach' -unique silver-variegation on the leaves sets the stage for the soft, Victorian peach-colored bracts.



'Monet Twilight'

'Holly Berry' -attractive marble (pink and white) bracts, with a distinctive holly-leaf shape.

'Holly Point' -gold and green variegated foliage with intense bright red bracts.

'Kris Krinkle' -unique red bracts with a distinctive "krinkled" texture.

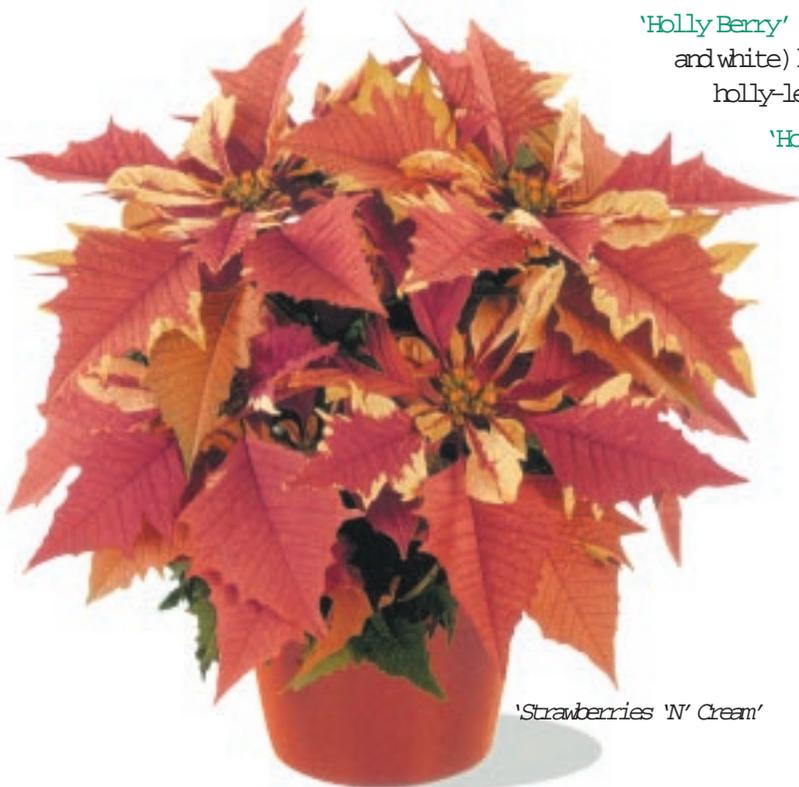
'Lemon Snow' -creamy yellow bracts above dark green foliage; perhaps not the best choice for a name.

'Monet Twilight' -bears multi-colored cream/rose/pink bracts. The color deepens as the bracts mature, creating an ever-changing holiday palette.

'Shimmer Surprise' -large, showy bracts with eye-catching red/white patterns. Like a snowflake, each plant is unique.

'Strawberries 'N' Cream' -unusual rose and cream-colored serrated bracts, set off by dark green foliage with a slight variegation.

'Visions of Grandeur' -soft peach bracts with a large, pillowy appearance.



'Strawberries 'N' Cream'



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