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Overcoming Obstacles—Growing Straight Up

— by Jim Dronenburg, Plant Specialist

I used to live on T Street NW, Washington D.C. Things flourished there, but when you are in a Victorian row house which takes up 18 by 60 of an 18 by 120 foot lot, you are strapped for space big-time.

So I did the only thing I could, and went straight up. I have yet to understand why people in Washington don't do more of this. People will have to take their sites into consideration, of course; my front yard, all of 18 by 12, faced due south. So seeing that I wanted both flowers and fruit, I planted the climbing rose 'Joseph's Coat' on the door side of the bay window, and a fig tree on the other. Figs grow like there's no tomorrow, and love the sun of a south-facing masonry wall. They also have relatively innocuous root systems, although I wouldn't knowingly plant one over my water line. They can be pruned to any shape, and by the end of the (fourth?) year I was picking my figs out of the second floor windows as well as from the ground. This had the additional effect of shading the house—welcome in DC summers. The rose also went gonzo—Joseph's Coat is a variable-color thing, red, yellow and orange, and against the dark red brick it looked like an explosion in a fireworks factory, on and off through the summer. I used glued-in-place anchors; masonry nails are also available.

What I have done in my present house is something that you probably won't want to; I got 2-inch metal plumbing pipe and put together rose trellises out of that. They stand twelve feet tall along one side of my house, and ten along another. Both are about eighteen feet long. I made them like the capital letter E laid on its side, with the crossbar on top, and sank the legs into concrete. My great-aunt had this kind of trellising for her grapes and roses, and they were still 100% fine in the late nineteen-eighties when

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Hydrangea 'Endless Summer'

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Although I generally write about perennials, considered by most to be the *sine qua non* of garden plants, I occasionally peek up from the dirt and take a look at what's new in the world of woody plants. Having not seen my shadow, I will bravely scribe forth and add to the chorus of comment that you are bound to see this year extolling *Hydrangea* 'Endless Summer'.

This new introduction has raised such excitement that it actually has its own website at <http://www.endlesssummerblooms.com>. This *Hydrangea macrophylla* cultivar is unique in that it blooms on both old and new growth. This is particularly exciting for northern gardeners, because normally *H. macrophylla* blooms on old wood. The hydrangea grows through spring and summer, and at some point in late summer, it makes flower buds. These buds overwinter, and *voila*, the plant blooms the next summer, giving the classic big puffy hydrangea flowers that many people love. To me, the flowers smell like old-fashioned plastic balloons.

But in Minnesota, and other Yankee states with permafrost, the flower buds are killed by cold winter weather. The plants often die to the ground, springing forth the next year with new growth but no flowers. Apparently, in 1984, a plant eventually to be called 'Endless Summer' was found at Bailey's Nursery in Minnesota. It bloomed when no others did. Being Minnesotans, and not prone to rush into things, the plant was trialed and trialed and found to be a great plant. You can get more info on the web site. (Note: I would contrast this trialing with the beautiful red-flowering perennial *Coreopsis* 'Limerock Ruby'. Released by another company with great fanfare a couple of years ago, it turned out to be about as winter hardy as perennial verbena, which is to say, not very. But I digress.)

So, *Hydrangea* 'Endless Summer' was originally meant for northern gardeners. Anyone can see that scads of hydrangeas overwinter fine this far south most years, so why bother? The nice thing for us is that it make pruning easier. If you prune a macrophylla hydrangea in the late summer or spring, you cut off the flower buds. But you can prune 'Endless Summer' and it will still bloom on new growth. Virtually mistake proof.

Briefly, hydrangeas will grow best in our area with direct sun in the morning, and shade from about 11:00 AM on. On hot days, they may wilt a bit until they catch the shade. They are living pH meters. In acid soil, with aluminum in the soil, they bloom bright blue. In less acid soil, aluminum becomes less available to the plant. They become a sort of ghastly lavender-pink. In soil that approaches neutral (that is, neither acid not alkaline), with additional potassium, they become a bright pink. For details, visit the above mentioned fan-club website.

Hydrangeas have become increasingly popular over the last few years. There are many types in addition to 'Endless Summer'. I've got 5 myself, including a 20 year old climbing hydrangea. I guess woody plants do have a place after all, if only as a background for perennials.



Fresh Herbs in the Kitchen

— by Roger Zinn, Certified Professional Horticulturist and Professional Chef

In this final installment on how to harvest, store and better utilize the herbs we grow, I will focus on herbs that preserve well. While all of these herbs are wonderful when used fresh they are also easily dried and stored for winter use. The night before you harvest give the plants a good rinse with your hose to remove any grit. The best time to harvest herbs is in the late morning, when the dew has burned off. Do not harvest from perennial herbs too late in the season because this can compromise winter hardiness. I like to make three light harvests — the first one when the plants are beginning to show the first signs of flowering (or by mid June), again in July and once more in August. I use my fresh herbs all summer, as I harvest, and dry the extra for winter. Herbs are easily dried by tying bunches with twine, or a rubber band, and hanging them upside down (smaller bits can be dried on window screens). Dry out of direct sunlight and in an area with good air movement (covered porches are ideal and sheds are fine too if there is no gasoline or other strong smelling chemical stored there). When your bundles are dry the leaves can be stripped off and placed in air-

tight bottles and stored in a cool dark place for the winter. For using dried herbs I recommend a spice grinder. A grinder really enhances the flavor and makes the herbs more palatable.

Rosemary is a perennial herb in our area — as long as the soil is amended to provide good drainage. Planting in raised beds also increases your odds, and be sure to purchase cultivars selected for hardiness. I like to use large branches for smoking on the grill. Just soak in water for a few minutes, shake them dry, and add to the fire a few times during cooking. Also, nice straight branches can be used as skewers and make a lovely presentation for your guests. Rosemary goes well with red meats, pork, and chicken, anything really.

Thyme is an easy perennial and there are many flavored varieties available. Lemon thyme is outstanding when used fresh on fish or potatoes. Thyme adds a perfect pleasant bitterness to any savory food and combines well with other herbs. The classic *bouquet garni* is made by combining 1 tablespoon thyme, 1 tablespoon marjoram, and 2 bay leaves. Place on a 4-inch square of cheese cloth and tie with twine to seal. Some folks add dried parsley and celery leaves as well. Add to any soup, stock, or stew — just remember to remove before serving.

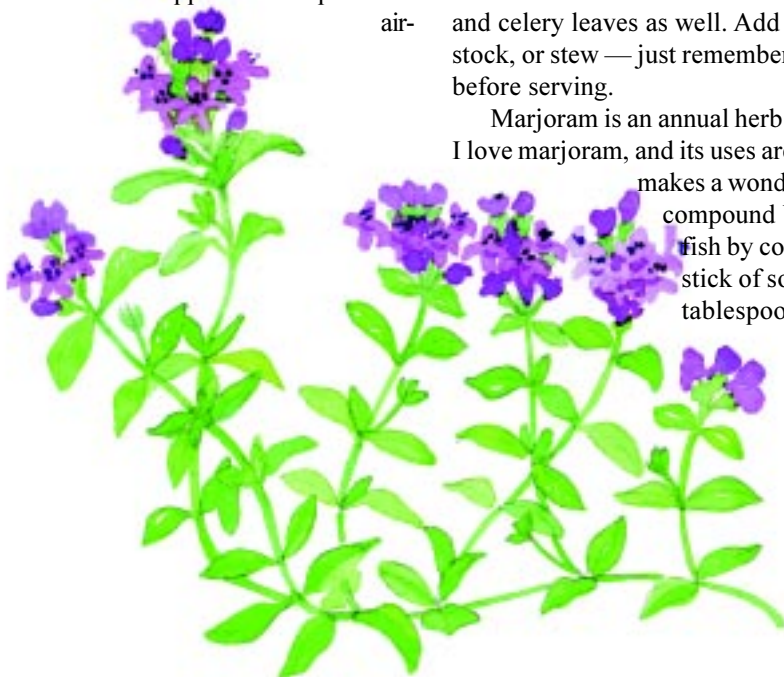
Marjoram is an annual herb in our area. I love marjoram, and its uses are infinite. It makes a wonderful compound butter for fish by combining 1 stick of soft butter, 2 tablespoons chopped

fresh marjoram, 1 finely chopped shallot, the juice of 1/2 a lemon, salt, and black pepper. Also, try adding to your favorite tomato sauce, at the very end of cooking.

Sage is a perennial herb and an outstanding ornamental as well. I like using sage flowers as a tasty garnish. Just pull the flower out of its calyx and serve. My favorite thing to do with sage is to deep fry the leaves. The pungent flavors are transferred to the oil, and the leaves become crisp and dark green and take on a subtle nutty flavor. The oil can then be used to toss with pasta salads or bean dishes, and the crisp leaves make a fine garnish.

Bay laurel is not hardy here but makes a easy houseplant that goes outdoors in May and back in before frost. I've had one for over a decade, it's in a 24-inch pot, and all you need is a sunny window. I get reams of leaves each year — more than I can use, so I give them away. Bay leaves add an aromatic dimension to any dish. I love adding fresh bay leaves to roasted new potatoes. Just as they come out of the oven add the bay leaves, cover, and let steep for 5 minutes.

Visit The Herb Society of America www.herbsociety.org for more information.



The ABCs of Entic

Remembering tropical plant names is certainly a challenge. Spelling them is even worse. Pronouncing them is just down right humorous. But growing them is easy with a little help from Behnke's. I have chosen 13 of *my* favorites from A to M (I'll do N to Z next time). These varieties and more can be found at all three Behnke locations beginning in May, when it is time to set these plants outside on your porch, deck, patio, or even "in" your garden.

Behnke's has everything you need to transplant *your* favorite tropicals into larger pots, or you may choose to plant them directly into existing flower beds, thus treating them as annuals. Whatever you decide, blending tropicals into your landscape will create an exciting new look for you and your neighbors to enjoy.

Allamanda cathartica is a tropical twining vine with deeply veined, glossy, whorled leaves and large, trumpet shaped bright yellow flowers (hence the common name golden-trumpet vine). Prickly seed pods follow the flowers with winged seeds that fly about when the pod dries and breaks open. Native to Brazil, allamandas prefer sun to light shade and well-drained soils. They can be allowed to grow up a trellis, slender tree, or side of a building where there is support. Some cultivars have been bred for fragrance, while others grow as bushes instead of vines. Allamandas are breathtaking when in the full glory of their bloom, so place them where they will be as conspicuous as possible.

Bougainvillea is famous for its brilliantly colored floral displays and quick growth rate. It is easy to care for and available in a dazzling spectrum of colors ranging from purple to magenta to scarlet to brick red to crimson. Also look for white, pink, orange, and salmon. Flowers are actually small

yellow-white tubes surrounded by three papery bracts responsible for the brilliant displays (sometimes called the paper flower). Thorn-protected canes are covered with rich green heart-shaped leaves. Also native to Brazil, bougainvilleas enjoy bright sunny conditions, rich loamy, well-drained soil, and prefer to have their roots crowded when grown in containers. Grow them on fences, trellises, or arbors for explosions of color.

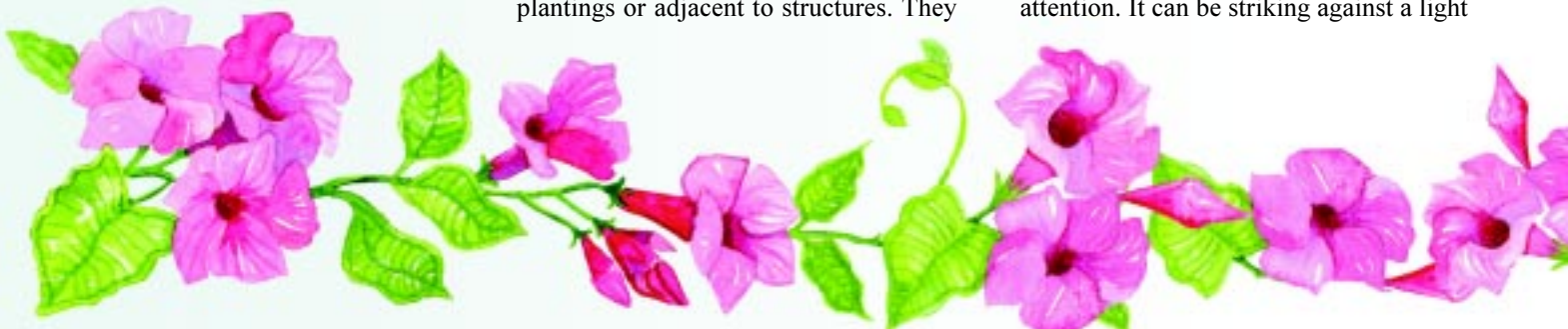
Cestrum nocturnum is a sprawling shrub with glossy, smooth, simple leaves and vine-like stems. Commonly known as night blooming jessamine (some people mistakenly say jasmine), it blooms in cycles throughout the summer, and especially makes itself noticed in the evenings while in bloom, when its perfume scent is distinctly powerful. Greenish-creamy white tubular flowers rise from above the leaves along the stem, followed by shiny white, fleshy berries. Cestrum blooms best in full sun to light shade and prefer light sandy soil. For a mixed border, background, or as a free-standing specimen, this shrub is attractive and can be used in butterfly gardens, as it provides food for the larvae of some caterpillars.

Datura, also known as angel's trumpet, have spectacular white or pale lavender, trumpet-shaped flowers measuring 8 inches long and 6 inches across. They are pleasantly fragrant and form all summer, each opening in the early evening and lasting until noon the next day. Native to the southwestern U.S. and Mexico, datura is drought tolerant and thrives in a wide variety of well-drained soils, but is most impressive when grown in rich, well-manured loams. With a sprawling, mounded habit, up to 3 feet high and 6 feet across, plants are best used in background plantings or adjacent to structures. They

will need plenty of sun and room to grow. (Brugmansia, also called angel's trumpet, is a shrub or small tree with larger, pendant flowers, also very fragrant. Another good reason we use botanical names.)

Evolvulus, or blue daze, grows in a low, spreading mound, up to 3 feet in diameter, but no more than 1 foot tall. The leaves and stems are covered with a light gray fuzz, while the funnel shaped flowers are born with five pale lavender or powdery blue petals and white throats. Evolvulus blooms profusely and almost continuously, but each flower lasts only a day, opening in the morning and closing by afternoon. It does best in full sun, but can tolerate a little shade, especially at midday. Grow blue daze in a sandy, well-drained soil, and water frequently. It's especially attractive grown in masses along with yellow or pink flowering plants or in hanging containers. Let it cascade over a window box or a porch planter.

Fatsia japonica is native to Japan (common name Japanese aralia). Imagine an ivy plant on hormones. Fatsia has huge, up to 12 inch wide leaves, deeply lobed and slightly serrated. Petioles, or leaf stems, are quite tall, and hold the leaves up and out. Unlike the previous tropicals, fatsia prefers shade to partial shade. Because of it's extraordinary bold landscape effect, it might require a little imagination to get the most effect from this plant. The effect is easily diminished by placement too close to other plants that could compete for attention. It can be striking against a light



ing Tropical Plants

colored background with a fountain or statuary piece in front, especially at night with illumination.

Gardenia is not a bloom-all-at-once-and-it's-over-shrub. It blooms in mid-spring to early summer over a fairly long season. Picture gorgeous, dark to bright green, glossy leaves on a shrub that can grow 6-8 feet high with almost equal spread. The flowers are white, turning to creamy yellow as they age, and have a waxy feel. They have a powerful, sweet fragrance, and can perfume an entire room. Air currents carry the scent throughout the warm summer garden to the delight of all. Need I say more (except to say that care sheets are available at Behnke's)?

Hibiscus flowers are glorious and huge—at their best 6 inches in diameter—and occur in many colors, blooming most of the summer. Most are flared and have a bell shape and may be single or double, smooth or scalloped.

They have a long central tube with stamens and pistils at the tip. I will save you the embarrassment of walking around with bright yellow pollen on your nose by saying the flowers are not fragrant. Hibiscus makes a wonderful "containerized" summer plant either in a bush or tree form. Just provide them with fairly moist, moderately fertile, well-drained, and slightly acidic soil. Anyone interested in attracting hummingbirds and butterflies should try a hibiscus. Behnke's is continually finding new varieties for you to try.

Impatiens, known for its prolific flowers and ease in growing, is one of the best known and most popular garden plants. They come in an enormous number of colors, from lavender to purple to deepest red, salmon, orange, pink, white, striped, speckled, and bicolor. For vivid color in summer months where other annuals won't grow because of shade, impatiens are the most dependable summer annual. Combine all colors available or select one or two colors for the greatest visual impact. Alternate with caladiums or shade-loving coleus for a sea of summer color in low-light areas. Plant red impatiens and red pentas along with pineapple sage and blue anise sage for a sure fire way to attract hummingbirds. Ok now, back to some more tropicals.

Jasminum sambac (also known as Arabian jasmine) is a bushy vine or scrambling shrub with shiny dark green leaves and fragrant little white flowers. The waxy snow white flowers are about 1 inch across, borne in clusters of 3-12, and intensely fragrant. They fade to pink as they age. Arabian jasmine blooms throughout the summer and like most of the other jasmines, is very easy to grow in almost any moist, but not waterlogged soil. It is often grown in a pot, on the patio or deck in full sun to partial shade, with or without a trellis, and brought indoors in the winter to enjoy its sweet perfume whenever one walks by.

Kafir lilies are best grown in bright light with early morning or late afternoon sun, but shaded in between. They have dark green, strap-shaped leaves which fan out from a leek-like base. The spread of a single plant can exceed 3 feet. Around late winter, thick flower stalks up to 18 inches long will begin to push up between the leaves and each stalk will carry up to 15 trumpet-shaped flowers in color combinations of

yellow to orange-red. These seldom seen plants are neither bulb nor rhizome, but possess an abundance of thick rope-like roots which prefer to be pot bound. It is also important to provide them with a cool rest period of six to eight weeks in early winter in preparation for the next bloom period. If you want to purchase one or some in bloom, you must visit Behnke's just before Valentine's Day.

Lantana may be familiar to most of us as a bedding plant, but this year we will be carrying many more tree forms. This tough tropical likes hot sun, is drought resistant, tolerates salt spray and can be used in beach plantings. These are low maintenance tropicals covered with flowers from spring to fall and are very attractive to butterflies. Actually too much water and fertilizer will reduce bloom frequency. What more could you ask for?

Mandevilla is the perfect choice for colorful quick growing screens. It provides a nonstop bounty of huge pink trumpet shaped flowers, beautifully presented against attractive dark green foliage. Native, once again, to Brazil, it prefers plenty of sun for best flowering and well drained soil. Apply liquid fertilizer periodically during summer and you will be rewarded with waves of big beautiful blossoms. This vine can be trained to climb posts and lattice, making it a favorite for growing up lamp and mailbox posts. Let mandevilla drip from an arbor or garland your front porch or entryway.

Visit Behnke's today and "fuse" some of these tropicals and more into your gardens.

—by Mike Bader, Houseplant/Seasonal Plant Manager



Growing Straight Up, from Page 1

the house was sold. These will *last*. They look gawky until the plants cover them, in about two years if you have something vigorous on them; but they weather to a gunmetal gray and are invisible thereafter. I drilled holes through the pipe and strung STRONG wire across between for the lower cross branches.

Spend money. Get the heaviest construction you can. Sturdier is better in just about all cases, unless you know that you only want something for annuals or a relatively light planting like a clematis. Do not hesitate to sink a four-by-four for a permanent stake or post, or even a six-by-six. It pays in the long run.

Many row houses, our old one included, had chain link fence on both sides of the back yard. I put a grape vine along the one and a hardy kiwi along the other.

In shade, climbing hydrangea or Schizophragma would do well. If you put up a board fence of any kind, do put up posts sturdy enough to take the weight of a crossbar at the top and a good vine or a rose running along it. When this is high enough, there is plenty of room for other plants under it. Some people will also (or alternatively) put up brackets for hanging baskets on the posts, which is another argument for sturdiness.

For those who want vegetables or fruit, the same heavy fence posts will hold stretches of chickenwire or, my own preference, heavy-duty fencing wire, with a 6" x 8" grid. This stuff is suitable for tomatoes, vining squash or cucumbers, loofah or other gourds, and even melons and cantaloupes *if the fruit is properly supported*—a sling made out of a piece of discarded pantyhose, for instance, is ideal; the stuff is strong but flexible, recedes visually, will not rot, and won't saw at the stuff it's supporting. (Smaller strips of this are also good for tying up anything else.) My mother-in-law, bless her, saves me hers. Things like green beans, and flowers like morning glories, need no tying; they will hold on to wire mesh by themselves.

You do need to recognize how your plant climbs, and trellis accordingly. Climbing hydrangeas, schizophragmas and Virginia creeper climb by stem rootlets or suckers; they need a nonmoving surface to cling to, and then will look after themselves. Peas, beans and grapes climb by thin tendrils that wrap around any small-diameter thing that they can, but cannot manage to wrap around a post. You can think of clematis in this category too; their "tendrils" are their leaf stems. Here you will need to provide wires, or string, or tie the vines up manually until they reach something that they can hold on to at the top. Wisteria and trumpet vine (and morning glories and moon vine) climb by wrapping their growing stems around any small-diameter thing in reach. These will need initial help, but then will use their own first stems as support for the later ones. I must stress here that wisteria and trumpet vine get very heavy; you **MUST** put up **HEAVY** supports for their eventual weight. Climbing roses ascend in nature by hooking their thorns against other things that they are growing through; you must tie them up to any artificial support. But they are always worth it. Once established on top of their support, they can hold on and run along or cascade down with little help from you.

The one caveat in all this is that you need to think before you trellis something up the wall of your house. A masonry wall is OK, but a siding wall will rot out under ivy or stem-rooting plants. And wisteria or trumpet vine put out tiny new stems that weasel between any two objects and then grow larger; they can rip the siding, fascia boards or gutters right off your house. You can still use these, but set your posts at least eighteen inches out from the wall so that the vine grows in front of the wall, not on it. And stand ready with the pruning shears to keep the new leaders off of the house.

But even so, you invest a little money, a little work, and gain a lot of valuable space by going straight up.

Bonsai Auction

Behnke Nurseries at Beltsville will once again host the annual Potomac Bonsai Association (PBA) Auction on Saturday, May 29 at 9AM. The auction will take place in the second floor Assembly Room at Behnke's in Beltsville.

Auction offerings include trees, tools, pots, books, soil, sets of *PBA Clippings* (the club's informative monthly journal), and other publications, viewing stones, and some very interesting, well-styled bonsai.

Only PBA members in good standing may sell items at the auction; but everyone is welcome to attend (free) and to bid for any items. Cash and check only, please.

Although the auction begins at 9 a.m. sharp, you may wish to show up a little earlier to get your bidder card. Items are usually "sold out" by 11:45.

Afterward, attendees are invited to meet with club members for bonsai advice and club information (there are 10 clubs in the area!). For those who are ready to take the plunge and start training their own bonsai, a PBA member will happily list a few plants on which to get started.

9th Annual Tomato Taste-Off!

*Saturday, August 21, 10AM to 2PM
at Behnke's Beltsville*

Taste and compare freshly picked varieties of tomatoes and peppers.

All samples are free!



Japanese Painted Ferns

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Plant Specialist

A*thyrium niponicum* 'Pictum', the Japanese painted fern, is a long-lived and colorful garden subject, named as the "Perennial of the Year" for 2004 by the Perennial Plant Association (PPA). I have a small cluster planted twenty years ago, in a dark and not particularly welcoming part of the garden. I intend to add more this year, because there are some new cultivars that bring joy to the heart of the shade gardener.

As described by the PPA (www.perennialplant.org), Japanese painted fern gets 18 inches tall, with "fronds that are a soft shade of metallic silver-gray with hints of red and blue." The silver really stands out, especially if you have a couple of hours of early morning sun to intensify its development. Shade the rest of the day and normal garden soil will keep the painted fern happiest. Ferns in general are salt-intolerant, so use an organic fertilizer like Plant Tone; or, topdress the soil around the plant in the fall with a couple of inches of compost. Like most hardy ferns, they are not evergreen. Early in April, you will see the dark brown fiddleheads begin to emerge from the soil, and then unfurl into their silvered fronds. (Bring a lunch, as the process takes a number of days.)



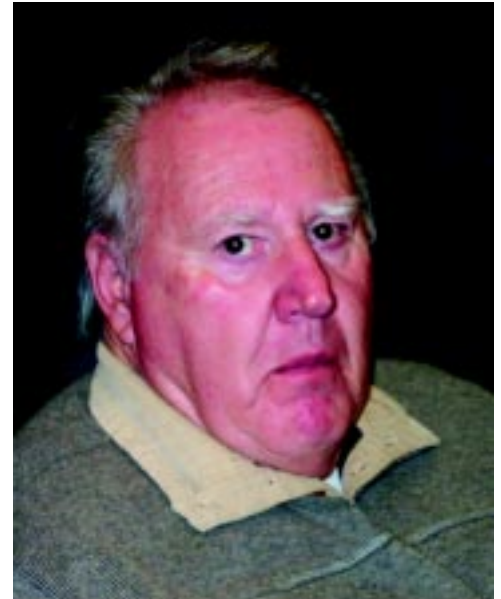
Some of the cultivars that we expect to offer this year include:

- 'Burgundy Lace' an amazing burgundy-colored overlay complements the silver leaves, like a sunset on still waters.
- 'Silver Falls' the silver fronds have contrasting red veins. The silver color intensifies as the season progresses.
- 'Soul Mate' an unusual crested form, in which the tips of the fronds continue to grow, giving a fine-textured, feathery appearance to the plant.
- 'Ursula's Red' we have a fine specimen of this cultivar at our garden at our Largo store. A strong grower, it has a red overlay to the silver fronds. The color fades a bit as the weather warms.

Most of the ferns we sell are grown by us at our nursery in Largo, and are about a year in-the-pots when we release them for sale. You can see photos of 'Burgundy Lace' and friends at terranovanurseries.com.

In addition to the Japanese painted fern, we carry a full range of ferns, including many of the "best" native ferns. The ferns we grow all come from spore or tissue culture. None are wild-collected. We are updating our signage so that signs for ferns and other plant which are native to Maryland will display our "Baysafe" logo.

Meet: Jay Smith



Customers who frequent our store in Potomac are no doubt familiar with this big guy.

Jay Smith was born in Washington D.C. and grew up in McLean, Virginia. He installed and repaired elevators for 43 years, working for Westinghouse, Otis and others. Now retired, he spends some time each week assisting customers at Behnke's in Potomac. He says his favorite part of the job is meeting and enjoying people.

Jay fought in World War II, serving in both Europe and Asia. He received several combat medals.

He loves to read, his favorite topics include history, economics and things relating to the world in general. Jay's greatest interest, however, is the Civil War, particularly the Battle of Antietam, in nearby Pennsylvania.

He lives in Potomac and describes his home life as relaxed.

The next time you're at our store in Potomac, be sure to say hello to Jay. He'll be happy to help you in any way he can. And if you know a bit of Civil War trivia so much the better!

Behnke's Branches Out with Two New Media Projects!

Your favorite nursery is now on radio and television. Anne Williams, new media director for Behnke Nurseries, proudly unveiled two new media projects last month. "The Corner Garden," on Fox 5 News, airing alternate Thursdays during the 8 a.m. hour, and "Garden Sense" which airs on WMAL 630 AM radio, Saturdays from noon to 1 p.m.

"The Corner Garden" features Behnke's own Susan O'Hara as host of the bi-monthly television spots. Susan offers seasonal advice on topics such as starting seeds, planting summer bulbs, improving soil and much more.

"Garden Sense" is a live radio talk show co-hosted by John Peter Thompson, grandson of Behnke founders Albert and Rose Behnke, and Yoz Roozen, of Roozen's Garden Center. These two garden experts have an impressive combined knowledge of horticulture, plant pathology, landscaping and entomology as well as much practical knowledge. Listeners are encouraged to call in with their questions or comments every week.

We invite you to tune in to these new media endeavors. We hope to appeal to both novice and long-time practitioners of gardening — because when you know plants, you know Behnke's!

Watch and Listen to Behnke Nurseries!

Television: **The Garden Corner**

During the 8 a.m. hour of Fox 5 News on alternate Thursdays. Next broadcast is May 20!

Radio: **Garden Sense**

Every Saturday from noon to 1 p.m. on WMAL 630 AM on the radio dial. Listeners are invited to call toll free 1-888-630-WMAL, or call 202-432-9625 and press #603 on their Cingular Wireless phone, or e-mail questions to wmal@mail.com



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