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An Offer from
Washington Gardener
Magazine



Summer Blooming Perennials

by Larry Hurley, Perennial Specialist

Summer is the season for long-blooming perennials. Spring perennials go in and out of bloom in rapid succession, bringing almost daily changes to the garden, especially when mixed with Spring-blooming bulbs and shrubs. In the long, warm days of Summer, everything seems to stretch out. Perennials in-bloom when you go on vacation are generally still blooming when you get back, especially after they have been in the ground for a couple of years and are established.

Summer is also the time for American native perennials. Most of the common Spring-blooming perennials are from elsewhere, often alpine locations. In Summer, the perennial flowers and grasses of the American meadows and prairies are well-represented in the garden, supplemented by non-native workhorses such as *Perovskia*, the Russian Sage (which sounds more like a character in a Chekhov play than a plant, if you are in the right mood), and nepeta, the catmints.

Many of these Summer plants bear yellow or golden flowers, and are members of the Asteraceae, or daisy family. That brings some challenges to the gardener to provide contrasting colors and form. Many of you are serendipitous gardeners who wander the perennial department, selecting blooming plants that strike your fancy (about 95% of you, we are told), and you shop most frequently in Spring; thus, your gardens tend to be heavily weighted in Spring-blooming perennials. We suggest you try to visit several times during the Summer to see what's "Blooming at Behnke's." This will make it easier to find a selection of different colors and textures for your Summer garden.

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Perovskia, or Russian sage, provides months of summer color.

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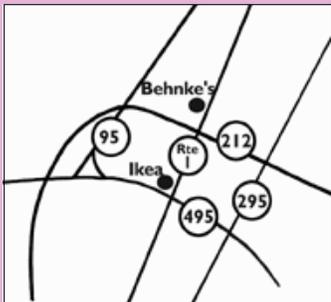
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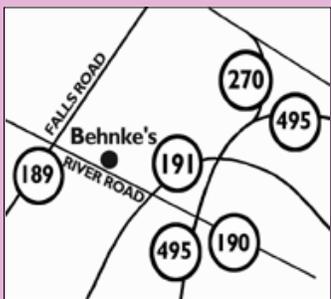
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***Coreopsis rosea* 'Sweet Dreams' is a cultivar of a Maryland native plant. It does best in sun and well-drained but moist soil.**

Summer, but not necessarily continually. Frequently, the initial bloom will be spectacular, and the re-blooms will be more sporadic or less showy; fewer or smaller flowers, perhaps the colors will be less intense due to Summer heat. Third: some perennials that flower their little green hearts out often die over the Winter. *Scabiosa* 'Butterfly Blue,' *Gaillardia*, and *Verbena* 'Homestead Purple' are examples. Either they don't make proper preparations for Winter, or they need super drainage, or they aren't quite Winter hardy; or a combination of factors. We call these "short-lived" perennials. They will give you a great show, are terrific in containers, but deep down they really want to be annuals.

Some groups to consider follow: additional groups have been left out for space concerns: Phlox, Rudbeckia, Helenium and Heliopsis, for example. Author's prerogative.

Coreopsis or Tickseed; daisies that come in a variety of colors, mainly yellow to golden, pink, and two-tone pink and white. They have a long-blooming period, starting in late Spring to early Summer, and continuing to frost. Shear or deadhead to force the plant to make new flower buds. There is much variation in the Winter hardiness of *Coreopsis* cultivars, and there have been many new introductions over the last couple of years. Some good rules of thumb for daisy-type flowers are that they generally perform best in full sun, and require good drainage. That certainly holds here: they often rot out in soggy Winter soils. We have had difficulty overwintering some of the new cultivars in pots ('Snowberry');

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Catmint, Russian sage and daylilies are star performers in this garden at PepsiCo headquarters in New York.

Rain and Shine On the Capital Beltway Azalea Show

The first annual Beltway Azalea Show at Behnke Nurseries at Beltsville brought together a number of groups to celebrate the area's most popular flowering shrub. Co-sponsored by *Washington Gardener Magazine*, and Earth Share, a national environmental organization, Behnke Nurseries offered an amazing assortment of azaleas, just coming into their blooming season.

Highlights included a wine tasting on Friday night, featuring the wines of Maryland-vintner Boordy Vineyards. Friday and Saturday temperatures were pleasant, and people enjoyed wine under the big tent, surrounded by Behnke's many plant offerings.

Exhibitors included the Master Gardeners of Prince George's County; Pogo Organics selling compost tea and "tea" making equipment; *Washington Gardener Magazine*; Riverbend Nursery offering advice on deer-resistant perennials; Friends of the National Agriculture Library — a national treasure of horticultural information in Beltsville; the Agriculture Research Service, also in Beltsville; the Four Seasons Garden Club, and the Beltsville Garden Club. Tree seedlings, native perennials and raffle tickets were sold to raise money for Earth Share.

Remember that Sunday when we suddenly caught up from our three-inch rain deficit? That coincided with the Azalea show, and put a bit of a damper on the Sunday activities, turning handouts into *papier mache* and creating some interesting new (but temporary) aquatic features at the nursery. That Mother Nature; such a sense of humor.

We are looking forward to welcoming you to the upcoming Capital Beltway Perennial Show, coming in June!



Kathy Jentz, editor of Washington Gardener Magazine (center right) was a co-sponsor of the Azalea Show.



The Friday night wine-tasting provided by Boordy Vineyards got rave reviews from participants.

About the Beltsville Garden Club

Thanks to Douglas Bolt of the Beltsville Garden Club for providing photos of the event. The Beltsville Garden Club was founded in 1952, primarily by individuals from the USDA, and currently has 220 members from throughout the area, including some Behnke Nurseries staff. This is an active club, with interesting meetings, summer field trips and friendly members. Proceeds from plant sales benefit the Duckworth School, a Prince George's County school which serves students with moderate to severe disabilities ages 5 through 21.

For more information, visit:

<http://beltsvillegardenclub.org/bgc2.html>



The Beltsville Garden Club sponsored a luncheon on Thursday and gave advice throughout the weekend.

The Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council (CCLC) has drafted “Eight Essential Elements” of Conservation Landscaping. The vision is to one day find conservation landscapes used routinely throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Ideally, these landscapes could be easily recognized because they would demonstrate these essential characteristics. In practice, relatively few model landscapes currently could claim to meet the conditions set forth in this list, but the closer you can bring your own landscape to the one described here, the more you will be helping all life in the Chesapeake watershed. Below, I have included bits of the report.

CONSERVATION LANDSCAPING ESSENTIALS

A conservation landscape...

1. is designed to benefit the environment and to function well for human use;
2. contains locally native plants that are appropriate for site conditions;
3. has an ongoing property management to remove existing invasive plants and prevent future alien plant invasions;
4. provides wildlife habitat;
5. promotes good air quality and is not a source of air pollution;
6. conserves water and promotes good water quality;
7. promotes healthy soils, composts plant waste on site, and amends disturbed soils to encourage native plant communities;
8. works with nature to be more sustainable with less input.

Note that this is not a process of “plant it and forget it.” Conservation landscapes are not maintenance free, and do require their own special set of cares and concerns.

Conservation landscaping works with nature to reduce pollution. Conservation landscaping incorporates environmentally sensitive design, low impact development, non-invasive native and beneficial plants, and integrated pest management to create diverse landscapes that help protect clean air and water, support wildlife, and provide a more beautiful, healthier human environment.

Some of the basic practices prescribed for each element are described below.

1. Design

Conservation landscape design occurs in the context of nature. It seeks to preserve, enhance and reduce impacts upon a site’s natural features. Design specifically to benefit the environment, while providing function for personal use and displaying the beauty of well-maintained, natural landscaping. Preserve existing environmental features to the greatest possible degree.

2. Native plants

Use a diversity of locally-native plants that are appropriate for existing site conditions and that provide a wide variety of environmental benefits.

3. Invasive plants and site management

Alien plants are those that occur in locations beyond their known historical natural ranges. Invasive plants are those aliens that display rapid growth and spread, allowing them to establish over large areas, overwhelming and displacing existing vegetation and forming dense one-species stands.

Avoid planting invasive alien species, remove them where they exist, and work to manage properties to prevent their spread on an ongoing basis. Unfortunately, many commonly used landscaping plants are invasive species (e.g; barberry, burning bush, butterfly bush, English ivy, Norway maple, purple loosestrife), so you may need to learn a new palette of native plants.

4. Wildlife habitat

A conservation landscape encourages native wildlife species. Provide a diverse plant environment which includes a variety of food sources year round.

ping: Good for the Bay

Founding Board Member, Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council; Chairman of the Board, Behnke Nurseries

5. Air quality

Minimize activities that directly create air pollution. Water pollution is increased by atmospheric deposition of nutrients (from the air into the water); help improve water quality by reducing sources of air pollution. Decrease the size of lawn areas to reduce mowing time and overall yard maintenance. Reduce the use of gasoline-powered equipment such as lawn mowers, string trimmers, and leaf blowers, which contribute to air pollution.

6. Water conservation and quality

A conservation landscape preserves the natural water cycle and helps keep waterways clean in your local watershed.

Rainwater running off of the land and percolating into the ground carries with it chemicals, soil, plant debris, and other pollutants. Reduce the amount of pollution entering local waterways by using plants that are adapted to local conditions; using plants to stabilize soil to prevent erosion; using planted areas to help slow the flow of runoff, filter pollutants and use up excess nutrients. Retain and re-use rainwater runoff through various stormwater management practices.

7. Healthy soils

Healthy plants begin with healthy soil, containing a complex balance of minerals, water, air and organic material (including living organisms). Disturbances to soil can result in a breakdown of soil structure and an imbalance of plant and animal communities. These disturbances may include compaction by heavy equipment or foot traffic, changes in nutrient cycling and pH from runoff and air deposition, removal of topsoil, erosion, and plowing. Thus, a cornerstone of conservation landscaping is the proper protection and ongoing care of the soil.

8. Sustainable landscapes

Conservation landscaping may reduce human intervention and therefore can save time and resources. Traditional intensive maintenance practices tend to be environmentally damaging. Instead, develop a site management program that works with natural processes, recycles resources onsite, and achieves a self-sustaining landscape.

Sustainable or conservation landscapes are not an escape from gardening. They are an alternative to traditional landscaping choices. Like traditional gardening practices, a conservation landscape or garden requires planning and work. Doing nothing is not a conservation landscape. A garden unattended is not a garden nor is it a natural landscape; it is a dynamic invitation for invasive species and unwanted pests contributing little or nothing to the ecosystem which a conservation landscape tried to support or enhance.



The butterfly garden at the Adkins Arboretum, above, incorporates many aspects of Conservation Landscaping

Below: A Great Spangled Fritillary butterfly nectaring on milkweed.



stock photo

Visit the CCLC garden installation at the United States Botanic Garden in Washington, DC. The garden is being planted as part of the exhibit, "One Planet-Ours! Sustainability for the 22nd Century," which opens on May 24, 2008. Behnke Nurseries is proud to have donated a number of Behnke Baysafe native perennials for the garden. For more information visit the CCLC at www.chesapeakelandscaping.org/



Chesapeake
Conservation
Landscaping
Council



Meet: Mike Wilson

Mike manages the landscape installation crews for Behnke Nurseries, and has been a valuable addition to our team since July of 2007. With 4 crews currently working out of our Beltsville and Potomac locations, Mike has a big job, especially in the spring and summer months when crews may be working six or seven days a week.

With a background of working for other landscape, grounds maintenance and construction firms, Mike is well-versed in both hardscape and plantscape installations. Fluency in Spanish helps as he works with a multilingual staff.

Mike came to the landscape business from a love of working outdoors and with his hands. He enjoys seeing a project through from start to finish. A Hoosier, he spent several years at Indiana University majoring in mathematics before he made the decision to proceed with the practical instead of the theoretical. As befits an outdoorsman, he loves sports, both playing (ice hockey, football); watching (a season-ticket holder for of the Washington Redskins); and listening (sports radio).

When a Behnke Nurseries installation crew arrives at your home or business to begin a job, feel confident that Mike Wilson is in charge. We at Behnke Nurseries certainly do.

Behnke's Design and Installation Division Now at Potomac!

Behnke Nurseries is pleased to announce that we have opened a Landscape office at our garden center in Potomac, to offer more convenient service for our Montgomery County customers. Now you can meet with our innovative designers at either our Beltsville or our Potomac location. *(Since our designers work both in the field and office, meetings at either location are by appointment only.)*

Behnke Nurseries Design and Installation staff will work with you through all the stages of your landscape project. From the initial consultation and site visit with our designer, developing a formal design, to the installation of plants and hardscape features, you will feel that your "outdoor living space" is in the best of hands.

Thanks to the "buying power" of our garden centers, Behnke's has access to hard to find types and sizes of plants from growers from across the country. Whether you are looking for that

"sense of place" feeling that comes from a landscape of plants from the mid-Atlantic, a garden that reflects your heritage, or a landscape that reflects current trends or fashions, our designers and install crews will make sure your dreams come true.

Working with Behnke Nurseries Landscaping assures you that the installation crews are Behnke Nurseries' employees. We work with you from start to finish and don't vanish after your project is complete. With a registered landscape architect on staff, we provide services from simple tree and shrub replacement plantings, to full scale design-build projects incorporating patios, walkways, walls, outdoor kitchens, exterior lighting and fencing. Our main focus is our residential clients but we also service discriminating commercial companies.

It is a good idea to plan ahead to get a professional plan! Call 240-473-6733 or email us at landscaping@behnkes.net as soon as possible. If an operator is unable to answer your call immediately due to the volume of incoming calls in the Spring season, please leave a voice message so that we may return your call.



Landscape photo provided by Behnke Nurseries Design and Installation Department

Summer Blooming Perennials, continued from Page 2

‘Crème Brulee’; ‘Pinwheel’, from which we infer that they will do better on a slight slope or in a raised bed than in clay-soil gardens.) While pale yellow ‘Moonbeam’ is the standard, two-tone ‘Sweet Dreams’ and ‘Autumn Blush’ are vigorous, taller and produce more blooms.

Like Coreopsis, there have been many new Echinacea introduced over the last couple of years, extending the color range of this daisy-like flower from white and shades of pink into gold, orange and burgundy; even some doubles. Purple coneflower remains the common name. The older cultivars such as pink ‘Magnus’ and ‘White Swan’ are tough as nails. Our experience and word of mouth in the industry is that some of the new hybrids seem to be harder to get through the first Winter, so watch the drainage, plant early in the season to get established, and if they continue blooming into September, remove the flowers so that the plants can prepare for Winter. Look for flowers beginning at the end of June.

Hardy hibiscus begin blooming in early July, with huge flowers in white, pink, red or bicolors. They flower continually into September, with each flower lasting one day. Recent releases have yielded shorter cultivars, as short as 30 inches, and cultivars with reddish-purple foliage. Given the plant’s coarse texture, the height of most cultivars, and the foliar shredding caused by their annual bout with Japanese beetles, they are generally used as background plants. Probably the best white bloomer, ‘Albert Behnke’ was found and named by Mr. Behnke’s grandson, John Peter Thompson. The best red we carry is ‘Fireball,’ which has much larger blooms than the popular ‘Lord Baltimore.’ Our best selection of hibiscus is from mid-June to mid-August.

Last year’s Perennial Plant Association Perennial of the Year was *Nepeta faassenii* ‘Walker’s Low,’ one of a number of blue-flowered catmints. They begin to flower in late May or early June, and will continue through the Summer. Bees are fond of

continued on back cover

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If you are a DC-area gardener, you’ll love *Washington Gardener*!
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Summer Blooming Perennials, continued from Page 7

the flowers, and it being a close cousin to catnip, you may find that cats are romping in the garden as well. *Nepeta subsessilis* and *Nepeta* x 'Joanna Reed' have darker blue flowers than the others.

Perovskia, Russian sage, begins to bloom in late June and continues to bloom into September. The foliage has a strong medicinal smell when crushed. There are several cultivars with subtle differences; all have pale blue flowers; 'Little Spire' is shorter with stronger stems than the others. They are quite reliable and always look great with Echinacea.

Joe Pye Weed is a real butterfly magnet. Although some of the eupatoriums are too weedy for all but the most informal garden (spreading by seed or runners) there are three that will perform well in most garden situations; all are smaller than the species and all have dusky-rose colored clusters of flowers. The industry standard is *Eupatorium maculatum* 'Gateway,' which gets six feet or more tall. A more recent introduction is *E. dubium* 'Little Joe,' which is said to be three to four feet but seems to be four feet plus here in our warmer climate. A new one for us last year is the hybrid, *Eupatorium* x 'Phantom,' which is supposed to finish out at two to three feet. Flowering begins in July and runs into September.

So: some take home messages; enjoy your Summer garden; extend your blooming season with judicious use of shears and pruners; stop by every few weeks to see what is in bloom; and, plant natives as the backbone of the garden, accenting with carefully chosen non-native plants.

* Further information on this in Tracy DiSabato-Aust's book, *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*, a must for all gardeners.



Nepeta x faassenii and *diascia* at Harewood House in England. In our area try a pink petunia or pink annual salvia as a substitute for the diascia.

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