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Behnke's at Beltsville to Remain Open!

The Behnke family is very pleased to announce that the Beltsville Nursery and Garden Center will remain open. As many of you know, we had expected to permanently close our doors in Beltsville this summer. (The garden center and production nursery in Largo and our garden center in Potomac were to remain open.) Happily, we have been able to secure financing that will allow us to keep the Beltsville store open and to continue in our role as your favorite nursery and garden center.

What made us consider closing the Beltsville store? Profitability, or lack thereof. We are a business, pure and simple. It is our job as business owners to run a profitable business. We are much better plant people, however, than business managers. And in recent years, a combination of factors contributed to our troubles. To begin with, the garden center industry is very seasonal in nature. We have the difficult task of trying to serve all our customers during a short period of time from mid-March to June. We are extraordinarily busy in the spring, as most of you undoubtedly know, and considerably slower during the rest of the year. The cost of running the large store during the off season, providing all the services and information that our customers demand and need, and maintaining a year-round staff of trained professionals is very expensive.

Moreover, we are directly affected by the weather. Uncooperative weather during our critical spring season can seriously hinder our sales, as our customers don't like to shop in inclement weather. The last few years have provided even greater challenges—we've endured several years of rainy springs followed by summer drought that have been particularly problematic for both us and our plants.

In addition, the number of customers shopping at our Beltsville store has been declining for several years. This has been caused by many things, but mostly by the increased traffic on the Beltway and Route 1. With the nearly-completed bridge work on the Beltway, even weekend traffic has been bad at times, and many of our customers are reluctant to fight the construction and traffic to get to us.

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GARDEN CENTER HOURS

Summer:

Monday - Saturday: 9AM to 6PM
Sunday: 9AM to 5PM
(CALL, HOURS SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

BEHNKE'S AT BELTSVILLE

11300 Baltimore Ave. (U.S.1)
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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

Water-Saving Tips for a Rainless Day

— by Lori Hicks, Behnke Staff

Although we seem to have had abundant rain so far this year, our area's water table is still seriously low, and it is essential for all of us to conserve water whenever possible. Several local counties are already restricting water use, and others will follow if we don't all do our part. Gardeners should consider gradually increasing their garden's drought-tolerance by choosing new plants that require less water, and strive to be more water efficient in the future. Here are a few effective measures we can all take to prevent wasting water:

Take shorter showers; wash only full loads in dishwashers and washing machines.

Water plants with gray water — the rinse water from washing dishes or laundry, the run-off when you take a shower, the bath water, and any other possible source.

Water gardens early in the morning to minimize evaporation losses. Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation systems.

Use rain barrels to collect water for your garden. Hundreds of gallons of water can be collected during one day of rain. (Our search on the Internet yielded dozens of contacts to buy or build a rain barrel.)

When watering garden beds, water more deeply but less often. This saves water two ways: you actually apply less water, and you train the plants to become deep rooted, thereby increasing their water-absorbing efficiency.

When planting large shrubs and trees, construct a shallow basin around the base of the plant. Use the soil to create a berm to capture water from the hose or normal rainfall. This concentrates water to the root system.

Maintain a two-inch thick layer of mulch around plants. The mulch reduces water evaporation from the soil and keeps the soil around the roots cool.

Behnke's to Remain Open, from page 1

Furthermore, our computer tracking system has revealed a problem that we had naively underestimated—we have been suffering huge losses from theft and shoplifting. The open, sprawling nature of our Beltsville site contributed to this problem, as did some of our rather old-fashioned business practices, and the trusting nature of our employees. We have made many improvements to the layout of the Beltsville store, but are still seeing evidence of this problem.

And finally, like other independent retailers, we have lost sales to the “big box” stores which offer some of the same products we do at a lower price. It is nearly impossible for small businesses to compete with these behemoths in the arena of lowest price. And although we have always cornered the market in quality, selection and service, we had to keep our prices low enough on staple items to attract customers, and so could not adequately compensate for our losses in other areas.

All of this brought us to the painful decision to close our Beltsville garden center. However, the response from the public when we made the announcement was both surprising and very gratifying. Cards, letters, e-mails and phone calls poured in daily. “Say it isn't so!” was the general expression. We decided to try harder to secure additional financing and to make the changes necessary to operate Beltsville in a more realistic manner. We will address all of the above concerns and hopefully emerge stronger and more profitable, while rededicating ourselves to building the finest nursery and garden center anywhere.

The Behnke family and our staff at all three locations wish to thank all of you who expressed concern over the prospect of losing the Beltsville Nursery and Garden Center. Your offers of help and support were most greatly appreciated.

Sonja Behnke Festerling, President
Mark Behnke, Vice President of Retail

John Peter Thompson, CEO
Mike Behnke, Manager, Behnke Nurseries at Potomac

Purple Coneflower: A Classic Native American Perennial

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Plant Specialist

Most gardeners are familiar with the purple coneflower, a standard of the summer garden. It performs so well under such a wide range of conditions that the Perennial Plant Association named it the Perennial of the Year for 1998. (Specifically, the strain *Echinacea purpurea* 'Magnus'. We wrote about 'Magnus' in the *Summer 1998 GardeNews*, and the article is available on our website, www.behnkes.com.)

Shamelessly lifting entire paragraphs from the earlier article, we recall that 'Magnus' is a selection of the native American prairie plant, the purple coneflower. The species is a daisy with reflexed petals and a large ball-shaped central disk (think "badminton birdie"), with flowers in white to pink to carmine. As with goldenrod, the Europeans appreciated the American plants before we did. 'Magnus' was selected at the nursery of Magnus Nilsson in Sweden, through a breeding project that looked for deeper carmine color and broad, flat petals (think "rum-drink paper parasol"). German seedsman Klaus Jelitto selected 'Magnus' from Nilsson's work and introduced it to the trade. Our plants are grown from the carefully-selected Jelitto seed.

'Magnus' will reach a height of about 4 feet, depending on the quality of the soil. The foliage is a basal clump with long flower stems bearing the 4 inch daisies. The plant naturally flowers in July and August (in pots they may bloom earlier or later). It has a tight crown and will stay where you put it. As with any seed-propagated plant, it may spread through self-seeding. Finches like to feed on the seed in late summer; butterflies are fond of the blooms. It makes a terrific cut flower.

Culture of *Echinacea* is easy. They prefer at least 6 hours of sun, decent soil that drains well, and a little fertilizer in the late fall or early spring. They have no serious insect pests. Occasionally, in wet, cold spring weather the plants develop a fungal leaf blight that may require a fungicide spray, but this may be more of a problem in the nursery than in the garden.

Group three to five plants together for a dramatic effect. For a really great combination, plant *Echinacea* with Russian sage (*Perovskia*, another Perennial Plant Association Plant of the Year), an under-used plant of similar height and bloom time with powder blue flowers. Add a silver-leaved plant such as *Artemisia* 'Powis Castle' or clunky ol' "Dusty Miller".

In addition to 'Magnus', Behnke's carries another half dozen or so other *Echinacea* species and cultivars. Who likes short shorts? The new cultivars include 'Kim's Knee High', a dwarf pink form discovered by Kim Hawks of Niche Gardens a few years ago. This cultivar, propagated through tissue culture, grows to a height of around two feet and is terrific for those townhouse gardens where 'Magnus' may be a little too large.

Newer still is a white-flowered version of 'Kim's Knee High' called 'Kim's Mop Head', found at Sunny Border Nursery, one of

Behnke Nurseries' wholesale suppliers. Featured in their Sunny Border Gold program a couple of years ago, it is now available in larger quantities. Also from Sunny Border, we have *Echinacea tennesseensis*, an endangered species in its native range.

From our nursery at Largo, we have a limited number of an old cultivar that we have not been able to find for many years. White-flowered coneflowers are a staple in the garden, most commonly seen in the variety 'White Swan', a good, reliable seed-propagated strain. This year we also have a limited number of 'White Lustre'.

This cultivar has tiny blooms on the central disk that are a deep golden orange and which really set off the white petals.

Our stock is imported from the Netherlands, and we are ever-so-hopeful that it is as wonderful as we remember it from the mid-1980's when we last carried it.

Lastly, from the tissue culture labs of Terra Nova Nursery comes a new cultivar called 'Ruby Giant', which we hope to have available this summer. This cultivar is described as having better color than the seed strains of 'Magnus', featuring seven-inch flowers with flat instead of reflexed petals. This is an exciting development, right up there with a good, soaking rain in August.

Speaking of August, for members of the Perennial Plant Association, there is a personal interest in the proliferation of *Echinacea* varieties and other summer bloomers. Our annual meeting is usually held in August (this year it happens to be in July). Perennials being seasonal bloomers, we tend to see many of the same plants in gardens on our field trips. We now have more reasons to leave the bus!



Succulent Plants

Succulent plants are plants that grow under conditions where water is scarce, seasonal, or just hard to get at. Traditionally in horticulture, the term refers to cactus-like plants, often tropical in origin, although the term “succulent” should better apply to any plant that has special adaptations for storing water for lean times, such as specialized tissues for water storage. Having applied a broad stroke, we can settle back down to the more cactus-like plants for discussion. Some of the features that succulents have developed to conserve water include the following:

- **Specialized stems:** fleshy stems that expand when moisture is available, and shrink or contract when it is not. Note the sort of accordion-shape of many cacti.
- **Transience:** the plant may leaf out for a few weeks following a rain in order to maximize photosynthesis, then drop the leaves as weather becomes drier, or, it may send up a stem from a fleshy underground root system, then shed the stem when conditions change.
- **Spines:** spines not only protect the plant from hungry critters but also tend to reduce wind velocity a bit, slowing down water loss.
- **Hairs:** also reduce wind velocity; reflect excess sunlight away from the plant; may catch dew and channel it to toward the root system.
- **Wax:** produces and deposits a waxy coating on leaves or stems to reduce water loss. Many silvery plants appear silver because they have a combination of wax and hairs to reflect excess light and heat. (As garden subjects, they frequently rot when placed in wet or poor draining situations *Artemisia*; lavender; dusty miller spring to mind).
- **Taste Bad:** to discourage critters. In some species, sap may cause a skin reaction or be poisonous. Just because the old prospector cuts open that barrel cactus, it doesn't mean it's going to taste good. One notable exception is the prickly pear cactus, the fruits of which are tasty and the pads (flat, “beaver-tail” stems) of which (nopales) are used in Mexican cooking.



- **Specialized Root System:** Broad, shallow, efficient roots able to absorb light precipitation.

Because of their interesting shapes and often-beautiful flowers, succulents are very popular as both houseplants and garden subjects. Since there are desert and seasonally dry areas all around the world and there are a limited number of ways to adapt to these conditions, many unrelated plants look similar. In the biology biz, this is known as *parallel evolution*.

Although people call a lot of plants “cactus”, cacti are actually a botanical family of succulent plants (the Cactaceae) native to the new world. Savvy readers of this newsletter know that plants are classified into families and species primarily by similarities in their flowers. Cacti have some additional characters, such as having spines borne on a structure called an *areole*. Some may also bear transient leaves on the areole when new growth appears. Although most cacti inhabit deserts or seasonally dry areas such as grasslands, some, such as the Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti, are actually tropical jungle-dwellers that are epiphytic and live clinging to trees as many of the orchids do. On the other end of the temperature scale, there are species of prickly pear (*Opuntia*) that make interesting (albeit hard-to-weed) additions to the perennial garden. Only one species of opuntia, *Opuntia humifusa* or *Opuntia compressa*, depending on the taxono-

mist, is native to Maryland; although there are a number of opuntias that are hardy here. Flowers come in yellow, orange, and pinks. The vast majority of species of cacti in commerce originated in the deserts of the southwestern United States, Mexico, and the rest of Central and South America and are best treated as houseplants.

In Africa, many succulents belong to the Euphorbiaceae (Euphorbia) family. This is one of the largest plant families and includes many non-succulent members, frequently grown in perennial gardens. The non-succulent poinsettia, native to Mexico, is also a euphorbia. A popular houseplant,



are Water Misers

— by Larry Hurley, Perennial Plant Specialist

the so-called candelabra cactus, is a euphorbia. All euphorbias have a sticky milky sap—if your “cactus” has this, it is probably a Euphorbia. Another favorite is a little round number, *Euphorbia obesa*. (Note that in some euphorbias the sap is irritating to the skin of sensitive humans. It is always a good idea to wear gloves as a precaution when handling euphorbias.)

South Africa, which has a unique flora and some very dry deserts, has given rise to some nifty succulents such as the living stones, baby toes, tiger jaws, and other cleverly-named plants. These tropicals are often somewhat challenging to grow. This is also the home of the ice plant (*Delosperma*), which has been used extensively for erosion control along the California coast. In the spring, Behnke’s carries several varieties which are winter hardy here in the well-drained, sunny perennial garden (bright pink or yellow flowers).

Other popular perennial garden succulents include members of the jade plant family (*Crassulaceae*), which are characterized by succulent leaves. Sedums come in many forms, such as the popular,

upright *Sedum* ‘Autumn Joy’ or the ground hugging, semi-evergreen, red-leaved creeper ‘Fuldaglut’. There is a Maryland-native creeping sedum, *Sedum ternatum*, which has white

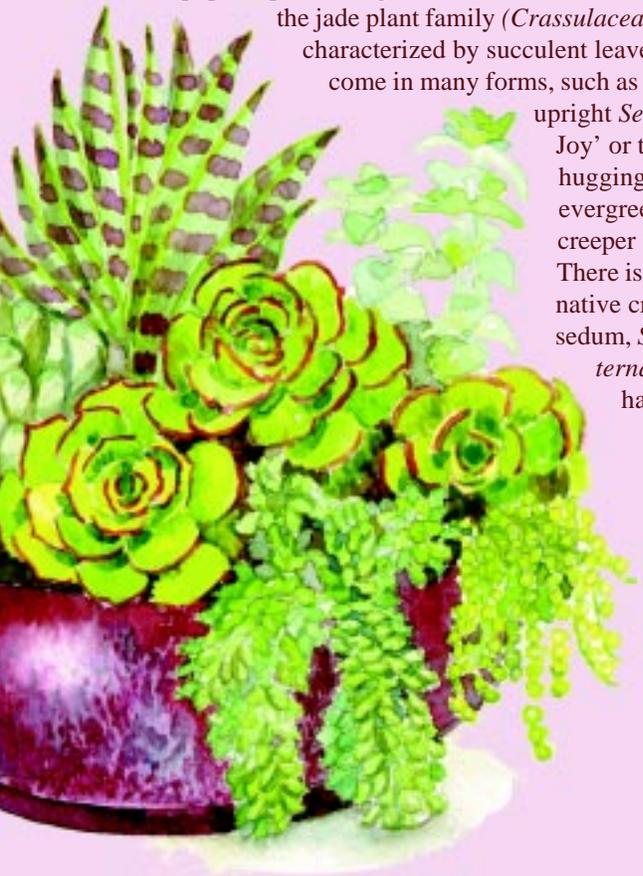
flowers and green leaves and is also shade-tolerant. Also popular, especially in containers, are the hens and chicks, or houseleeks, *Sempervivums*. These were traditionally grown on rooftops in Europe because they were said to prevent lightning strikes. (In the spring, we offer a good assortment of *Sempervivums* as well. You may consider this plugging a leek.) Of course, there are also many members of the *Crassulaceae* that make great houseplants.

Aloes (old world) and agaves (new world) resemble each other in that they form a rosette of succulent leaves. The agaves, common in the southwestern deserts, bloom once and then die (“century plant”) while the aloes bloom seasonally and are used for landscaping in warm, arid regions such as southern California. Tony Avent of Plant Delights Nursery (mail order, North Carolina) is promoting the use of hardy agaves in eastern gardens. Some of his selections would probably do fine in warmer parts of our area, such as Georgetown, Anacostia or Annapolis. *Aloe vera* is famous as a burn ointment and skin product, while Agave is the source of tequila. Many aloes (and similar-looking plants like Haworthia) make great, long-lived houseplants. Most of the agaves will ultimately require more space than the average person has available in the home.

Treated right, houseplant succulents may outlive the owner. I have several cacti purchased in 1973, as well as a stapeliad (carrion flower, related to milkweed, which looks and smells like rotting flesh when it blooms; pollinated by flies—a real plant-lover’s plant), and several old aloes or aloe relatives. All they ask for is good light, occasional watering, and an occasional scan for scale insects or mealybugs. Mine all get watered once a week, unless I am on vacation, which is probably why I don’t have any of the fussy living stones, baby toes or tiger jaws.

I am developing the theory that plant owners start to resemble their plants, just as dog owners are said to resemble their dogs. As proof: my oldest cactus is a barrel cactus. Had I realized this was a possibility, I would have invested a lot more time and money early in my plant career on some of them—there silver-haired cacti. The wind velocity around my ears on a cold day is mighty fierce. However, I bear no resemblance to the stapeliad whatsoever.

Special thanks to Bob Stewart, of the Cooperative Extension Service, for his assistance on this article.



Much Ado About Mulching

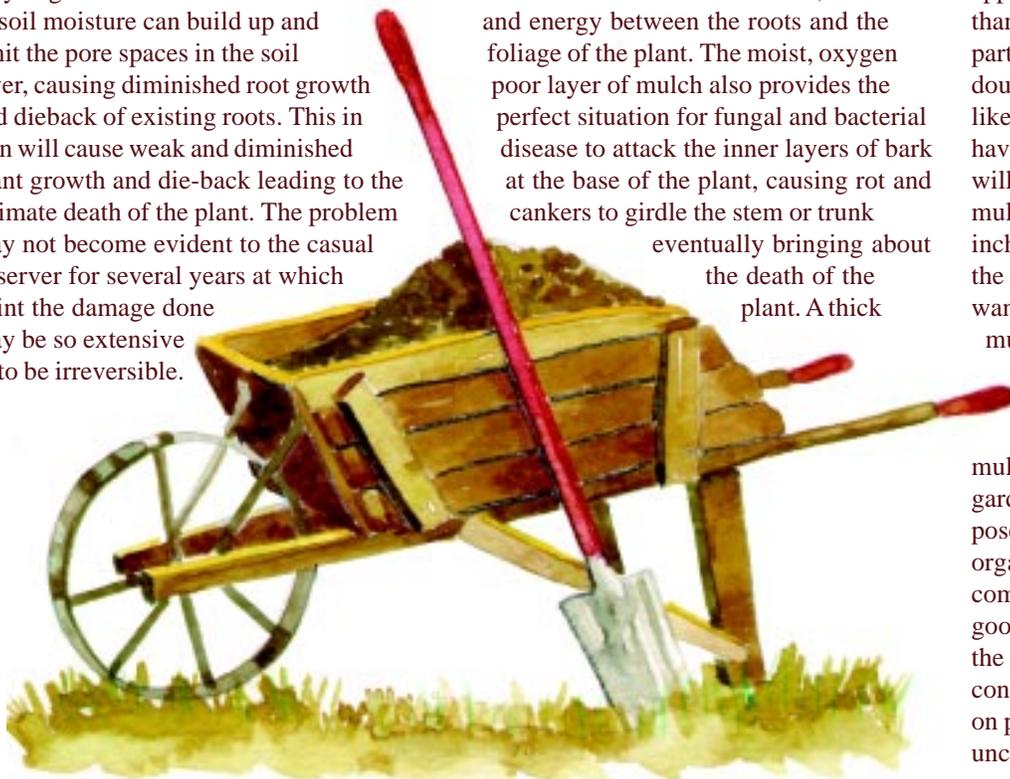
— by Kevin O'Toole, Behnke Staff

As we have told our readers many times before, mulching is a beneficial gardening practice, that can not only improve the aesthetics of the garden, but can also help retain soil moisture during dry spells, moderate soil temperature changes, increase organic matter content in soil over time, and reduce weed growth. Mulching has many benefits, and it has never been more popular with gardeners, but as with most things in life, mulching is best done in moderation. Over-mulching carries with it several short and long term consequences that should be noted. First of all, applying any more than a 2-3 inch layer of mulch is a waste of money, time, and materials. A proper amount of mulch can facilitate the main function of the roots of a plant, the intake of soil moisture and nutrients, and the uptake of oxygen from the pore spaces in soil. In general anything over 4 or 5 inches of mulch or continued annual applications of mulch without regard for compaction or depth of the previous years mulch layer can have very negative effects. Excessive amounts of soil moisture can build up and limit the pore spaces in the soil layer, causing diminished root growth and dieback of existing roots. This in turn will cause weak and diminished plant growth and die-back leading to the ultimate death of the plant. The problem may not become evident to the casual observer for several years at which point the damage done may be so extensive as to be irreversible.

Over-mulching has become a widespread problem in the modern landscape, particularly on the grounds of town house developments, office parks, and shopping centers. A dark, weed-free layer of mulch around every tree, shrub and planting bed has become the standard expected by any self respecting homeowners association. The problem is that the fastest and easiest way of achieving this look is to simply apply layer after layer of mulch into the planting areas, sometimes several times a year. The result is the unmistakable "mountain" or "volcano" of mulch surrounding every tree and shrub which has become an all too common sight in suburbia. If piled deeply enough around the base of the trunk, it will not only damage the roots of your trees and shrubs but can also cause a great deal of damage to the bark of the tree. The mulch can inhibit the free exchange of gasses (mainly oxygen and carbon dioxide) between the atmosphere and the inner layers of bark, causing this inner layer to die. If allowed to continue, this will cut off the flow of water, nutrients and energy between the roots and the foliage of the plant. The moist, oxygen poor layer of mulch also provides the perfect situation for fungal and bacterial disease to attack the inner layers of bark at the base of the plant, causing rot and cankers to girdle the stem or trunk eventually bringing about the death of the plant. A thick

mulch layer also creates the ideal winter hideout for rodents that would be more than happy to feast on the nutrient rich inner layer of bark. All of these situations can be easily avoided by keeping the mulch ring several inches away from the trunks of young trees and up to a foot away from the trunks of mature trees. The tree or shrub would benefit greatly if that same amount of mulch that had been piled up against its trunk was spread in an even 2-3 inch layer out to the plant's dripline (the outer edge of the canopy). But if that fresh dark layer of mulch is your highest priority, simply rake and turn over the existing mulch layer to improve its appearance, or, if that isn't sufficient, try adding just a one-inch layer of fresh mulch to bring back that dark rich color.

The decision on which type of mulch is used is usually based on aesthetics and your personal preference for color and texture. Pine bark nuggets and other coarse mulches are less likely to compact and allow greater oxygen flow, so can be applied on the thick side (but never more than 4") if necessary. You should be particularly careful when applying fine or double shredded mulches, which are more likely to settle and cut off airflow. If you have poorly-drained heavy clay soils, you will also want to pay particular attention to mulch depth, usually not more than 2 inches, so as not to impact oxygen levels in the soil any more than necessary. You may want to consider changing the type of mulch you use when you are ready to reapply, since over the long run pine bark mulches have a tendency to acidify the soil while hardwood bark mulches tend to sweeten or make your garden soil more alkaline as they decompose. Be careful when using a mulch of organic materials that have not been composted adequately. This mulch draws a good deal of the available nitrogen out of the soil and away from your plants as it continues to decompose. Read the article on page 7 for more information on handling unconventional mulches.



The Evils of Clay Soil and Other Nonsense

— by Jim Dronenburg, Perennial Plant Specialist

In 1991, we moved to an old brick farmhouse on a hilltop overlooking the Potomac River. We had a great view and a wonderful site to create a garden — but no topsoil to speak of. One day, I went out with a shovel, set the point on the ground, and jumped into the air with both feet, one foot coming down on each flange of the shovel. (Most men know this maneuver.) I came down with all 220 pounds, and the shovel bent and rebounded like a Pogo stick. That's when I knew I had my work cut out for me. The previous owners had discovered chemical fertilizers in the 1940s and had used nothing else since. The soil had reverted to hard-packed clay in which nothing would thrive.

Clay actually contains a fair amount of plant nutrients but tends to bake into a brick — preventing roots from reaching the good stuff. And there's nothing like dry clay for shedding water — rain runs right off. If you dig a hole in clay, the water that goes into it will stay there for a respectable length of time before it soaks in, ever so slowly. Once saturated, soggy clay takes the devil's own time to dry out. So: You have soil that stays wet long enough to drown a plant, then dries out, and resists taking in water thereafter. What to do?

Amend your soil. You already know this lesson. We say it at Behnke's every other sentence. "Good morning, amend your soil, and how can I help you?" Amendments for clay soil (and also sandy soil, where water drains off instantly, taking nutrients with it) are: anything organic. Just to clarify — in this context, "organic" means, "stuff that was once alive." Technically, a dead horse would qualify; although it's best to think in terms of dead plant matter, leaves, grass, what-have-you. Lawn clippings, fallen leaves, the shredded stuff left by a tree crew who grind up a fallen branch — anything will work, over time. What you do *not* want to add is sand alone. Sand and clay make concrete. *Sand and clay make*

concrete. Vegetable matter, on the other hand, absorbs water *very* fast — and can hold an amazing amount of it — the more vegetable matter, the faster this happens.

The Classic Good Stuff (CGS), of course, is manure that has been composted for at least 6 months with vegetable matter. Fresh manure will both smell bad and burn the roots of your plants. Treated sewer

two very kind families with horses). This is one reason why things get planted so slowly. And why things take off like a big bird once they get their roots into the soil.

One thing that has saved me, and can save you too, is that most jurisdictions have landfill areas where they take garden clippings, prunings, autumn leaves and tree limbs and put them through a monstrous-

big shredder, and the result is free mulch.

Frankly, it's not much to look at, and there are always scraps of plastic and broken glass that you have to watch out for. But it's free, free by the truckload (your

Amending soil is a lot like making chicken soup; you don't get anything out of the pot if you don't put anything in.

truck). Use it as compost-on-the-hoof or as mulch; come the end of the season, the big stuff will still be there, but a fair amount will have gone to topsoil. A note of caution however, it does use nitrogen to decompose — you would do well to put a bit of lawn food on this stuff — and each year put a little more mulch on, or do what I have on occasion; rake it all off, screen it, and dig in the decomposed stuff. You can till in the small stuff, but you have to remove the larger chunks, or they will stick in your tiller tines or bung up your shovel. But you can't beat it, if you have the time, for a cheap source of bulk organic material. There can be surprising side effects to using this cheap bulk material. Once I dug out a large walkway to a depth of about nine inches and filled it solid with this free stuff. One morning several months later, the whole area was a solid mass of inky cap mushrooms. They were gone in a day, with no action needed on my part. Similar things happen with slime molds; they look like something large and ugly died, but they will soon be gone, no need to panic—unless the Garden Club's coming on that particular morning. Even then, claim that you planned it all as a Teaching Opportunity.

Composted cow manure, Leaf Pro®, and peat moss (no food value but it will break up clay, hold water, and increase soil acidity) are all easily and cheaply available, which is a good thing because you need a lot of CGS to make a difference in your soil. Amending soil is a lot like making chicken soup; you don't get anything out of the pot if you don't put anything in.

Current wisdom tells you not to amend too much because when a plant's roots get to the edge of the amended soil and hit hard clay, they turn sideways just as if they were in a pot. I amend, nevertheless. At Behnke's, we recommend roughening the edges of the hole to force the roots into nooks and crannies and start them out into the cold, hard, unamended world. I have a little less than two acres, most of that is lawn which I only mow, do not amend or bother with — and just for maintenance and planting, I go through 30 pickup loads of composted manure a year. I need to amend with that much stuff just to break up the clay (and the manure is free, thanks to

Moral of the Story: Buy mulch if it has to look good, but *never pass up any opportunity to add organic matter to the soil.*

Enjoying Thyme in the Garden and at the Table

— by Lori Hicks, Behnke Staff

Thyme is one of the more delightful gifts from the Mediterranean region. This perennial plant belongs to the genus *Thymus*, a huge family of aromatic plants with small leaves and twiggy stems. Thyme is popular with gardeners and cooks alike and is prized for its performance in rock gardens, borders, containers, herb gardens and, of course, the kitchen.

Thyme has a special talent for lending complexity to a dish and is best combined with other herbs, as in classic *Bouquet Garni* and *Herbes de Provence*. A bit of thyme will enhance other flavors; a bit more will lend its own unique and wonderful flavor to a dish. In cooking, thyme is terrific with vegetables, particularly squash, carrots and in pasta primavera. Soups, stews, sauces and dressings are all improved with the addition of thyme, either alone or in combination with other herbs.

Use thyme fresh from the garden whenever possible. Although dried thyme has the familiar flavor, it lacks a wonderful, subtle quality — the *je ne sais quoi* of fresh thyme. Rudyard Kipling described it as the “wind-bit thyme that smells like the perfume of the dawn in paradise.”

Thyme is easy to grow. Although it is never invasive, it rambles and spreads with minimal effort from the gardener. Plant thyme in a sunny spot. It will thrive in poor soil as long as it has adequate drainage. Too much fertilizer will result in a profusion of leaves with weaker fragrance and flavor — dry, poor soil actually produces a higher concentration of the fragrant oils in the leaves. Additionally, leaves harvested late in the season, when the plants are in bloom, will be the most aromatic of all. Harvest thyme early in the day after the dew has dried. Tie the sprigs into small bundles and hang in a well ventilated, dark area until dry.

Enjoy thyme in the garden throughout the season. Plant it at the edges of borders and kneel upon it as you work. Or use creeping thyme as a groundcover in container gardens on your deck or patio. Brush your hand across the plant as you happen by to release the delicious fragrance.

Traditional Bouquet Garni

A standard addition to soups, stews and stocks. Use fresh herbs.

- 2 sprigs parsley
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 1 sprig marjoram
- Half a bay leaf

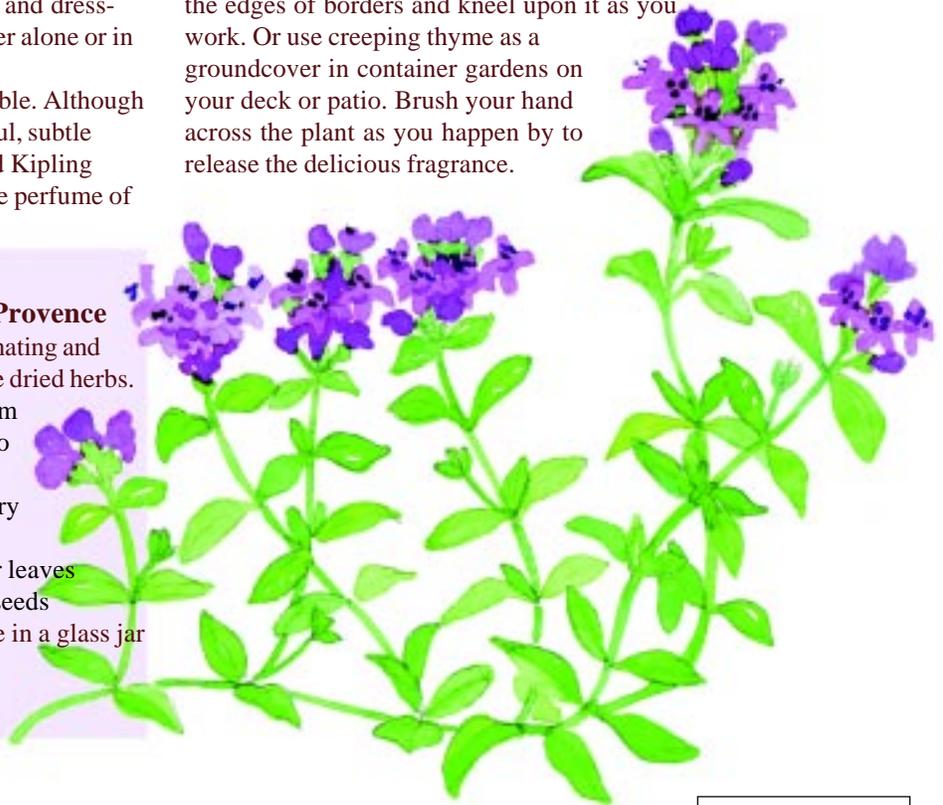
Wrap herbs together in a square of cheesecloth and tie with string. Drop into cooking food and remove before serving.

Herbes de Provence

Excellent for marinating and grilling meats. Use dried herbs.

- 2 parts marjoram
- 2 parts oregano
- 2 parts savory
- 4 parts rosemary
- 4 parts thyme
- 1 part lavender leaves
- 1 part fennel seeds

Combine and store in a glass jar for up to one year.



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