

Belgian Giant: Our Heirloom Tomato

Do you want to grow a really BIG tomato? Then you need the Belgian Giant. One of the most interesting tomatoes grown at Behnke Nurseries, the Belgian Giant grows over 8 feet tall and bears fruit 6-8 inches in diameter, weighing 1 to 2 pounds each. The fruit, pinker than most tomatoes, is sweet, not acid, and is very meaty. Like many heirloom tomatoes, it is intensely flavorful but does not show the disease resistance of the newer hybrids. Many of us at the nursery consider it the perfect sandwich tomato. As Ele Behnke, manager of the Christmas Shop, says, "One slice will cover the sandwich and then some!"

Albert Behnke, founder of Behnke Nurseries, discovered the tomato many years ago. Fascinated by the large, pink fruits and captivated by the taste, he bought some of the tomatoes and harvested the seeds. He grew his first crop outside the little house where the Garden Shop now stands and shared the abundant crop of tomatoes with his employees. Extremely pleased with the tomato, he harvested seeds for the next year's crop and began a Behnke tradition. In fact, the tomato was so important to him that he stored the seeds in several coffee cans and gave them to different family members so that a fire in one home wouldn't wipe out his entire crop of seeds.

In the early 1950's people came from all over the East Coast to buy Belgian Giant tomato plants at Behnke Nurseries. Even now, some customers will drive for hours to purchase this unique plant. For example, one customer comes from as far as Richmond every year in late April to purchase 12 dozen plants for his garden! And another drives from Charleston, S.C., each year for his Belgian Giants.

At our propagation facilities in Largo, the Belgian Giant tomato is grown for a seed crop every three years. Only the most perfect fruit are harvested for seeds. The harvesting procedure hasn't changed much over the years. The fruit is selected, then allowed to ferment for several weeks. The seeds are strained and washed, then dried and stored. However, today we store the seeds in the company vault rather than in the backs of our closets.

For great taste and BIG tomatoes, try a Belgian Giant. After many years and many new varieties, it still remains an old favorite here at Behnke Nurseries.



AARS Roses are Winners!

When shopping for roses at Behnke Nurseries, consider the varieties that have special tags which identify them as AARS winners. This tag means that these roses have passed stringent field tests throughout the United States and qualify to be among a select group of **All-America Rose Selection (AARS)** roses.

After the passage of the Plant Patent Act of 1930, many new varieties of roses were introduced to the plant market. Not all of the newly-introduced roses lived up to their grower's claims. Some of the new varieties were of inferior quality and some were even renamed to attract buyers. In 1938, the major rose growers formed a non-profit organization, the **All-America Rose Selection**. The purpose of this group was to recognize truly outstanding roses and to provide an objective standard for the public to judge the quality of the best new roses. To become an AARS winner, a new rose has to be evaluated for two years at 26 testing stations located throughout the United States. A rose must receive a passing score in 14 evaluation categories at every testing station. There have been some years when no rose met the high standards to qualify for AARS honors.

Whether you plant the rose in Florida or North Dakota, you can be confident that an AARS rose will perform well under your specific growing conditions.

—Gene Sumi, Customer Service

Meet: Ami Dorn



You may not recognize her face, but if you heard her say "Hello, Behnke Nurseries" you would consider her an old friend, indeed. Ami has been our primary phone operator here at Behnke's for over twelve years.

Ami was born in Texas and raised in Linthicum, MD. She holds a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Maryland. Her many interests include Russian history, cooking, sewing and film (she is a member of the American Film Institute). An avid gardener, Ami starts hundreds of flowers from seed every year. Her flower and vegetable gardens are a local legend.

Ami pulls in dozens and dozens of ribbons every year at the Anne Arundel County Fair for her entries in many categories, including vegetables, cut flowers, cakes, pies, and her specialty, pickles, jams and jellies. Ami shares one of her prize-winning recipes below.

Strawberry-Rhubarb Jam

- 4 cups strawberries, washed & stemmed
- 2 cups chopped rhubarb (about 4 stalks)
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 package powdered pectin
- 5½ cups sugar

Crush strawberries; place in a large sauce pot. Combine chopped rhubarb with strawberries. Add lemon juice and pectin. Bring to a rolling boil over high heat. Add sugar; return to a rolling boil. Boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Pour hot into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch head space. Adjust caps. Process 10 min. in boiling water bath. Yield: about 6 half pints.
—Ball Blue Book, 32nd edition

Don't Let Your Garden Go Hungry

Your landscape knows when it's time to add some fertilizer to your lawn and garden. When the weather warms up, take a close look at your landscape for signs of nutrient deficiencies.

As the soil becomes warmer, the plants' roots stretch through the soil, seeking food. When they can't find enough, plant growth is stunted and the plant starts to show signs of starvation. On some plants, for example, normally green leaves turn yellow, definitely the wrong color. Green lawns may become spotty or lighter in color.

If your landscape shows symptoms like these, it's time to fertilize. So, stroll on down to Behnke Nurseries' Garden Shop and take a gander at all the choices you have. Confused? Just talk to one of our garden professionals. They'll help you choose just the right products for you, your garden, and your lawn.

Did you know fertilizers come in liquid or dry forms? Some are premixed and ready to attach to garden hoses. Some contain slow and fast release foods so your plants can eat a little now and a little later. Furthermore, fertilizers can be made from a variety of materials, some naturally occurring (or organic) and others chemically created. The list goes on and on so don't be shy. Ask a professional.

And remember, always follow the directions on the label carefully. You'll find that the standard approach is to apply fertilizer to moist soil and dry foliage, BUT there are always exceptions to the rule. Pay attention to the label. It will indicate precisely how you should proceed. If you have a question, give us a call! That way, you'll be sure to get the results you want.

Contain Your Enthusiasm!

Our professionally designed, pre-planted container gardens were such a hit last spring, we've decided to expand the selection. And even more exciting, we'll custom design and plant a container garden just for you! Just bring us your pot, window box, strawberry jar, or choose one of ours. Then select the plants you'd like to use. For a small fee, we'll professionally design and plant your container garden.

For those of you who don't-know-what-you-want-until-you-see-it, come visit Behnke's and check out our selection of container gardens. You'll find a dazzling variety of annual plantings, herb gardens, and even some perennial collections. Each pot is labeled with the plants contained within, and the recommended exposure (sun, shade, or part shade). Most of our container gardens will be priced between \$12.99 and \$49.99. *Available late April.*



Garden Recipes

These recipes were provided by Melodie Likel, our Seminar Coordinator and one of our perennial experts. They are two of her favorites for enhancing the fresh vegetables from her garden.

Orange Champagne Vinaigrette

This vinaigrette is perfect for garden-fresh lettuce and basil. It complements the flavors without overpowering them.

- ½ cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- ¼ cup champagne vinegar or white wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp grated orange rind
- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup chopped, toasted walnuts

Whisk all ingredients together. Serve over small mixed lettuces and fresh basil leaves. Sprinkle with chopped toasted walnuts.



Cherry Tomatoes Au Gratin

Serve this luscious dish with extra french bread to mop up the delicious juices. Choose a variety of colorful cherry tomatoes to delight the eye as well as the palette. Prepare to fight over seconds!

- 2 cups cherry tomatoes and small pear tomatoes in several colors
- 1½ cups day-old french bread, cut in 1" cubes
- 1-3 cloves sliced garlic
- ¼ cup freshly-grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼-½ cup coarsely-chopped Italian parsley
- salt and pepper to taste
- ~¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Toss all ingredients, except olive oil, together and spread in a 9" square or 9" x 13" pan. Drizzle with olive oil and bake for 20 min. at 375°. Serves 4.

HOT STUFF!

Our selection of pepper plants is sure to please everyone, from sissies to real tough customers (you know who you are). As a guide, we've prepared this chart which rates the hot peppers available at Behnke's this year.

In addition to hot peppers, we carry many sweet bell peppers in a variety of colors - green, orange, chocolate, and more.

- Habañero** Hottest of the hot, 1000 times hotter than jalapeño!
- Charleston Hot**.....15 times hotter than jalapeño; heavy yielding
- Giant Thai Hot**.... Twice the flesh as the old Thai Hot; conical pepper
- Thai Hot Dragon** Prolific, high-yielding and very hot! Dries fast
- Super Chili Hybrid** . Zesty; All-America winner; good for containers
- Super Cayenne II Hybrid** Good flavor, high pungency
- Cherry Bomb Hybrid**..Medium-hot; great for pickling; heavy yields
- Serrano Chili**...Flavorful, great for chili sauce, salsa, vinegar, pickles
- Jalapa Hybrid**.....Premier hybrid jalapeño; compact, heavy yielding
- Garden Salsa Hybrid** . Pick green for delicious salsa; matures red
- Ancho**..... Heart-shaped fruit perfect for chilies rellanos; rich flavor
- Numex Big Jim** A great variety for chilies rellanos
- Senorita** Mild, spicy fruit is cylindrical in shape; sturdy plants
- Mulato Isleno**.....Rich, deep chocolate brown when ripe; mild
- Anaheim Chili**..... A popular pepper; continuous, high yield
- Pasilla Bajio**.....Very little heat, almost herbal in flavor

Upcoming Events at Behnke Nurseries

Beltsville location. Call (301) 937-1100 for more information

Camellia Society of the Potomac Valley Spring Show

Saturday & Sunday, March 23rd and 24th, 1996

Members of the Camellia Society of the Potomac Valley will hold their 4th Annual Spring Show in our greenhouses. The show, featuring *Camellia japonica* in a wide variety of unusual cultivars, will be judged at 10 am on Saturday, then open to the public. Take advantage of this opportunity to talk about camellias with the experts. At 3 pm each day, **Dr. Akerman** will discuss cold-hardy cultivars he has developed in conjunction with the **National Arboretum**.

Hosta Club Cut-Leaf Show

Saturday & Sunday, June 15th and 16th, 1996 Judging 10 - 12 noon

Open to the public Saturday 12 - 4:30 pm • Sunday 10 - 4:30 pm

Members of the Potomac Hosta Club will hold their annual show in our Seminar Building. This is a great way to see some of the most popular and newly introduced varieties. Visit the show and take advantage of the opportunity to talk with the Club's hosta experts. This is the first time the show has been held in Maryland!

Beardless Iris Show

Saturday, June 22, 1996

Don't miss this opportunity to see some of the most exquisite cut flowers that nature offers. The Beardless Iris Society Show is always a breathtaking experience.



Behnke's Gardening Tips

March

Rake leaves and other debris from under fruit trees to help prevent disease.

Plant some pansies for cheerful color and spring fragrance. *Behnke pansies* love the cold weather and will give you a long season of bloom.

Mid-March is a good time to reseed your lawn. Pick up our *Guide to a Superior Lawn* for step-by-step instructions. And choose *Behnke's Best* seed for great results in the Washington D.C. area.

Test your soil and apply dolomitic limestone to your lawn now if the pH is too low (6.5 is just about right).

Sow seeds for cool-weather crops, such as *broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower* and *Brussels sprouts* directly into the ground late in March.

Apply *Milky Spore*, a biological substance, to the soil now to safely control Japanese beetles. These pests feed on the roots in your lawn as grubs, and on the rest of the garden when they mature. *Ask for it at our Garden Shop after April 1st.*

April

Begin working on your vegetable garden soil in earnest. Turn the soil frequently and add *cow manure, peat moss, compost and other organic soil amendments*. Adjust the pH, if necessary, to around 7.

Plant *lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, berries, asparagus, garlic, chives* and *perennial herbs*. Behnke's vegetable crop is the largest ever!

Mandevilla Vines will be blooming in our greenhouses in mid-April. These incredible plants will give you a vigorous growing vine full of hot pink trumpet-shaped blossoms from now 'til the first frost. We use a lot of these vines in landscaping our nursery, and were completely sold out last year before August! Buy your vine now, enjoy it inside until after the last frost, then put it in a spot that will get full sun for the rest of the summer. You'll be amply rewarded with glorious color.

Sow the first crop of *dill seeds* this month. Continue to sow seeds every few weeks to guarantee fresh dill all season.

May

Mothers' Day is May 12th. Behnke Florist can handle your local or FTD deliveries to make Mom's day the best ever. Or, consider a *flat of flowering annuals, a hanging basket, an AARS winning rose (see page 1), a pair of garden clogs, or a super-sharp set of quality pruning shears*. Or, if none of these ideas strikes your fancy, let Mom decide — our *Gift Certificates* are always the perfect solution.

Chrysanthemums will appreciate a top dressing of a good fertilizer now. *GardenTone®* is excellent, but any all purpose fertilizer for flowering plants will do. For spectacular mums this fall, pinch the plants two to three times from now until early to mid-July. The result will be bushy plants loaded with buds!

You can safely plant tender annuals this month. The last frost date for Washington D.C. is May 1st. For most of the suburbs, you should wait until the 10th. If you just can't stand to lose those two weeks of growing time, take a chance and plant early. If a frost is expected, simply cover tender transplants overnight.

This is the month to set houseplants outdoors for the summer. Be careful to gradually introduce the plants to the higher levels of sunlight. If cold is expected, bring houseplants indoors for the night.

June

Check out our huge selection of *container gardens*. We've done all the work for you. They're perfect anywhere, especially patios, porches, or decks. Just add water! (and a little fertilizer now and then).

Father's Day is June 16th. Is there a special garden tool he has been wanting? A Behnke *Gift Certificate* is always an appreciated gift.

Feed your lawn this month. Including the two fall feedings (September and November), provide a yearly total of three pounds of nitrogen. We recommend *Espoma Lawn Food*.

If there is not sufficient rainfall, provide your lawn with one inch of water per week during summer and through the fall.

1996

Call Behnke's for more information: (301) 937-1100

The Avant Gardener

Exciting introductions to the world of plants

by Helmut Jaehnigen

Helmut, manager of our Woody Plant Department for most of his thirty-four years at Behnke's, is always on the look-out for interesting plants that will perform to your satisfaction and grace your landscape with their beauty.

Behnke's has always been the best place to get top quality rose bushes. You'll find all the newest varieties along with the older tried-and-true favorites. The 1996 All-America Rose Selection (see page 1) winners are: 'St. Patrick', a mint-green blush over a yellow flower, 'Mt. Hood', an ivory-white grandiflora, 'Easy Living', a slightly ruffled apricot floribunda, and 'Carefree Delight', a shrub-type rose whose flowers are pink with a white center. Of course, we will also feature 'Flower Carpet', introduced last year, an everblooming rose which tolerates shade and is disease resistant.

Additionally, there are three new groundcover roses, 'Dawn Creeper', 'Ivory Carpet' and 'Scarlet Spreader'. They belong to the 'Freedom' series, an exciting new group of carefree roses for containers or for the landscape. They will delight you with delicate flowers in pink, white, and red from May through October. The Freedom roses were bred by Ben Williams, a local rose hybridizer from Silver Spring, who is known around the world for his many AARS-winning roses. Mr. Williams bred these little jewels for disease-resistance, extreme cold-hardiness, and continuous blooming.

The *Agapanthus x Bressingham hybrids* (Lily of the Nile) are available in blue and white. Their big flower clusters are borne on 24-inch stems and last for two months. The biggest plus, however, is that they are cold-hardy to Zone 5.

At last! The National Arboretum Hybrid *Camellias*, which are reliably cold-hardy in our area, will be available this spring. 'Snowflurry' has a beautiful double-flowered white blossom, and 'Winterstar' has a lovely clear pink flower with a yellow stamen. These camellias, with their lustrous evergreen foliage and abundant blossoms, bloom October through December — usually a period in the garden when flowers are sparse.

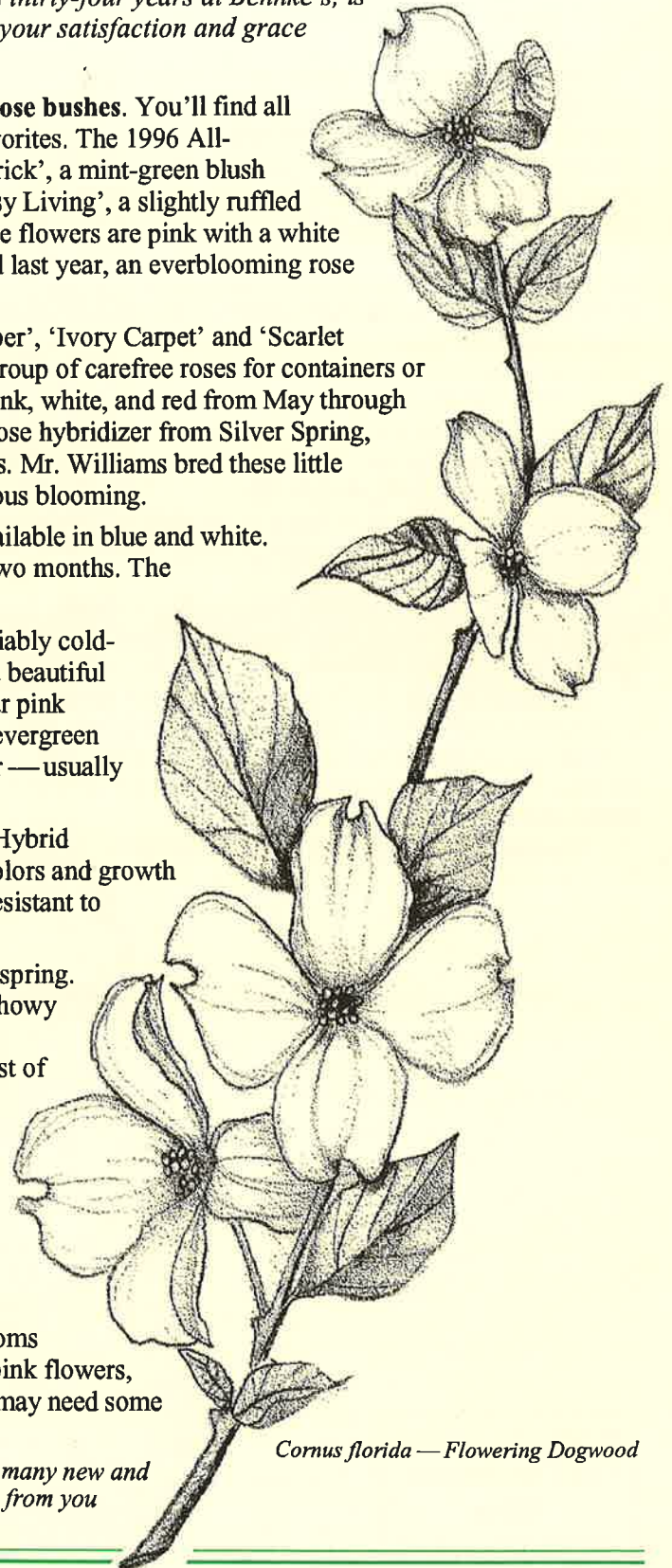
By now, you may have heard of the new disease-resistant Rutgers Hybrid **Dogwood trees**. Choose from several different varieties, bloom colors and growth habits. All the hybrids in this group are fine trees and extremely resistant to borers and the dreaded Anthracnose disease.

Three new **Trumpet Vines** will be available for the first time this spring. 'Dragon Lady', the first evergreen, cold-hardy trumpet vine, has showy red flowers that attract hummingbirds! 'Morning Calm' has huge trumpet-shaped orange-red flowers. 'Minnesota Red' is the hardiest of all and produces a dazzling succession of red trumpet flowers all summer.

If you have been searching for an attractive evergreen vine that provides privacy year 'round, look no further! We'll be carrying a new ivy this year, 'Sulphur Heart', which features large, beautifully-variegated leaves that lend a tropical look. Best of all, this plant is super cold-hardy and will thrive in shade or sun.

Loropetalum chinensis belongs to the witch hazel family and blooms early in the spring. With evergreen foliage and masses of elegant pink flowers, this plant is a real gem. Hardy to Zone 7, *Loropetalum chinensis* may need some winter protection.

At Behnke's, we enjoy plants as much as you do. We're proud to bring many new and interesting selections to the market each year — and we'd love to hear from you about how these plants perform in your garden.



Cornus florida — Flowering Dogwood

Get in the Pink with Dianthus

Dianthus, commonly known as garden pinks, are treasured garden acquisitions. Many of them are evergreen or semi-evergreen and flower from late spring into summer. Some varieties are deliciously-scented and good for cutting.

They prefer a sunny location, with very well-drained garden soil and a pH close to neutral. You may have to add an occasional handful of lime to maintain the correct pH. Deadheading (removing spent flowers) is a must if you want repeat blooms.

Dianthus, of the short kind, are great either for the front of the border or in a rock garden. The tall varieties tend to enliven the mid-border. This garden plant provides its own charm and unique color combinations to perk up the dullest of borders.

One of the most adorable of the *Dianthus* is 'Tiny Rubies'. The flowers are a deep, full pink and fully double. The spreading mass of green foliage is completely hidden when these tiny, fragrant gems blossom in June. This 4-inch plant is a favorite of rock gardeners.

Dianthus 'Spotty', another short variety, 8 inches, has wonderful white flowers with two distinct rose-colored spots on each petal. Hence, its name.

Dianthus 'Frosty Fire' is going to be a new favorite among perennial lovers. Imagine a small 6 to 8 inch plant with fabulous blue foliage topped off with double, red blooms. This plant flowers in late spring, and continues to flower sporadically into the summer.

Dianthus 'Little Bobby' is small, but mighty. Picture a

bright raspberry-red flower with a darker eye resting on a blue waxy foliage...all this on a plant less than 6 inches tall. This little plant will certainly wake up the border!

Another *Dianthus* that's sure to attract attention is 'Feuerhexe'. (German for 'Firewitch'). With a name like that, it's got to be different. This low-growing, 6 - 8 inch tall plant sports single magenta flowers with deep blue foliage. Nothing compares to this dramatic combination.



Dianthus 'Bath's Pink' is one of the most beautiful of the short *Dianthus*. Its lovely silver-blue foliage bears single pink flowers on a plant less than 10 inches tall. This highly fragrant species is one of the most heat-tolerant and drought-tolerant.

Dianthus 'Danielle Marie' commands attention because of its double, salmon flowers in late spring. Its height, 10 - 15 inches, makes it an ideal choice for the

middle of the border.

Dianthus 'Her Majesty', 12 - 18 inches tall, is elegant enough to make the Queen pay tribute to its gorgeous fragrant, double white flower and to its great foliage.

To cover all of the wonderful *Dianthus* available at Behnke Nurseries would take pages. You'll find over 25 different cultivars in a variety of colors and shapes (singles, semi-doubles, and doubles). Each one has its own unique charm. Come in and check out our wide and varied selection. Every gardener needs one of these old-fashioned favorites to enhance the perennial border.

—Gertrude Greengloves

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