

## A Perfect Tabletop Christmas Tree

— by Lori Hicks

When she was almost two, our first daughter was so enchanted by our Christmas tree that bedtime became a struggle. We decided that a tabletop tree in her room would help ease the transition between wakefulness and sleep — and it just might inspire some visions of sugarplums to sweeten her dreams.

An artificial tree just didn't seem right for this very genuine little girl, and cut trees that were short enough were straggly and misshapen. So we settled on a Norfolk Island Pine, a tropical evergreen with soft, lustrous green needles and a distinctive tiered branching habit. Norfolk Island Pines are native to the tiny South Pacific island of the same name, where they sometimes reach a height of 200 feet. Norfolk Island Pines are grown as houseplants in this part of the world, and under average household conditions they grow only four to six inches per year.

The tree we picked stood about three feet tall including the pot, and after being strung with homemade paper chains and decorated with tiny ornaments, it was, for one delighted little girl, the most perfect tabletop Christmas tree in the world.

Five Christmases have come and gone, and the years have brought some changes and two more daughters. But the tradition of our tabletop Christmas tree has endured. The tree has become taller and more beautiful, its branches sturdier and farther reaching. This is fortunate as each Christmas has brought more "treasures" to test the branches. The Norfolk Island Pine has expanded its act over the years, too. On Valentine's Day it gets strung with a garland of tiny red metallic hearts and hung with the small paper valentines brought home from school. At Easter it is put into a bright wicker basket filled with Spanish moss. We nestle chenille chicks into the moss, drape the tree with a string of mini jelly beans, and adorn the branches with blown eggs that the children decorate themselves.

When it's not enjoying the limelight, our Norfolk Island Pine dwells in a sunny corner among the ordinary plants. It needs cool temperatures in winter, especially at night. I water it about once a week, less often when it's just been repotted, and more often in summer when it stays on a shady back porch. These summers outside add strength and thickness to the main trunk and branches, and a few inches each year to the height. I fertilize about once a month — more in summer and less in winter. Our tree has never been bothered by insects, probably because I hose it off several times a year.

A Norfolk Island Pine is a gem among indoor plants, whether used as a houseplant or as a seasonal decoration. It is slow growing, but in my book, that's a definite attribute. For if they grew as quickly as their cousins across the globe, my plant would be hitting the ceiling about now. And although I realize sentimental value is involved — I'd sooner cut a hole in the roof than part with it! ❧

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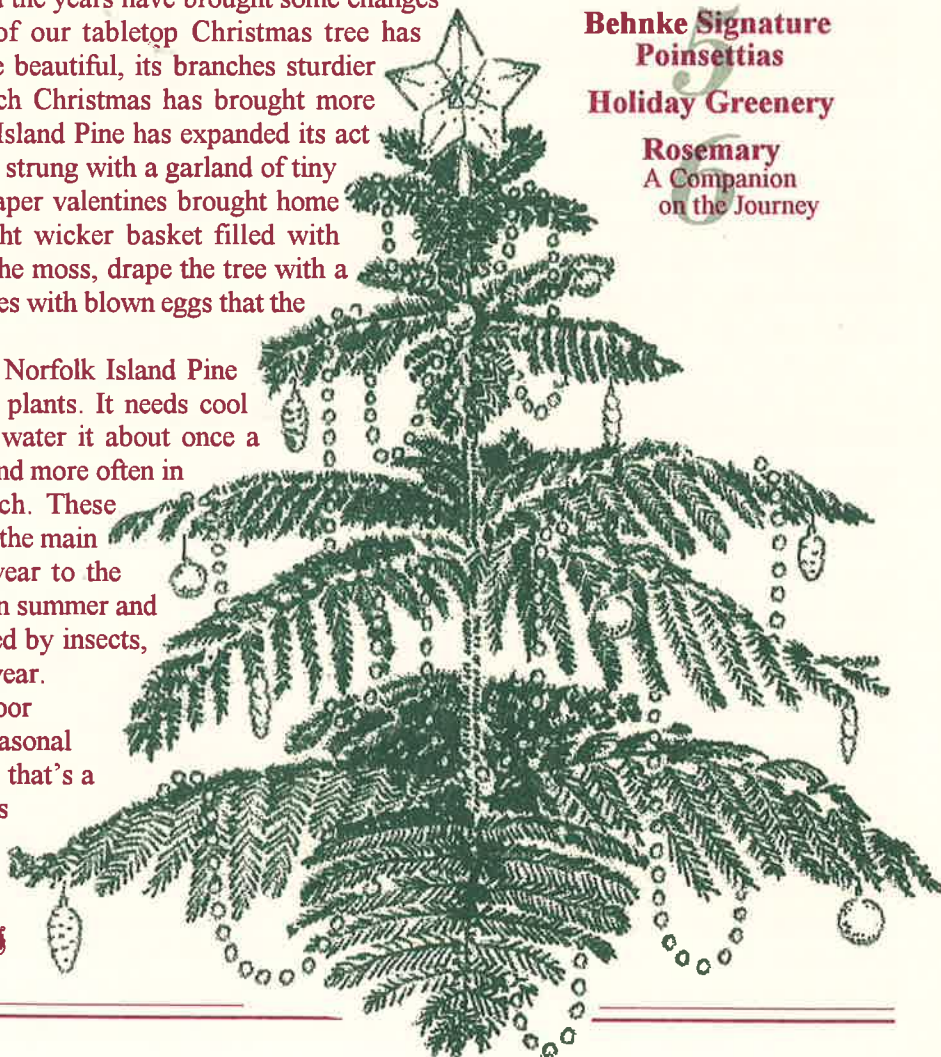
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## Meet: Ele Behnke



Eleanor Behnke, affectionately known as Ele, has been an important part of Behnke Nurseries since 1976, when she and her husband Roland, the past nursery president, moved here after his retirement from the Air Force. At that time, Ele joined Sonja Behnke Festerling, our current nursery President, in the Christmas Shop, setting the standards for the shop and doing much of the buying herself. She still personally selects each item that we carry in the shop, and is known for her tireless energy and determination to find just the right unique items for the shop.

Ele was born in New York City, but considers Nebraska home. She earned a bachelor's degree with double majors in German and Primary Education from Midland Lutheran College in Nebraska. She met Roland while he was stationed in Nebraska, and they were married after a whirlwind courtship. Ele likes to spend her spare time with her 3 children and 5 grandchildren, and enjoys all forms of needlework. After living in Beltsville for almost 20 years, she and Roland now enjoy the country life at their retirement house in St. Mary's County. 🍀

## Heirloom Glass Christmas Ornaments

The Behnke Nurseries Christmas Shop, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this holiday season, has grown over the years from a small corner in the Nursery to a spacious, sparkling shop featuring an enchanting array of unique gifts and decorations.

Again this year, Behnke's Christmas Shop will showcase an extensive collection of traditional, mouth-blown, hand-decorated glass ornaments from Europe. These unique works of art are still created the time-honored way — a laborious process requiring skills which have been passed down through many generations of European glassworkers.

Molten glass is carefully blown into a porcelain mold. (Many of these molds are hundreds of years old.) After cooling, the inside of the hollow piece is coated with a thin layer of liquid silver. After drying in a special oven, each piece is painstakingly painted by hand. Some ornaments require up to thirty coats of paint, and each coat must thoroughly dry before the next one can be applied. The final step is the addition of a trademark cap (a design is unique to each company) — and an heirloom ornament is born.

Visitors to our shop often ask about the curious and sometimes whimsical forms of the ornaments. Each one is deeply steeped in tradition and folklore. Here is a sampling of some of the most popular ornaments and their meanings:

**Ladybugs:** Many centuries ago European farmers suffered crop loss due to aphids. They prayed to the Virgin

Mary for help, and soon little red beetles arrived in droves to eat the aphids. In the firm belief that their prayers had been answered, the farmers dubbed the beetles Lady bugs, in honor of "Our Lady." Ladybugs are symbols of good luck.

**Pickles:** Traditionally, this is the last ornament to be hung on a German tree, after the children have gone to bed. St. Nicholas would leave an extra gift for the most observant child — the first one to spot the pickle in the morning!

**Pansies:** Also known as heartsease, pansies are believed to heal a broken heart. Legend has it that Cupid shot an arrow into a pansy blossom, which produced its heart shape and colorful center. Pansies are symbolic of sentimental thoughts and true love.

**Nutcrackers:** Original German wooden nutcrackers were painted to look like kings, noblemen and soldiers. It amused the German people to use these caricatures of their superiors to perform the menial task of cracking nuts. The nutcracker is therefore a symbol of humility and equality for all mankind.

Here are a few more familiar shapes and the qualities they symbolize:

- Bells - Joy and merriment
- Coffee Pots - Hospitality
- Baskets - Abundance & good wishes
- Birds - Happiness
- Mushrooms - Good luck
- Stars - Faith & Heavenly guidance
- Acorns - Rebirth of life
- Fir Trees - Triumph over hard winters
- Tulips - Passion and hope 🍀

# Save 25%

Present this coupon to save 25% on any one regularly priced item during:  
**Holiday Open House, Thursday, Nov. 21, 6:30 to 9, in Beltsville, or**  
**Poinsettia Tours, Sunday, December 1, 12 noon to 4, in Largo**



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# Holiday Happenings


 **HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE**  
Thursday, November 21st,  
6:30 to 9pm, in Beltsville

We invite you to enjoy classical holiday music and an array of goodies to nibble as you stroll through our beautifully decorated greenhouses.

 **POINSETTIA TOURS**  
Sunday, December 1st,  
from 12 to 4, in Largo

This is your chance to see how we grow literally thousands of poinsettias in the greenhouses at our Largo location. A perfect photo opportunity for holiday greeting cards. Free.

*Clip the coupon on page 2 for extra savings during the two events listed above.*

 **HOLIDAY WORKSHOP**  
Saturday, December 7th,  
10 am to 1 pm, in Beltsville

Floral designer Anne Brooks will demonstrate techniques for creating decorative centerpieces and door swags. Then, with a wonderful selection of materials to choose from, you'll create your own holiday arrangements! All participants are asked to bring their own clippers or pruners.

Tuition is \$25.

Reservations are required.

Please call (301) 937-1100 for more information or to register.

*Tuition includes the use of all materials needed to make both a door swag and a centerpiece.*

## HOLIDAY HOURS

December 24th - 8am to 5pm

Closed December 25

December 31st - 8am to 5pm

Closed January 1st



## O Tannenbaum

—by Helmut Jaehnigen

For over 30 years Behnke Nurseries has been offering the very finest trees for Christmas, selected from the best growers. Over the years, I have strived to build a good relationship with the tree farmers and plantation owners that grow trees for us, and I personally visit every few years to inspect the fields. I would like to share with you some of the things that they have taught me about selecting a good tree.

A **Fraser Fir** is definitely my first choice for a cut Christmas tree. Its soft, shiny, dark green needles, wonderful fragrance, and straight trunk make it a winner. The well-spaced, strong branches make it easy to reach into the interior of the tree to decorate, and the soft needles are kind to your hands. But best of all, a Fraser Fir will stay fresher inside the house than any other tree. I often keep mine until the end of January, and it doesn't even drop its needles when I take it outside. As its name implies, the Fraser Fir belongs to the fir family and is native to only a few mountain tops in North Carolina with elevations between 4 and 6 thousand feet. It can't be grown below 3 thousand feet because it needs the cooler climate and good drainage of the mountains.

The **Canadian Balsam Fir** is a close cousin to the Fraser and also has a nice straight trunk. Canadian Balsam has a good piney fragrance and its needles are shiny and soft, although they may begin to drop by New Year's Eve. Not a bad trade-off for a less expensive tree.

The majestic **Noble Fir** comes from the cool Pacific Northwest, generally from Washington state. It needs the mist that comes from the ocean to develop its strong branches and sturdy trunk. It has long, well-spaced, stiff branches of shimmering silvery green that will support even the heaviest ornaments. In addition, the Noble Fir has a straight trunk, a fragrance reminiscent of a woodland forest, and long-lasting needles.

The **Douglas Fir** has long needles and a sweet orange-like fragrance that fills the room. This tree is long lasting and keeps its needles well. Because it is full and compact, there's no need to decorate the

inner branches. This is our first choice when selecting a tree to flock.

**Blue Spruce**, the elegant aristocrat, has storybook appeal — branches are stiff, easy to decorate, and strong enough to hold very heavy ornaments. The needles are short and beautifully blue. The trade-off here is that the breathtakingly beautiful Blue Spruce is more expensive and will not last as long as the Fraser —but it is a good choice for luxurious color and a perfect Christmas tree shape.

**White Pines** provide you with extremely long, soft, almost feathery needles. The tree is very full and compact, and again, the decorating is limited to the outside. It is less fragrant than firs, with a piney scent.

No matter which tree you decide is right for your home, plan to purchase it as soon as possible in the season. Almost all trees are cut in November, and the sooner you begin to care for your tree, the longer it will last. At Behnke's, we spray our trees daily to keep them as fresh as possible, and we'll carefully put a net around your tree so that the branches won't be damaged during transport. We'll also make a fresh cut at the bottom of the trunk so your tree can absorb the most water. At home, you can plunge your tree into a bucket of water and leave it in a shady spot outdoors, with the net still intact. Add some tree preservative to the bucket and cut the netting off the day before you want to set up your tree so that the branches can relax. When you're ready to bring it in the house, you will have a fresh, fragrant, well-hydrated and fire resistant tree that will hang on to its needles longer than you ever thought possible. ❧

## Try an Easy Layered Compost Bed

—by Melodie Likel

With planning and patience it's easy to have the wonderfully rich organic beds that most shrubs and flowers prefer, with little of the backbreaking spading and amending that local clay soils usually require. Fall is an excellent time to begin a layered compost bed — there is an abundance of suitable materials readily available. The entire process takes approximately six months. Quicker results can be obtained by turning the pile once a month during warm weather and/or by adding a compost activator, such as Ringer Compost Plus® (available in Behnke's Garden Shop), when piling on the various layers. Try it yourself this fall!

### Here's How Easy It Is

1. Use a garden hose to outline the perimeter of your new bed. Try to achieve a pleasing shape with flowing curved lines.
2. Using a sharp, flat, garden spade dig a narrow v-shaped trench, 4-6" deep around the entire perimeter of the bed. Toss turf and soil to the inside.
3. Cover the area inside the trench with a layer of newspapers, 10 - 12 sheets thick. The newspaper ensures that the grass underneath will be killed.
4. Layer 1 - 2" of peat moss on top of the newspaper. Moisten with a fine spray of water. Cover the peat moss with a 1 - 2" layer of dehydrated cow manure. Moisten again if the manure layer is very dry.
5. Now pile on about a foot of any good organic material you can find: grass clippings, spent annuals, perennial debris, sawdust, wood shavings from the hamster cage, veggie peelings, coffee grounds, raked fall leaves, and the old potting soil from the summer's annual pots. If the supply of suitable materials is dwindling in your yard, be creative! Your neighbors would probably love to have you cart away that pile of leaves in front of their house. And most counties have composting leaves for the taking.
6. Add a second layer of peat moss and then another layer of manure. Continue building up the layers — organic matter, peat moss, then cow manure — until the pile is about 3 feet high. Moisten as you build and keep the materials within the trench that delineates the bed.
7. Your bed is now ready to "cure." Cover the pile with heavy-duty black plastic, which will keep the pile warm and aid in decomposition. Punch holes in the plastic so that air and water can reach the composting materials. Stake or weight the plastic down.
8. Now sit back and let nature's microbial minions and legions of earthworms take on the task of transforming the not so lovely pile into wonderful, rich organic soil in a few short months. Early next season when other gardeners are digging, amending and digging again, you'll be planting in your rich, organic beds.

## Gifts for Gardeners

—by Helen Gardiner

**Garden Sundial** - Absolutely the perfect gift for the gardener who has everything. Our Garden Shop carries a wide variety of styles and finishes.

**Felco Pruning Shears** - Everyone at Behnke Nurseries agrees that these are among the best pruning shears available. Felco tools are precision aligned and hollow ground to cut cleanly, and all parts are easily replaced.

**Sheepskin Garden Gloves** - Every gardener needs at least one pair of really good gloves. These gloves are contoured for maximum fit and flexibility, and they will protect your hands against the rough chores of gardening. The soft, breathable leather will also keep your hands smooth and wonderfully soft. 🐑

## Garden Recipes

Our **Fruit and Berry Festival** was held Sunday, Oct. 20th. If you missed it, there's always next year! In the meantime, try this great recipe from our free booklet which was available at the festival.

### Cranberry-Raisin Spread

*An outstanding alternative to cream cheese and butter*

- 1 bag (12 oz.) cranberries
- 1 cup golden raisins
- 1½ cups cranberry juice cocktail or apple juice
- ½ to ¾ cup sugar
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves

Place all ingredients in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally and pressing down on the berries to break them, for 15 minutes or until thick.

Pour into bowl, cool, cover and chill. *Makes 2½ cups; 29 calories /Tbsp.*

## Flocked Christmas Trees

Behnke Nurseries is one of the few places where you can still purchase professionally flocked Christmas trees. A perfect Douglas fir is selected, strung with tiny, glistening lights, and then sprayed with a coating of dazzling, pure white flocking. The result is a storybook perfect Christmas tree that looks as if it were covered with

natural snow. When lit, the entire tree seems to glow from within. The flocking is not only picturesque, but will also help fireproof and extend the life of your tree.

This year we're excited to be able to offer a beautiful 6 - 7 foot tree, with lights and beautifully flocked for under \$100. Start a new family tradition! 🌲

*Always the Finest...*

## Behnke Signature Poinsettias

— by Hank Doong

It isn't the distinctive brown paper cover, printed with the Behnke name, that makes a Behnke Signature Poinsettia. It's the serious poinsettia growers at our Largo Greenhouses. Because, before we decided to put our name on a poinsettia, we had to decide if we were willing to provide the extra special care it would take to grow the finest poinsettia available.

- Were we willing to hand-tie each poinsettia, with double-knots and double-loops, to the carefully slanted stakes in each pot? 42,000 poinsettias? If not, the plants couldn't support the heavy blooming bracts.
- Were we willing to space the pots farther apart on the greenhouse benches, using up precious square footage, so that the plants could develop the full, lush leaves we wanted?
- Were we willing to let the crop develop naturally, rather than forcing it to premature bloom? We knew we would again be using up that precious square footage by not rotating the plants in and out of the greenhouses quickly, but we wanted a plant with fully developed flowering bracts.
- Were we willing to invest the extra time when pinching back the plants to actually count the number of leaves on each stem so that we could pinch with precision? This was the only way we could be sure to get a full, lush plant with overlapping leaves.
- Were we willing to pay more for larger pots and, consequently, more potting soil, in order for our Behnke Signature Poinsettia to be in proper proportion to the pot and shown to its best advantage?
- Were we willing to take the extra time to wrap each plant as it was bought, not wrap them all ahead of time to save on labor as everyone else does? If wrapped too long, poinsettia leaves break off and gasses build up and discolor the leaves and bracts.



With over 25 varieties of poinsettias to care for, these considerations had to be made. We easily decided that our goal to make Behnke Signature Poinsettias really stand as the benchmark against which all other poinsettias could be measured was worth any expense.

This year, compare a Behnke Signature Poinsettia. Then you'll understand why so many hundreds of customers come back to us year after year for their plants. And you'll understand why first-timers stand in awe when they encounter the display and say - "I never knew poinsettias could be so beautiful!" ...Well, *we* knew they could be. §

## Fresh Holiday Greenery .....

**W**ant a genuine look and fragrance this Christmas? Choose from a wide variety of natural materials, such as:

- Mistletoe
- Pine Cones
- Incense Cedar
- Boxwood
- Evergreen Magnolia
- Holly

John Reed, our greenery buyer, travelled to New England this fall in his search to bring you the finest quality wreaths and greens at the best possible prices. He knows that the most beautiful wreaths come from the oceanside, where the rocky soil and salt air produce a unique needle formation.

John selects our wreaths, greenery, roping, boxwoods and hollies for quality and appearance. Once they arrive, our greens are carefully handled and misted several times a day to keep them fresh.

John says that the premium wreaths are made from Douglas and Fraser Fir because they are longer lasting and very fragrant. We also carry wreaths made of Balsam, Boxwood, Nobel Fir, White Pine, Concolor Fir and Blue Spruce, available both single and double-sided. (Double-sided

wreaths can be viewed from both sides - as through a window or glass door).

We also have fresh evergreen roping for your holiday mantle or to deck your doorways and windows. Choose White Pine, with its long, elegant needles and fresh piney fragrance, or long lasting White Cedar and Douglas Fir.

Try the real thing this year — you'll love the fragrance and the memories it brings back — and you'll be creating new memories as a link from one generation to another. §

## Rosemary — A Companion on the Journey

— by Lori Hicks

Rosemary is often sighted in garden centers this time of year, along with other seasonal staples such as poinsettias, holiday cactus and mistletoe. Rosemary has always had much significance throughout history, especially during Christmas. A popular legend has it that Mary was sheltered by a rosemary bush one night on her long flight into Egypt. The next morning, the flowers on the plant had turned from white to blue, to match her cloak. And the faithful rosemary is said to bloom each year on the day of Christ's Passion. To this day, rosemary is used to decorate many churches and Christian homes during religious holidays.

An aromatic woody shrub with needle-like leaves and a distinctive, somewhat piney fragrance, this herb is a mainstay of both formal herb gardens and back door kitchen gardens. When in bloom, endearing lavender-blue flowers appear in small clusters along the upper branches between the leaves. The variety *Rosmarinus officinalis roseus* has lilac pink flowers which fade to mauve in full sun. And *Rosmarinus officinalis albus* blooms in white.


As a decorative plant, Rosemary offers pine-like needles and interesting

gnarled woody stems. Under the coaxing of an appreciative gardener, a rosemary plant can be neatly clipped into a lovely topiary or majestic garden standard. One variety, *Rosmarinus officinalis prostratus* has a unique weeping habit which lends itself to being woven around a wire frame.

Cooks treasure rosemary for its distinctive pungent flavor, and others value this herb for use in potpourris, herbal teas and home remedies. But just about everyone is fascinated by the long history and abundant folklore surrounding this herb. Rosemary was widely cultivated in ancient Rome. Besides its popularity in the kitchen, rosemary was put to a variety of uses: For decorative purposes — rambling in gardens and cascading over walls; practical purposes — its fresh piney fragrance was used to scent the air indoors; ceremonial and ritual purposes — rosemary was woven into garlands to adorn statues of the gods and to honor important guests. In addition, the species term "*officinalis*" indicates that at one time rosemary was listed in the *Official Pharmacopoeia*, and was probably used as a medicine.

Rosemary has been present through many of mankind's most poignant life

experiences. This herb was used to freshen and scent christening waters at baptisms and was woven into bouquets and headdresses for women on their wedding day. Rosemary is part of many cherished family recipes and holiday traditions. And a sprig of rosemary, a symbol of remembrance, was often placed in the hands of the deceased before burial.

For many, the scent of rosemary can conjure up memories both joyful and bittersweet. And it's no wonder, this herb follows us from the cradle to the grave — and through many of the most memorable times along the way. 



*Gifts for the Gardener inside!*

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