

## When Good Garden Cats Go Bad by Fran Benton

As a master gardener, I am often asked to recommend a plant for a certain place. When I think of all the kinds of possibilities, a few tried and true plants come to mind. It needs to have nice flowers, be tolerant of kids, deer, rabbits, neglect, nature's whims, and our pets.

Well, I can think of one such group of plants - the catmints. These are not the catnips although they are related to them. Catmints or Nepeta are a group of small shrubby plants and herbs that have wonderful spikes of cool purply blue flowers. They can be large and bushy (6 hills giant) or much smaller and herb-like (Nepeta Blue Panther). One of my truly happy moments is to watch our resident herd of deer mosey past the catmint without any interest at all. Smaller catmints are nice in containers too. The catmints benefit from the "Chelsea Chop" which is a cutting down of exuberant vegetation at the time of the Chelsea Flower Show in May. The catmints respond by throwing out fat new shoots that will look spectacular and last all through the fall. They are easy to propagate by splitting in the spring.

The genus Nepeta is, of course, the genus that includes *Nepeta cativa*. I don't need to tell you what this stuff does to the feline nip addicts. Please examine the depraved behaviour on Monika's kitty cat's face. There are no institutions available at present to deal with this dreadful addiction problem. Some cats are more prone than others to fall victim to the allure of the catmint family. Sometimes as cats age they grow out of the love for nip. Others just lie there in the plant pot and drool.

Ever wonder why cats get silly on catnip? The chemical compound in the plant is called nepetalactone. It is found in the leaves and stems. The effects last for about 10 minutes before wearing off and the cat going back to normal.

If the cat smells catnip, it acts as a stimulant and you better watch out! However if the cat eats the nip it acts as a sedative and they get sleepy. And if they eat too much they will present it back to you in a way that is not pleasant!

Happy gardening and don't forget to water!

