

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns  
Issue 39, May 2, 2009

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Zelkova (*Z. serrata*) is a great shade tree. Here, it's still in fall color when other trees have shed their leaves. Considering this tree, a katsura or a lacebark elm? Zelkova's largest of the lot and sometimes shows good color in fall. Katsura is fastest growing and most reliable in fall color. Lacebark elm has the most handsome bark and widest canopy.

Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

### Another ash down, another gardener looking for a foolproof replacement tree

We **need a shade tree** and are considering a Japanese elm or a katsura. Are these hardy in zone 5? Do they have any major insect or disease problems? We just lost a big old ash tree to emerald ash borer so we'd like something **that will grow relatively quickly** but we're not keen on taking on a tree with known problems. Thanks for your help. - A & D -

Hi, A & D. My condolences regarding your ash.

I know and can tell you about the katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) but I have to make a guess

about the Japanese elm since it isn't a name I'm familiar with.

**Katsura** is a mid-sized tree, in the **50-foot** range, reliable in **zones 4-8**. It's usually pyramidal when it's young but wider-spreading with age. It's a **fast growing** tree, adding about 2 feet each year. The foliage is reddish as it emerges in spring, and turns **apricot in fall**. If you're out by the tree in fall you may smell a spicy scent -- that's the leaves as they turn. It needs moist well-drained soil and full sun.



On the left in its fall color, a katsura Steve Nikkila and I planted to replace an ash. It was about eight feet tall four years ago; now it's topped 15 feet. This year it will be taller than the stewartia (*S. pseudocamellia*) on the right, which has grown very well for its type but took 17 years to reach its current 17 feet. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

As for the Japanese elm, two trees occur to me that might warrant that name. One is a **zelkova** (*Z. serrata*), an Asian elm relative once proposed as a tree to replace the American elm in the landscape. Its claim to that position rested on its upright vase shape -- good for casting high shade -- and ability to succeed along city streets where root space is tight. It's **bigger** than the katsura by 10 or 20 feet but **slower**, growing perhaps one foot per year. **Zone 5** or maybe zone 4 to zone 8.

Another possibility is *Ulmus parvifolia*, a true elm usually called the Chinese- or **lacebark elm**. It's a **fast grower**, mid-way between the zelkova and katsura. It's got a wide, **spreading form**. It's a match for the katsura in size. Older trees are stand-outs for their **multi-color peeling bark**.

**All three** of these trees are **low care, with few pests**. At least, that's the current situation. It can change: The ash was one of our most fool-proof trees until an insect from Asia found itself a home in North America.

*Ulmus parvifolia* is sometimes confused with the Siberian elm (*U. pumila*) because the name Chinese elm has been applied to both. However, the Siberian elm has no place in today's discussion. It's true trash, a weak limbed speed demon that may be best known as an unwelcome weed tree or the neighborhood tree most likely to drop limbs during an ice storm.

## Sad to say, emerald ash borer here to stay

I have been noticing for the last two or three years, **ash trees** planted along streets (in the open, as opposed to in the woods) that appeared to have been **badly affected by emerald ash borer** -- dead branches, epicormic shoots, exit holes. For the last couple years the epicormic shoots have been looking bigger and stronger and greener and **the tree canopy seems to be recovering**. At first I thought it was just a fluke, the tree greening up for one last season, but the shoots didn't die and seem to be growing. I know we can expect regrowth from root sprouts, but these are shoots, now branches, above an existing tree trunk. I have noticed these trees in my neighborhood in southwest Detroit.

What's going on? **Have the borers moved on** to greener pastures? Are there some predators or natural controls we don't know about? - R.H. -

Young, small diameter and bark-free ash limbs are not generally favored by egg-laying ash borer adults, R.H. They're spared damage for two or three years and may survive a year or two of feeding if the borer population is low -- *anything* would be lower than the hordes we saw in 2003 - 2007.

I'd love to report otherwise but I don't see a reason we should entertain any new hope for ashes. It's **very unlikely we'll ever be shed of this new pest**.

## All in a gardening family: Homegrown Pachysandra by mail

Our son **mailed me a large box of Pachysandra** which he had dug up/pulled out from a bed. What are **my chances of transplanting these plants?** Some have roots, while others have nothing. - Pat -

**Plant them**, Pat. Loosen a bed, remove all perennial weeds, add a layer of compost, then make slits and insert a root in each furrow. Every piece that has a leaf or even just a green stem end can grow if it also has some white root attached to it.

The transplanted pachysandra bed **may seem patchy**, with **individual leaves poking up** at irregular intervals and odd angles as if the whole area had been rattled by earthquake. As evergreens, these plants will not be in a hurry to drop their greenery and grow new, so try to plant from the start for a look you can live with. Then cover the bed with two inches of fine-particle mulch to keep seedling weeds from getting a toehold. Water it regularly.

The plants **won't seem to do much the first year**. They're from a long-lived species that succeeds and persists by **a conservative increase rather than rampant growth**. However much

## Continent-wide destruction of chestnut, elm, ash

The fungal blight that crossed an ocean to attack and essentially exterminate the American chestnut at the beginning of the 20th century as well as the elm disease fungus that afflicted billions of trees in the middle of that last century are both still with us and resurgent whenever the host plant population rebounds. Elm blight reasserted itself in 2006-2007 in young elm populations and also killed some of the majestic survivors of the 1960's epidemic. Emerald ash borer seems to be on pace to follow the same route.

leaf or remnant stem each piece had at planting, that's all it will have through the end of its first season in your garden. That leaf or green stem will, however, have photosynthesized all summer and will have sent to the root quite a bit of starch. With that starch the root will first elongate and then, the next spring, produce a new leaf or two. By the end of the second season in place, given the production power of two or more leaves, the root of the transplant will begin to branch. **By the second spring** in place each bit will have enough stored energy to produce three or four leaves wherever there was one. Then we will recognize the increase as "Hey, it's **finally filling in.**"

## Dealing with invasive perennials requires a warrior's heart for battle

I'm **fighting a perennial weed** with heart-shaped basal leaves that have a leafstalk / petiole that's green near the leaf and purplish-red at its other end. It has slender roots that lead to a whitish, elongated tuber which can get quite large. When I pull the plant, leaves and crown detach. That means **the tuber remains to come back another day**. The inflorescence is a leafy stalk with blue flowers very close to the stem.

I tried smothering it at a client's and it's back in force. There is some in my own yard and at another client's. I **would like to eradicate this** very invasive thing.

I have identified this plant as *Adenophora liliifolia*, also known as False Campanula, Lilyleaf Ladybells or Lady Bells. Any idea how to get rid of it? - C.E. -



Bell towers (*Campanula rapunculoides*) threads itself through other plants' crowns and then thickens its root (right). When a gardener tugs on the plant to remove it, the crown or runner root breaks away from the tuber. That starch-rich root can produce perhaps a dozen new leaves before it needs replenishing. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

I sympathize, C.E. There are **several invasive bellflowers** (*Campanula* species such as *C. rapunculoides*) as well as ladybells (*Adenophora*) that have tuberous, regenerative roots. They win their way into our gardens with their dangling blue-violet flowers and because they are tolerant of varied growing conditions, from full sun to shade. Given a year or so to take hold they invariably remain for a long time,

either as **entrenched guerilla warriors** or because someone accepts them as **a naturalizing groundcover** perennial.

Just today I was weeding in a garden where such a bellflower settled in more than a decade ago. Between planting time and the day the garden's owner decided the plant was too weedy to be tolerated, it spread into the territory of several adjacent perennials and shrubs from whence it continues to this day to launch new invasions.

If during her first attempt at eviction the gardener had known the root's nature and the **importance of removing tuber as well as root**, she might have sliced into the center of the colony and **chased all threads outward to the nascent tubers**. She might also have lifted the neighboring perennials, washed their roots to reveal foreign matter and **extracted the tubers** from those root masses.

Alas, she was unaware, and not only left root bits in place to make a comeback but failed to **recognize them in their leaf-only appearance**. Thus the pieces had a chance to prosper from their new greenery and gather significant steam. Worse, she declined to admit the seriousness of the problem and would not smother and leave the area fallow for at least a full year. The bellflower roots maintained a presence in the nooks and crannies of other plants' territories, leading resurgences from there. Now the shrubs that were once small neighbors to the *Campanula* are large and their woody root systems cover and preserve the whole battleground.

**To kill the colony** completely requires that everything be **smothered** -- sacrificing all perennials within the shrubs' reach -- and that **biweekly or more frequent visits** be made by someone adept at recognizing the **smallest new leaf**. That person must also be as determined as I am to **pull every one**. Pulling a new leaf as it appears causes the remaining root to shrink, since it expended starch to produce a leaf which did not then live long enough to repay the root. Continual pulling eventually **exhausts the remaining root**.

Since in the garden where I worked today the garden's owner does not care to undertake or underwrite such an effort, I run a holding action. I conduct a thorough search and destroy mission when I am there every spring and fall. That keeps the plants beat back to within those woody roots.

## Oh yes, let the rain come down on the just-planted garden

Hello, Janet. To find out when I could plant my tomatoes and green peppers I found the site you used to operate, and asked for help. I live on Prince Edward Island. Now it is my third year growing **a vegetable garden**. Besides the tomatoes and peppers, I like to grow cucumbers, gourds (my nieces and nephews like them), lettuce, carrots, beets, squash, and beans. I've had pretty good success, especially **last year when we planted in the rain**. We didn't know what would happen, there was a large downpour just when we finished planting. **It was the best** garden, I was so proud.

That website was good, too. I was glad to have found it. - G.D. -

## Janet's tactics against invasive weeds

My **attack pattern on running root weeds** or weedy perennials is this:

**Loosen** the entire infested area with a garden fork.

Then, grasp a crown of the *Campanula* in one hand and with my opposite hand, insert the garden fork beneath it.

**Tug gently and steadily** on the crown while jiggling the fork.

As the soil is loosened around it, the **tuber at last pulls free**.

When I feel this happen I increase the pressure of my pull and eventually the crown-plus-tuber comes out.

If I feel a snap, I know some root is left and I chase it if I can.

I toss all these roots into a special pile so they will be thrown away with yard waste and **destroyed in a hot compost**.

**Rain right after planting is an unbeatable blessing on a garden**, G.D. It sounds like your good year of growing is proof of the pudding.

I enjoyed that forum where we first met, too. I'm very glad you found me once again.

Eventually when I establish my own website I'll build another forum. For now, this newsletter is what I do to stay in touch. I'm glad of it, "speaking with" a great many gardeners in one-to-one emails and then incorporating as many of those exchanges as I can\* in this weekly email that goes out to everyone.

\*(I listen for readers to say "Ouch, enough!" It hasn't happened yet.)

**We are all faced with great opportunities --  
brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems.  
- John William Gardner -**

### Wet garden needs plants for soggy places

I have a section in my garden where I **cannot get anything to grow**. We have dug two drainage systems. It is at the end of a big berm. Walking on it today it was gushy. I have tried hydrangeas and no way.

I would like to put in either tall perennials or hydrangea-like bushes. Any suggestion? - M.Z. -



The dark purple flowers (blue flag iris, *I. versicolor*) and the big leaves of pairie dock grow in my swale, which holds water for two days at a time -- that's wet, airless soil, a condition many perennials can't handle. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Sad to say, M.Z., it's failure such as you describe that teaches most gardeners the difference between moist, well drained ground and **wet soil**. *Hydrangea* species prefer soil that's always moist but airy, like a wrung-out rag. **Elderberries** (*Sambucus* species) and **buttonbush** (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) are better suited to soil that's sometimes so wet all the air is crowded out. Of the two, elderberry is like hydrangea in its large flowers, summer bloom and coarse (large-leaf) texture, but an elderberry is **much bigger than the average hydrangea**.

So perhaps you can manage with **an all-herbaceous line-up** -- no woodies. To learn which plants to use there, keep an eye out when you're perusing reference books or the Internet. Also keep an ear cocked at gardeners' gatherings for mention of "**bog plants**." If you can, join me today at Grass Roots Nursery in New Boston, Michigan; it's one of the best places anywhere around to see bog plants at their best and be able to buy what you've seen. If you can't make it there today, go any day and look up owner Scott Bates, probably the most practiced hand in the State with bog plants and one of the best teachers, too.

### Starting line-up for a wet garden

#### In full sun:

Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)  
Sweet flag (*Iris pseudacorus*)  
Snakeweed (*Polygonum bistortum*)  
Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)  
Queen of the prairie (*Filipendula rubra*)  
Prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*)

#### In part shade:

Marsh marigold  
Creeping forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*)  
Sweet flag  
Variegated false sweet flag (*Acorus calamus variegatus*)  
*Rodgersia*  
*Hosta*  
Turtlehead (*Chelone obliqua*)

#### A warning about bog plants:

Most are running-root plants and as such are invasive. Invasive plants in wet areas are uncontrollable. (Read *Dealing with invasive perennials* in this issue and following those control tactics in mucky soil... Not!) Thus wet areas must be designed and maintained to allow the plants to shift and align themselves as they will.

Rodgersia (right, large-leaf plant blooming white) shines in damp, shady places.  
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila



## This week in Janet's garden

### Grow with me! This week I will:

Be amazed all over again that I can **make some of the same mistakes every season**. Scraping **juniper foliage along my bare arms** is one. Reaching in to beds I know have hosted **poison ivy** in the past, without looking closely first and completely covering my skin is another. This will be an itchy week!

Although these episodes do make me wonder about junipers. I only reached into these to help them out, to cut out limbs broken when snow was stacked and plowed over them. Wouldn't you think that plant would be at least a little grateful for such attention and spare me from its irritating oil?

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**Cut all the way down** when I cut back hard or take wood out of shrubs that need regular renewal. To leave stubs six inches or a foot tall is to ask the plant to sprout most vigorously from the tips of those stubs. Each year as I repeat this cutting the old stubs will be thicker and more crowded -- each one more difficult to cut and collectively making a thicket nearly impossible to clear of dead wood.

The stubs at right, barely 4 inches tall, are of a gold-leaf variety of blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris*). I cut the plant back hard on April 9; this photo was taken May 1 to show its comeback. Every stub has sprouts coming; those on the youngest wood are most advanced.

Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

**Shrubs I cut back hard** every year include: butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*), blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*), dwarf spirea (*Spiraea x bumalda*), cooking sage (*Salvia officinalis*), lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) and beautyberry (*Callicarpa* species)

In the "**regular renewal**" category, shrubs from which I remove some canes every spring, are *Deutzia*, mock orange (*Philadelphus*), lilac, ninebark (*Physocarpus*), *Forsythia*, *Hydrangea* and spring blooming spirea (*Spiraea vanhouttei*, *S. thunbergii*).

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Keep trying to get over it: That **so many woody plants had a tough winter**. I haven't seen a single blue or pink hydrangea that kept its tip buds -- so no bloom there! -- and seeing the badly burned foliage on arbs and Hinoki falsecypresses makes me want to cry. I know I simply need to refocus on the plants that weathered the winter in fine fettle, including so many Japanese maples that have nary a bit of dieback -- for once!



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Teach those who need to know, **what garlic mustard seedlings look like**. To beat a biennial weed, it's important to recognize the first year seedlings. (Above. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila.) In their first year, these invaders are smother-able. Although it may be simpler to learn what they look like when they reach blooming stage in the second year, letting one grow for that long means having to pull it to eliminate it. I was surprised to find only second-year photos when I went looking this week for garlic mustard photos on the Internet.

**Wrap-up with Grins and Grow-ans** that turn our green thumbs up or down

**Grins:** To big toads in the garden. I've run across quite a few impressive toads this spring, and been glad to see them. They spend most of each summer on dry land, plucking bugs and slugs from the bases of my garden plants.

**Grow-ans:** To leaving rolled sod stacked in the sun. Heat builds quickly where it's moist and the nitrogen level is high -- and that describes a roll of sod. More than a few hours rolled up and the sod's own heat may kill it. So if you can't lay your sod right away, spread the rolls green side up, even if it's on pavement, and sprinkle them.

### **Pest primer: The slug**

A.B. emailed, "I heard you speak at English Gardens and you talked about how to get rid of slugs. **I don't know what a slug is** but it sounds like I should know. What is it?"

My apologies, A.B. Sometimes I forget **the basics. About slugs** (pictured on the next page): They're **mollusks**, relatives of the snail, and important in the environment as **decomposers**. (Plenty of people don't realize what a range of things slugs do eat, including powdery mildew

fungi.) However, slugs also qualify as pests since they eat live foliage as well as dead, rasping **holes in leaves** and flowers.

Where gardens are overly **moist** and slug predators such as toads, garter snakes and young earwigs are in short supply, the **slug population can get out of hand**. Then plants such as **seedlings and hostas may be reduced to lace** almost overnight. In the morning, where you see thread-thin silvery lines on hard surfaces you can be sure slugs or snails were crawling around there during the night. Slugs can't handle dry times and hot sun so **they hide from sun** in dark places, operating at night and on overcast and rainy days.



Common garden slugs.  
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

What you heard me describing during one of my talks was the **slug control method** I find most effective. It is, in early spring (a season that's almost gone!), to:

- 1) Remove all the mulch from the area where slug numbers were high,
- 2) Put that mulch (which doubtless includes slugs and slug eggs) into a hot compost,
- 3) Roll up some sections of newspaper and stick them to soak in a five-gallon bucket of water.
- 4) Lay a few **sections of wet newspaper flat on the garden** trouble spot.
- 5) The next afternoon, flip the newspaper sections over.
- 6) Tear off the just-exposed page of the paper, which was formerly facing the ground.
- 7) **Throw away that piece of paper and the slugs that gathered on it** while it was lay on soil. Put it in a bin or bag -- very tightly closed because slugs can slip through the tiniest holes.
- 8) Keep flipping papers each afternoon or early evening, and throwing away the slug-gy page.
- 9) Replace and/or re-wet the newspaper sections as necessary.
- 10) Keep at this for a couple of weeks or **as long as it takes until the slug count falls** -- when few or no slugs turn up on the papers.
- 11) Put clean mulch on the bed, smiling all the while because every slug I tossed is one slug that won't be around to lay 30 to 100 eggs by July.

ONLY YEARS OF PRACTICE WILL TEACH YOU  
THE MYSTERIES AND BOLD CERTAINTY OF A  
REAL GARDENER, WHO TREADS AT RANDOM,  
YET TRAMPLES ON NOTHING.

- KAREL CAPEK -

IN SPRING AT THE END OF THE DAY,  
YOU SHOULD SMELL LIKE DIRT.

- MARGARET ATWOOD -

## Steve Speaks: Straight scoop from the short shovel

Sometimes I get so caught up in explanations why and how that I forget the power of a short, sweet, just-do-it approach. Until, that is, I overhear **Steve Nikkila in conversations** like this:

Jim: Hey Steve, my guys are **cutting down grasses** now on the properties we maintain. How far should they cut them?

Steve: All the way down, Jim, **as far as you can possibly cut them.**

Jim: Oh yeah? Then why does everyone leave them taller?

Steve: Because they don't know what they're doing, Jim.

## Who's Janet?

**The gardener's trainer.** For over twenty years Janet Macunovich has been helping gardeners grow through her classes, books and other publications. She shares what she learns in attending classes herself at educational institutions all over the country, reading, participating in professional symposia, and applying it all in her own and client's gardens.

To learn more about Janet, email her at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) and ask for What's Up Issue #1.

## Where to catch Janet in-person:

**Saturday, May 9, 9 to 11 a.m., *Michigan Wildflower Walk: Garden revelations* at Highland State Recreation Area**, White Lake Township, Michigan. Walk in one of southeast Michigan's richest woods to learn some native plants at their prettiest. Take tips from Nature and your guides, Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila, about soil renewal, fertilization, plant placement and more. Meet at Goose Meadow picnic area parking lot, Highland Recreation Area. Enter the park off highway M-59 west of Bogie Lake Road in White Lake Township. Follow that main entry road to the first siding, Goose Meadow. Dress and prepare for hiking, the weather and fun. Sorry, no wheelchair access at this location. You must bring with you or purchase a State Park daily- or seasonal vehicle pass for your car. \$20 voluntary contribution. Limited space: Call or email Janet and Steve at 248-681-7850 or [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) to reserve a spot. Provide a contact phone number.

**Sunday, May 10, 12:30 p.m. *Perennial Combinations.* At the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens** Janet's speaking during the spring plant sale, giving you these tips for which perennials to grow, where and how to combine them to make the most of not only their blooms but their distinctive shapes, foliage colors and textures. Free to those who come to the plant sale this day. Matthaei Botanical Gardens is on Dixboro Road south of Plymouth Road in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Take the Plymouth Road exit (Exit 41) on US-23 and go 1.5 miles east to Dixboro, then right/south about one mile to the garden entrance on your left.

**Saturday, May 16, 8:00 a.m. to noon, "*Garden by Janet - Bring Your Gloves and Tools!*"** At the Detroit Zoo, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for Janet's hands-on instruction in spring perennial garden maintenance (weeding, mulching, division, planting and pest I.D.). To join in, send an email to [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com) with subject line "I'll volunteer at the Zoo with Janet."

**Saturday and Sunday, May 30-31, 11 a.m. *Great Bedfellowss*.** At **Specialty Growers Spring Open House**, 4330 Golf Club Drive, east of Latson and north of Grand River midway between Brighton and Howell, Michigan. This is Janet's crash course on finding the perfect mates for perennials you're growing or thinking to add to your gardens. Learn what goes with what and why. All the critical characteristics are covered: Complementary physical features, compatible energy levels, similar cultural needs! \$5. Call Specialty Growers at 517-546-7742 or visit [www.specialtygrowers.net](http://www.specialtygrowers.net) for more details.

### About attending Garden by Janet sessions:

We gardeners are let-me-see, hands-on people and that's how we learn best. In these sessions, I offer you that kind of chance to grow. You can visit me where I'm working and you can either watch or work with me side by side. I hope you'll bring your gloves and join in so you realize the most value for the time.

At the **gardens I tend through my business, Perennial Favorites**: I've worked for many years with some of my clients, who not only trust me with their landscapes but also understand my enthusiasm for teaching. They open their gardens to small groups who want to see and practice "how to." When the work I'm scheduled to do may be of interest to you and the situation allows on-lookers or apprentices, I invite you in.

I've volunteered in the **Detroit Zoo Adopt-A-Garden** program for 20 years. During that time more than 100 people have worked with me, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish much. The program requires that regular garden volunteers complete an interview and orientation process but you can try it for a time or two on a temporary pass as my student. **If you'd like to join me at the Detroit Zoo**, email [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com). Make the subject line of your email "I'll help at the zoo with Janet." That email will put you in touch with my good friend Deb Tosch who keeps my group's schedule straight while I plan and lead the work. You'll receive upcoming work dates and instructions for getting to the zoo and meeting up with my group.

Watch this space to join me in other non-profit events and in gardens I design and tend.