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What's Coming Up: This week's garden news

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila help you grow
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*In this What's Coming Up pdf**

A mantis' green thumbs up to friends like you

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Greetings!

This week we have just one message for you, a glimpse into our holiday fun. We hope you have a wonderful holiday and a great green New Year. - Steven and Janet -

Who are Janet & Steven?

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2/9/13 in Toledo, Ohio, *Collectors' Gardens and Entry Garden Design*

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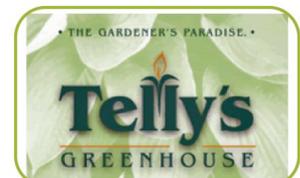
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Green thumbs up

To friends who say "Cool!"

...and "Sure, bring them over" in gardening situations that might prompt others to say "Ick" and "Are you kidding?!"

This explanation -- our holiday greeting!-- comes to you with thanks to our Sponsoring friends at Telly's Greenhouses in Troy and also apologies to Clement Clarke Moore.



'Twas the week before Christmas...

Photo caption

...and all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring -- well, maybe a mouse.

Plant samples were laid on the table with care,
In hope a close look showed us what to do where.

Our bulbs were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of tulip time danced in our heads.

We two at our desks in comfy sweat pants and tees,
Had just settled in for a late night tapping keys.

When from Janet's office there rose such a clatter
Steven sprang from his chair to see what was the matter.

Enroute he heard mutters and then a, "Good Lord,"
"Just look at what's walking across my keyboard!"

By monitor's light, 'twas like snow dimly lit,
We could see but not photo the objects it hit.

What wonder we felt, like finding Atlantis,
Hiking 'cross QWERTYUIOP -- a miniature mantis.

And wait, now another, so we knew in a flash,
"That mantis egg case wasn't empty - it hatched!"

More rapid than eagles we flew to the table,
Then whistled and shouted, "We won't be able,"

"To catch all these mantids, there must be eight dozen!"
"And what could we feed them, no bugs are a buzzin'!"

Out in the garden, meager options consisting
Of one Brussels sprouts with some aphids persisting.

As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,

We hurdled that problem and headed for Telly's,
So fifty wee mantids might fill up their bellies.

And there in a twinkling they took on their role,
The predator part in bio-control.

Then we got back to work, Christmas Eve came around,
And inside our chimney we heard a strange sound.

A clatter, a scrabble, then protruded a foot --
A big mantis, all covered in ashes and soot!

A bundle of stuff it had flung on its back,
Which wriggled so we cried, "Don't open that sack!"





Its huge eyes narrowed, our brows began beading,
"Where are the hatchlings," it hissed, "They need feeding!"

Its two spiky pincers drew up like a crab,
And we knew right away to stand back from that grab.

"They're off to a greenhouse where organic is chief,"
"And they have what we're lacking -- good light, lots of leaf."

And Mantis Claus grinned, twitched its supple antennae,
Then shook as it laughed, rasping, "There were so many,"

"I'm amazed you could catch them! Now tell me the way,"
"To this Telly's so I can be sure they're okay."

It cinched its white sack, fixed its hat on its head,
Which gave us to know we had nothing to dread.

It took our directions, scratched them down like a clerk
Took a last look around, then turned with a jerk.

And folding its legs tight aside its carapace,
It wriggled back into the chimney's tight space.

It cheered as it went, "They'll be learning from lacewings,"
"How to prey on stray whiteflies and plant-chewing things."

We heard it exclaim as it flew out of sight,
"Bless this off season hatch! And forgive this rewrite!"

We wrote *'Twas the week before Christmas...*

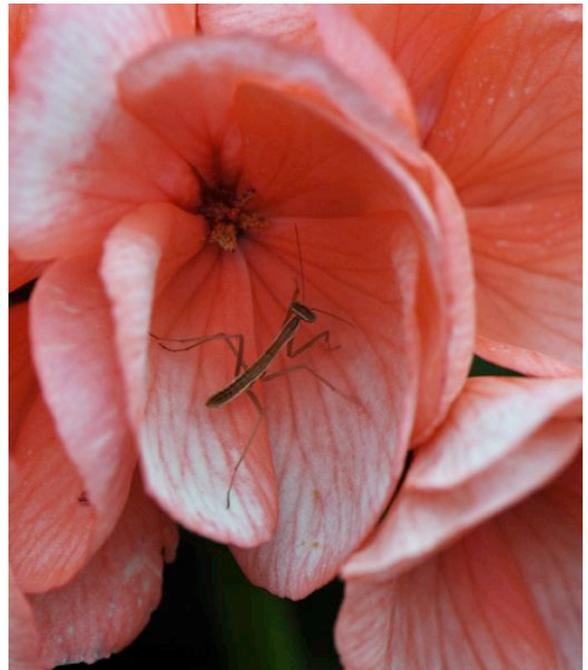
...about our preying mantis adventure because it was an unusual event
and we were having such fun. If you've read it, and wonder: It's true
except for the visit by Mantis Claus:

One night working late, Janet reached to thump a spider that dropped onto her keyboard. She stopped when she noticed it
wasn't a spider but a tiny preying mantis.

We realized that the preying mantis egg case they'd found the previous
week had been in the warm long enough so that perhaps... yup, it had
hatched! Tiny mantises were emerging and fanning out.

What a shame, we thought. If we hadn't interfered the hatch would've
waited until spring. These mantids would have spread outdoors and
done some good in the garden. (Sure, preying mantises have a down
side. It's true they eat absolutely everything they come upon, including
"good guy" bugs. That means they aren't so helpful as ladybugs if you
want something to sic on scale or aphids. However, they do hang out
and feast where insects are plentiful, and it's plant-eaters that most
often form those crowds they prey upon. As for the other argument against them, that they eat what you'd rather they didn't, it's
only the end of summer adult mantises that are big enough to grab big butterflies and little hummingbirds...)

Can we catch any of these, then save them from starving here in the house?



Well yes, we can catch some but what then? It's December. They'd die if we put them outside. And although we've had mantids indoors in winter (we just extended the life of adults we found in fall), those free range guests were large enough to eat store-bought crickets. This horde of little guys would need tiny insects. The pickings in that category are lean this time of year.

We had one aphid-bearing Brussels sprouts plant left in a garden (Why? Another story!). We brought some of its leaves indoors and put them in vases near the mantids. As we watched, we realized that these were infant mantises, still learning to catch and kill. Their bumbling was a far cry from the prowess of the adults we've had roaming our houseplants, which have been so formidable that even our cat gave them a wide berth.

Then, we thought, "What next?"

We made some calls, offending a few friends before we learned to phrase our question carefully, "Hey, do you have any insect infested plants in the house?" On one of those calls we were reminded about Mike Maran, a grower at Telly's Greenhouse, the integrated pest manager at the Shelby Township location. "He uses a lot of beneficial insects and other bio-controls rather than chemical pesticides."

Right! We called Telly's owner, George Papadelis, and then Maran. To our relief, both greeted the offer of fifty mantises with enthusiasm. So a short while later we rounded up all the mantises we could, putting them in groups of 5 or 6 into plastic containers, then dashed out. (The rush was because we'd noticed that their natural distancing was about 18

inches, and we've heard mantises will even eat other mantids. So we didn't want to

leave them closer together than that any longer than necessary.)

Maran released the mantises individually, explaining that he's employed indiscriminate killers like mantids before. Yet most of the time he uses specific predators for particular pests that might appear here and there - - incursions that happen when new plants arrive, or when the greenhouse vents are open to the outdoors.

Recently, for instance, he had to learn about a scale insect he hadn't seen before, calico scale, when it arrived on some citrus plants. Only a certain type of ladybug eats that scale, so he bought them in.

At right, calico scale adults, which resemble tiny Shih Tzu dogs wearing brightly embroidered saddles. The immature scale "crawlers" are also visible -- left arrow. Crystalline beads -- right arrow -- are the scale excrement called honeydew that drips from these insects, causing scale infested plants to develop a sticky surface and then a layer of dark sooty mold.

Maran released each of our mantids. We're wishing them well!

