

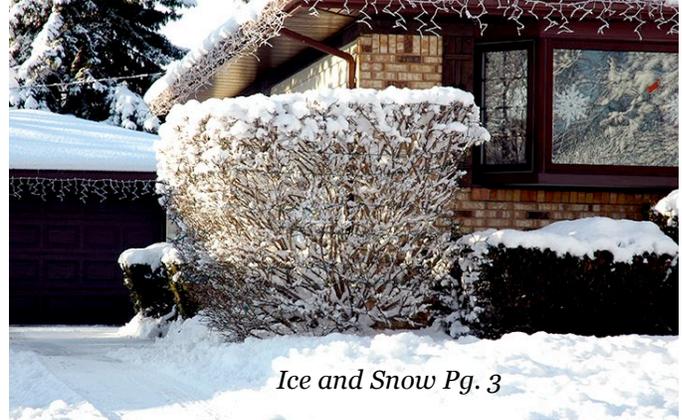
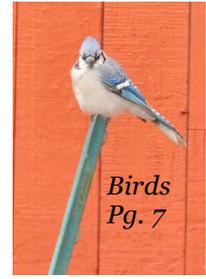
GardenAtoZ.com presents:

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

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila help you grow
Issue #195, January 8, 2013

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When ice and snow deal crushing blows Page 3
How snow play can improve the landscape Page 6
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*Above: Its species and your care can affect how a shrub holds snow or ice and whether it's more or less likely to break. The dwarf burning bushes (*Euonymus alatus compactus*) on the left are pruned hard every four or five years and then grow back without shearing. Thus the branching is naturally open, and snow has sifted all the way into the shrub's center rather than becoming caught at the tips. Winter weight breaks are unlikely. On the right, the same species and variety repeatedly sheared without thinning. It's become densely twiggy at the top, stopping the snow there. In a very heavy storm its limbs are more likely to break.*

Greetings!

We used to think of winter as the off season.

We've begun to forget why.

This week we finished our annual review, tromped around in the snow for the good of the landscape, entertained the neighborhood, chased around after birds with sticks (!) and wrote it all down for you here with lots of ways you can add to the stories.

'Nuff said! Thanks much for helping us to grow this website and this gardening community!

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Where to see us:

2/2/13 in Detroit, *Organic Gardening, Herb Gardening, Bees for the Garden*

2/5/13 in South Lyon, Michigan, *Designing with the Armchair Gardener*

2/7, 2/14 and 2/28/13 in Beverly Hills, Michigan, *Vegetable Basics, Beyond and Etiquette*

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

2/16/13 in Chagrin Falls, Ohio, *Entry Garden Design and Visualizing Landscape Changes*

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In *What's Next*

Where we keep you apprised of operational changes on the website:

Zero to One at GardenAtoZ

We've been augmenting our gardening work by writing and teaching for over 20 years. However, we just turned one year old on the Internet.

Overall, we are pleased with our progress and how you've responded. We're encouraged to keep on in this endeavor to make available all of our completed work and open our ongoing discussions and explorations to anyone in the community who wishes to participate.



Yet we're feeling our E-age as we learn that our past experience does not buy us time in getting this website up and walking on its own in the direction we've planned. We set out too ambitiously but we've grown, we're happy to keep at it, and we've learned from every unexpected expense and hour.

Webinar premier

So now it's on into Year Two, continuing pretty much as before with particular focus on one of our unmet goals -- to host webinars. We'll tell you all about that plan as we go along, starting with this invitation: We will need a trial audience for our premiere webinar on the evening of March 1. Email if we should invite you.

Our other changes won't stand out to casual inspection. They have to do with how to work soonest on the topics most valuable to you, and

In a Webinar we can sit down together, you in your living room, we in ours, and talk plants. We'll use our photos and drawings to explain how to, entertain and encourage. Since it's our premier, we'll be dressed up for the premier but you can wear your jammies!

developing our audience participation level. They help us to save hours, make better use of the help you offer, and fund the site's expenses more realistically so we can keep this a literal mom and pop (well, grama and grampa) operation. Your first look at a change comes in this week's *What's Coming Up*.

GardenAtoZ.com presents *What's Up* 195 page 2

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Beginning this week: Blue Susans to direct our website library's expansion

It introduces a different way of posting articles from our library. We have about 23% of the library posted and have been working chronologically to add the rest. Your responses to our Sponsorship requests opened the door to another sequence, one in which we tell you what's available in a given category, and let you choose what's next. That's what you'll see in this week's articles about *Winter damage to plants*, and *Why no birds*, about coaxing birds back to a changed yard.

More articles like it are on the way. For instance, we have an article coming up which includes a perennial selection chart. We took stock of all the other plant charts we have, think you will probably want them all, but need to work more methodically since it's especially time consuming to format these charts for the Internet. So that perennials article, coming out in two weeks will match the format of this week's *Winter damage* and *Why no birds* articles. It as a list of post-it-next candidates plus a Blue Susan flower as a participation gauge. A glance at the Blue Susans will tell us or any of you where this community's interests lie.



Thanks for participation in Forum, Market and Sponsorship: Begin \$5 annual fee for others

Second, we're looking at our email distribution list. Keeping it current and mailing out each week take a lot of time, especially given our conviction and commitment to the confidentiality of your email addresses. This year we will begin contacting those on the list who have not also participated as Market customer, Forum member or Sponsor.

Here and on the website our Sponsors -- gardeners like you -- make much of this possible. We honor their help with Sponsor seals on the pages or topics they request.

We will be requesting an annual membership fee of \$5 from those whose only participation has been to be on the list, beginning with those who have been on the list the longest. Our thanks to all of you who have participated -- you are why we do all this work, to have a community that helps each other grow.

Enough of this. We promised ourselves we'd keep this Year One report short and put the details into articles and our What's Next department. So we're off to write the news now, and if you have questions or recommendations about how we operate or your standing on our list, please check What's Next, and email us if your answer's not there.

We are really looking forward to E-year 2 and writing year 22.



In the department,
Main features:
When ice and snow
deal crushing blows



Should I clear the snow off my bushes? In some places it's getting pretty deep. - P.F. -

Yes, if the branches are sagging significantly. The Hicks' yews pictured on the next page (*Taxus x media* 'Hicksii') qualify: 12' tall but bent to just above a 4' chain link fence.

It's a good idea to remove such heavy snow, or prop icy branches to relieve some of the strain.

At-risk plants: Some plants are more vulnerable under a heavy load of snow or ice.

Most likely to break are species with brittle wood -- horsechestnuts, older rhododendrons and singleseed junipers like 'Blue Star' come first to mind.

Also high risk are those with branches attached to the trunk or each other in a tight V. Such crotches often develop [included bark](#), a condition that results in increasing detachment as the bark grows within the crotch and exerts outward pressure against the limb. Callery pears, especially the older 'Bradford' variety, are poster children for included bark and calamitous splits in winter.

Frequently sheared shrubs also tend to have problems under snow. They become so twiggy at the top that snow can't sift through. Instead, it piles up. In addition, the internal branches are too weak to bear weight because they've been sheared without any thinning.



Branches that can descend onto each other, with the lowest then resting on the ground (*below, left, the yew at the far left*) and near-horizontal branches with wide angles of attachment (*kousa dogwood tree, below, right*) are most able to bear lots of weight. They will not usually break and can rebound even after a few weeks bent out of position. However, breaks are much more likely when the vertical trunks bend (*below, left, center arborvitae*).



Left: When the vertical trunks bent on a neighbor's pyramidal yew, Janet went out under it (right) and brushed up to relieve of its snow weight.

Tough guys less likely to break

Plants least likely to break are those with widely spaced limbs attached to the trunk or each other in wide angles. Branches that are attached to the trunk at right angles are so strongly attached that they rarely break.

Probably the most snow-tolerant plants are those with layered horizontal branches. Each branch can sag onto the one below, and the lowest descends to the ground. Spruces and pines are the premier exhibitors of this cascade defense.



Brush UP to remove snow

If you go out to relieve plants of snow, don't knock down -- brush up. Insert a broom or a rake under the snowy branch. Then draw it out and up so that you're supporting some of the weight as the snow is jostled and falls to the sides. If you beat the plant from above with a broom -- we see this done all the time! -- you actually increasing the chance of broken limbs because the impact from above adds more weight, suddenly. That's a recipe for a break.

If a branch ices up so you can't knock it off, prop it. Forked branches, upended rakes, crates, plastic patio chairs, ladders and lots of others things have been props in our garden.

Other tips and topics of winter damage

We've written a good deal about winter damage to trees and shrubs, from split Japanese maples to good and bad uses of burlap. Here are those topics, listing the *What's Coming Up* or *Growing Concerns* issue that contains the article. To read that article, visit www.GardenAtoZ.com and type its name into the Search field (such as *Growing Concerns 553*).

Design to prevent or alleviate winter damage:

Design and re-design to have room for snow removal and snow banks. *Growing Concerns 553*, *Growing Concerns 439**
Ice can be nice: Pretty snow scenes. *What's Coming Up 21**
Perennials can replace snow-mashed shrubs.

*Growing Concerns 561**

Protection: Wind screens, anti-desiccants and more

Anti-desiccants like Wilt-pruf can be helpful even late in winter. *Growing Concerns 556*

Burlap burlesque. *Growing Concerns 702**

No snow, oh no! Weeds germinate! *Growing Concerns 653**

Preventing damage from salt & rodents.

*What's Coming Up 11**

Preventing damage: Props, spiral tied shrubs.

*What's Coming Up 10**

Preventing damage: Room for snow, replacement shrubs.

*What's Coming Up 13**

Propping up ice loaded branches, *Growing Concerns 560**

Protect a new evergreen. Windscreens and good use of burlap. *What's Coming Up 122**

Protecting rhododendrons in winter. *What's Coming Up 120**

Snow is better than rain in winter. *Growing Concerns 613**

Winter burn worse after a dry fall? *Growing Concerns 513*



Thinking as you shovel and plow:

Note snow bank locations, aerate in spring! *Growing Concerns 393**

Read the snow, realize the benefits of mulch insulation. *Growing Concerns 744**

Room to stack snow. *What's Coming Up 117**

Snow as mulch. Bulbs okay even if leaves are up. *What's Coming Up 130*

Snow on warm lawn can mean snow mold trouble. *Growing Concerns 450**

Stack snow carefully, don't pile on shrubs. *Growing Concerns 597** *Growing Concerns 763*

Stack snow carefully. Beautyberry crushed. *What's Coming Up 128*

Stacked snow can help dry beds. *Growing Concerns 707**

Staying healthy while shoveling snow. *Growing Concerns 646**

Snow plow hazard in summer: Stones thrown in plowing. *What's Coming Up 141*

Throw snow under evergreens? You bet. *Growing Concerns 337**

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Then, we focus on those topics as we write!

Trees: Winter damage

Holiday lights may increase snow load. *Light the Night*

What does ice weigh, how can a tree bear? *What's Coming Up* 26, page 7

How ivy and snow team up to damage trees. *Growing Concerns* 556

Included bark in tree crotch adds to winter woes. *What's Coming Up* 85*

Repairing a snow-split Japanese maple.

Growing Concerns 391* *What's Coming Up* 82*

Spruce bent and broken by winter. *Growing Concerns* 703*

Why snow melts around the base of trees. *Growing Concerns* 451*

Shrubs: Winter damage

'Blue Star' juniper fails the test under heaped snow. *Growing Concerns* 597

Brush up, not down on snowy shrubs. *Growing Concerns* 338*

What's Coming Up 82* *Growing Concerns* 647*

Grasses can revive after snow flattening. *Growing Concerns* 647*

Massive icicles drop on shrubs. *Growing Concerns* 392*

Protecting arborvitae from snow breaks. *Growing Concerns* 477*

Repair or replace snow crushed azaleas. *Growing Concerns* 560

Rhododendron topples under snow. *Growing Concerns* 696*

Smashed shrubs are no laughing matter. *Growing Concerns* 559

Sheared shrubs, greater snow load. Fun with snow people.

Growing Concerns 649*

Snow on ornamental grasses. Snow as mulch. Fun with snow people.

Growing Concerns 650*

De-icer salt

Safer de-icers. *Growing Concerns* 742*

Salt in bed, big problem. *Growing Concerns* 706*

Winter can be beautiful. Enjoy the beauty in the many pretty photos here. (More on GardenAtoZ.com.)

Seen in the 45 mph garden

What's catching drivers' eyes this week

How snowplay can improve the landscape

The other day a light snow fell. From the first push of the shovel we knew it was great snowman snow. We threw some, wheelbarrowed more, packed the mounds and sculpted them. Then we used food coloring and water in a spray bottle to brighten the scene.



Snow sculptures sit right on the bones of the landscape.



You might think this is all play and we certainly do have fun with it. Yet it's also a design exercise. Nature's giving us all a clean slate and easily doodled white canvas plus the wherewithal to pile up or scrape away with ease. Put a new focal point out in the yard, see how you like it, let it melt away -- no sweat!

Take a snow shovel and draw new bed lines, no worries about working around that peony or seeing past that rose -- they're all out of the picture for the season. We can be really free in our thinking.

Can't stand to shovel? Food coloring is a bright marker on snow, yet easily erased.

Go out and play when the next snow falls. Be a kid again, ignore the limits imposed by special plants and growing season chores. Then take a look at what you've done from a living room window or approaching car. We've had revelations, we've shared guffaws, and we've enjoyed the specialness of the season.

Every day is a gift and every garden is worth playing in all year. We hope you smile and pull on your boots!

Below: Our snow lions frame a focal point, the entrance to our front path.



Photographer's tip:

If you take a picture of a snowy garden, take several shots, setting the exposure to overexpose at least one. That can correct for a camera's tendency to make snow scenes gray.

Above: Our teddy bear stops the eye before it travels too quickly to the front door. By making the eye spend more time perusing a scene, a designer can make the whole seem larger, with more chances for interesting side trips.

New in the *Stumper* department

With some problems, all we can do is to share the pain and ease it with laughter. For instance, whyizzit that: We design the whole yard for birds but make one minor change and they desert?

What to do when small things spook the birds

V.H. called to say, "I hope you can help us. We love the birds in the yard and we've fed them for years, decades. All of a sudden recently, the feeders are ghost towns and we're really concerned. It's been like this for a couple of weeks now. What can have happened?"

From that call, came these topics you'll read here:

- 1) The importance of staging areas
- 2) Polling the birds for an answer
- 3) A test, and a call for comments
- 4) More backyard bird topics

We talked a bit about and eliminated things such as tainted feed or the presence of a hunting hawk, which can make every bird in the area lay low. ("We've had hawks here forever," V.H. assured us. "The birds just hide a while, then come back out later.")

Then because prey animals are creatures of habit, rightfully cautious of and unsettled by every change in their environment, we asked about recent landscaping work in or around the property.

"Oh!" said V.H. "We did have a hedge pulled out. It was overgrown and full of weeds. But we planted more, and there is lots of other shrubbery and trees on the property."



Left: Like many birds, the cardinal uses a tip-top surveying perch to announce its claim on a property but stages (above) for the feeder a bit less conspicuously, lower in a plant. There are often multiple staging areas around a feeder.

This downy woodpecker (right) scouted the situation from a neighbor's crabapple before moving to this "on deck" spot on the arbor right next to the feeder. (We may never be able to replace that decrepit arbor since winter would be when we have time to do that job yet it's the worst time to spook the birds -- in winter feeders make the most difference to birds' survival.)



The importance of staging areas

That's good that the yard wasn't laid bare in the change. There are few things more likely to discourage wildlife. Nonetheless, that hedgerow may have been where the birds were staging. Staging areas are where birds stop in their approach to scope out a feeding station to be sure the coast is clear.

So we've suggested to V.H. that they try what worked for us when a client had a similar problem after new neighbors removed a big tree. Nothing could be done to immediately re-establish the shade, offer new high-rise perches for announcing territory or replace the three story nesting level. But after we planted where the birds told us they would stage, most of the bird traffic returned.

Polling the birds for an answer

Here is what we did:

1) First, we bought a lure: A multi trunked tree, about 8 feet tall -- 10 feet including its big root ball. What it gave us was a wide top with a selection of landing spaces, big enough for at least a few birds to share spots just below the top (like the one the robin's assumed, at right), and leafy enough to create some hiding places within. We could have used a shrub for this, if we could have found one that size. We also discussed using long, much-branched limbs cut from trees but decided against it since that would have complicated steps 2 and 3, and we were going to need new plants of significant size, anyway.



2) We set the tree temporarily. We picked a place where that tree could one day be planted, in the same direction away from the feeders as the lost tree had been, and set the new tree there. We didn't plant it, just set it on the ground and put blocks under the root ball so it wouldn't tip. (Making it upright and sturdy is the part that would have been difficult to do with a cut tree branch.) We covered the root ball with an old blanket to help it stay moist, asked our client to keep it well watered and to check it every day for bird droppings.

3) We moved it until the birds said, "Yes!" After a few days, if there were no droppings or other signs that a significant number of birds had perched there, we dragged the tree to another spot. We moved it three times, none of them particularly big changes. We hit the right spot the third time, and planted the tree there.

Right: It may seem like you have only a few birds if you watch a feeder for a short time every day. So how can signs of their passing (please forgive the pun) accumulate in a staging area in a few short days? When birds are around in numbers, one visit per hour can add up! In winter, small birds may make a great number of trips to and from a feeder each day. A three year study of chickadees in southern Wisconsin where chickadees with their high energy demands have to feed almost continuously to survive the cold, calculated that at 0°F these birds need the equivalent of 250 sunflower seeds per day (60% of their weight) and probably take 20% of that from feeders, one seed at a time.



A test of the approach, a call for comment and suggestion

V.H. is going to try the same approach. Meanwhile, we've started a topic on the Forum where we hope others will share what they've done to re-establish bird traffic after a change, or have noticed will spook the birds, to help the rest of us bird lovers avoid any set-backs.

More backyard bird topics

We've written many other articles about the birds that share our gardens. Here is a list of those you might be interested in, including designing for the birds, feeders and natural foods, providing water, the importance of shelter, and the inevitable undesirables. Some of these articles already available here on our site, so there are links ready to go. Others are still staging, which means we'll have them here soon and link them in -- they have an *. They can be called forth most quickly via Sponsorship.



This article is another Blue Susan article (explained on page 5). Briefly, if you're interested in an asterisked item on this list but do not already have it in your personal library of our past articles, you can email us to say you'll Sponsor it. Then we'll bring it more quickly onto the website, via this newsletter.

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Designing for the birds: Food, water, shelter

Birdbrained design; Trees and shrubs for birds; Menu planning for wildlife. *What's Coming Up* 95 pp. 1- 6

Hummingbird garden design. *Growing Concerns* 157 7/20/96*

Living the wild life in a garden: Birds, Butterflies and you. From *Michigan Gardener* magazine September 2009*

Reconciling need for neatness, desire for birds. *What's Coming Up* 144 pp. 8-9

Sponsor a Green Thumbs collection of bird attracting tips:

Can't have it all - birds may mean less Viburnum berries in winter. *Growing Concerns* 680 8/12/06*

Christmas trees as birds' windbreak. *Growing Concerns* 338 1/1/00*

Don't ignore birds during big snows. *Growing Concerns* 603

Evergreens at a home's southeast corner are for the birds. *Growing Concerns* 553

Feed chickadees for aphid control. *Growing Concerns* 550

Foresters advise leave snags when pruning. *Growing Concerns* 366 7/15/00*, Green Thumbs section

Hummingbird in the greenhouse. *Growing Concerns* 579

Hummingbird votes for Dianthus. *Growing Concerns* 670 6/3/06*

Perennials best for bird feeding. *Growing Concerns* 314 7/24/99* Tips section

Why water and stamped snow mean a less buggy spring. *Growing Concerns* 391 1/6/01* Tips section

Winter interest and wildlife, too. From our *Better Homes & Garden* article, Summer 2004*

Right: Designing for wildlife takes in a whole ecosystem, including aspects you might overlook, such as the importance of overhead wires as staging areas. We sometimes consider rerouting "eyesore" overhead wires into underground conduit, but look at this use first where birds are important. This is "just a starling" but we counted a dozen species staging with it on those wires.

Below: Design spaces for different types of birds. Juncos are perky additions to any northern landscape in the winter but they prefer open space on the ground to feed, often jumping up to knock seed loose from short ornamental grasses.

Importance of food diversity: Feeders and natural foods



Knowing many, they are less likely to starve if any one source dries up. Feeders make a difference. One study concluded that chickadees with access to feeders had a 69% winter survival rate, compared to those without feeders, which had a 37% winter survival rate.

To learn more about various species' food preferences: American Wildlife & Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits; Martin, Zim and Nelson. Dover Press; reprints a 1951 USDA study.

Scarlet tanagers (below) feed more on fruit and

insects than on seed. Chickadees and juncos (left) move every day between many feeding stations, man made and natural.



Bird seed makes a good gift. *Gift what you covet: For the birds*

Drunken birds?! *What's Coming Up* 95 and *Growing Concerns* 581



Importance of bird feeders in winter. *What's Coming Up* 125 pgs. 4-5

Insects are vital bird food. *Quotes: Wildlife and ecology*

Late summer hummingbird attraction. *Growing Concerns* 162 8/24/96*

Ornamental grasses as bird feeders. Tip cuttings section, *What's Coming Up* 166, pg. 10

Serviceberries for the birds. *Robinberries: What's Coming Up* 172

Seedy perennial garden, great bird feeder. *What's Coming Up* 151, pg. 16

When grocery money's better spend on bird food: Insect control.

What's Coming Up 123 pg. 10*

Which Viburnum best for bird food? *Growing Concerns* 727 8/4/07*

Water

Bevy of bird baths Tip cuts *What's Coming Up* 189

Mist sprinkler brings birds that eat leafhoppers *Growing Concerns* 724*

Shelter

Grampa gave them shelter, they ate all the hornworms. *What's Coming Up* 50

Keep your eyes open, wildlife all around. *What's Coming Up* 50 pp. 7-9

Perennial messiness has an up side:

Bundle & stack healthy cuttings to feed birds, shelter overwintering beneficial insects.

Growing Concerns 630* and *Gardens enrich pets' lives*

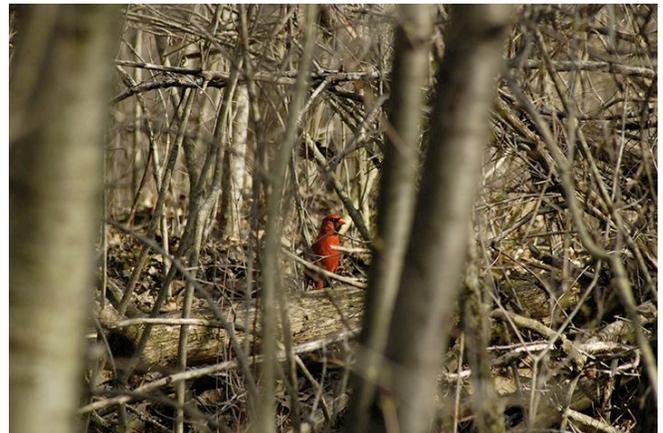
Pros/cons leaving perennials up/cutting down. *Growing Concerns* 695*

Robins may herald spring but also stay in winter: Forum: *Robins all winter*

Right: Our sensibilities say "Keep things neat" but the cardinal needs this thicket, just as the marshy area surrounding a redwing blackbird's nest is essential.

Undesirables

Below: Some of the undesirables are not only a headache for the gardener and competition to the birds, but predators of the birds. This is a busy spot for goldfinches, sparrows and others including a cat and a hawk.



Dogs grubbing under bird feeders. *Bug eating dogs* from *What's Coming Up* 166 in Stumper section

Geese not wanted, eat corn gluten meal. *What's Coming Up* 142

Hawks eating the songbirds. *Bird Worry relief* in *What's Up* 172, *What's Coming Up* 132 pg. 8

Squirrels! *What's Coming Up* 30* and *What's Coming Up* 47*

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