



What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns
Issue 138, March 30, 2011

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Books, photos, magazines and CDs: Yes, we're still selling. Email for prices or wait for the order form and catalog which will return in issue #139!

A spruce sheds needles normally, year 'round. Yet it shouldn't bare outer branches entirely. See page 3.

Cold, who needs it? Scented geraniums do!

I have a Prince Rupert **scented geranium** (*Pelargonium crispum*) that **won't bloom**. Does it bloom? I have used 4-10-10 plant food on it but it still hasn't bloomed. I have lots of foliage but no blooms. Is there something else I should be doing? It also gets plenty of sun, it sits in my bay window with a southwest exposure. I would love to see what kind of blooms I could get from this plant. - M.C. -

The plant **needs a winter**. Annual geraniums such as lemon-scented *P. crispum* can't survive a Michigan winter outdoors, yet the need for distinct seasonal change is programmed into their genes. They evolved to flower during a spring-to-fall growing season, stop producing flower buds once days become quite short, then "wait out" one cold season in a non-flowering state.

So plants of this species expect a certain degree and duration of cold and *need* about 6 weeks below 50°F in order to return to the physical and chemical condition that leads to bloom. Without a cold winter rest, flowering won't start or will be very poor.

The need for a cold season -- vernalization -- **applies to many species**. For instance, old fashioned bleeding heart (*Dicentra spectabilis*) and most apple trees require about 6 weeks at or below 40°F to support the hormone production that kicks off a new round of bloom.

So put your plant into a colder, sunny room and let it rest. Once flower buds form, gradually increase warmth and keep light levels high -- too rapid a change or too little light may cause new flower buds to abort.



Pelargonium 'Prince Rupert' blooms a beautiful pink with burgundy center. The blossoms look like mini orchids. I have one 'Prince Rupert' that I use as a stock plant. It's about 4 years old and has been trained into a topiary. That beautiful plant is putting buds on right now in March.

During the winter I keep my scented geraniums in a cool spot, giving them as much sun as possible. I withhold fertilize during their winter resting time, and water only when necessary. About March first, they are well trimmed, cleaned up, repotted if needed, fed with 20-20-20, and as soon as frost is over they are planted directly into the garden. I mulch with cocoa bean hulls and enjoy their blooms and fragrance all summer. Before frost they are again trimmed, (those trimmings are dried for several projects), potted up and let rest during the winter.

None of the scented geraniums are fertilized when they are in the ground and do excellent with what nutrients that come from the cocoa bean hulls. Any plants left in containers during the summer are fertilized weekly.

- Beulah Hargrove -
Grand Oak Herb Farm, Bancroft, Michigan
GrandOakHerbFarm.com

Left: Steven had great fun one winter on a trip to Glasshouse Works in Stewart, Ohio to learn about winter treatment of tender perennials, including scented geraniums. Below: Variegated scented geranium. Steven observed: "A little cold goes a long way. There were hundreds of plants of so many kinds being vernalized -- cut back and resting in the cold on their enclosed, unheated porches."

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Glasshouse Works, Stewart, Ohio mail order;
glasshouseworks.com

Look to the light when evergreen screen becomes see-through

For several years the **spruces** on the west side of our house have been **losing needles** in some cases totally stripping branches. This winter seems to find the process accelerating especially on the north side of the tree. The trees have had galls for years but I was under the impression that this really didn't harm the tree. Planted in the 60's, these trees are about 40-50 feet tall now. Any thoughts? - R.K. -

The insect that causes spruce tip gall -- in which the infested new shoot thickens, curls and dies - is usually only a cosmetic problem for the tree. That is, it's no more likely to kill the tree than acne to kill a person. There is another, more harmful gall making insect that hosts on spruce. It's called spruce twig gall because the gall develops in the wood of young branches. Since the tree loses not only a tip but a year or more of growth, that insect takes a greater toll on the plant. Yet by itself it's not a killer, either.

The death of an entire branch is a loss to a tree. Yet that, too, may be natural. (See *Only natural: Grow, thin, shed* at right to picture the process.)

If you're seeing whole, large limbs go bare right to the tips, especially if it happens so rapidly that needles drop in showers when the branch is touched, that's unnatural. When we see that we look for one or a combination of these things, which we list in order from most- to least common: **Dense shade, drought, injury to the branch, disease that's girdled the limb, root loss, or borer insects** destroying the critical growth layer beneath the bark.

Since you notice the problem is **more prevalent on one side**, look for and see if you can correct any **light- or water deprivation** there. Maybe the naturally shaded side of the tree (north side, in the northern hemisphere) is also being shaded by other trees. Some pruning might admit more light. If the plant's own growth has taken it into the shade of a building, you might change the paint color to reflect more light or prune to restrict the plant's size. If root growth is restricted by a wall, pavement or competing plants' roots, your spruce's root tips can no longer reach into moist soil beyond the drip line of their own outer

Only natural: Grow, thin, shed

As a tree grows, its upper and outer limbs shade those low and inside. Fewer and smaller leaves form on the shaded branches, so total photosynthesis there declines. There's less starch to create new wood. Eventually, side branches with so very leaf surface stop thickening and no new buds form at their tips. Eventually that wood dries out and is shed.

This process is gradual and the loss is often hidden from us by the tree's foliage. The most notice we may take of it is when we view an evergreen primarily from its inside. Spruce trees (*Picea*) are prime examples.

An individual spruce needle lives three or four years. Needles drop year-round, so there is no dramatic autumn display to match that of deciduous trees, or pines, arborvitaes and falsecypresses. Most of the thinning and branch death happens well inside the tree, where increasing shade reduces new growth each year, and more needles fall than form.

Yet even when we're looking directly into the evergreen's interior, we may not see how the foliage is thinning because we see it against a backdrop of more densely needled limbs. We might notice a limb's bareness only in the year its last needles fall, two years after new foliage ceased to grow. Then, we see a whole branch "suddenly bare."



branches. You might turn the tide with supplemental water to keep those root tips and their dependent branches alive.

The **fungus disease *Cytospora*** and wood boring insects can kill spruce branches. If this is the case you'll see interior branches stained with white sap, like abundant bird droppings (*Cytospora*), or weeping holes in the trunk (borers). Fungicide or insecticide and pruning are sometimes required to get a handle on these things but even then there must be attention given to sun and irrigation. A spruce that has enough light and water is resistant to disease and insect trouble.

Don't delay, if you think you can correct light or water issues. Spruces don't replace limbs, only grow new from existing tips, or grow into gaps from nearby lively side branches.

It **may be time to replant**. To stay full to the ground into old age, Colorado- and Norway spruces need full sun and unrestricted root space for 80 feet in all directions from the trunk. Once a tree outgrows its space, it's stressed and become susceptible to

problems. Its carefree years are over. Often, it simply can't be maintained.



All photos, this page: Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*) is susceptible to the fungal disease called *Cytospora*. It infects young limbs, remains in the wood and grows until it kills the branch. It's a problem most prevalent in stressed- and older trees that have slowed in growth as they run out of room. Limbs will die back here and there -- often the shaded lower limbs fail first -- and you'll see wounds further back on those and other limbs dripping white sap. Very well-timed fungicide treatments may prevent infection. Yet it's at least as effective -- often more so -- to prune out all infected wood and bolster the tree's vigor by trimming nearby trees that are shading the spruce, removing any lawn from the root zone, fertilizing, and being more generous with water.



Girdling damage puts us up against the wall

I'm just sick over what's happened. Our beautiful **espaliere apples and pears** at the Conservatory have been **decimated by rabbits!** All 6 trees have been damaged (right). Since they are in front of the garden as you walk in, they are very noticeable. On the pears (one is pictured below they've left the trunk alone, but chewed the 1st tier laterals of the candelabra pretty much all the way around. We may be able to prune off this lower tier, saying goodbye to the 2 outer upright 'forks'. Argh!

This is the first year we've had any sign of rabbits, so we'll protect for next season.

Any thoughts on what else to do and whether we may save these trees? Should we protect what's left of the cambium!? Or is it too late?
- Patricia Donahue, Executive Director, Taylor Conservatory & Botanical Garden -



Above: If you were there with cool grafting wax to seal this halfway-round-the-trunk damage within hours of the attack, you might reduce the amount of remaining cambium lost to dehydration. Here, that's a moot point, since this gnawing almost certainly happened weeks before our email exchange, back when snow was still thick on the ground in your Taylor, Michigan garden. We say that because we can just about see the rabbits, using a snow bank as a platform to reach the branches but sparing the snow-shrouded trunk. Now, the remaining cambium has already dried along its edges and also sealed itself better than we ever could.



It was a **bad winter** in that way. Lots of us have **rabbit-chewed and vole gnawed trees, shrubs and vines**. Solid snow cover helped rabbits reach higher and voles survive, safe under cover from hawks and other predators.

In this case, there's hope, tree replacement or bridge grafting.* (If we didn't have to give special weight to the years of pruning and training such as goes into flattening and shaping an espalier tree, there would be a fourth choice. See *Off with its head* on page 8.) We **recommend tree replacement**. You have our sympathy. We, too, have lost painstakingly shaped fruit trees because we left them unguarded against rabbits over winter.

Hope for a girdled woody involves keeping it very well watered this year, protecting it in future winters and accepting a much reduced growth rate for at least a few years and perhaps many.

Don't let your hopes run high. With the cambium half gone, leaves can only transfer starch to the roots half as effectively. Some roots are sure to starve. As a result, the reduced root system will be unable to support the foliage during summer's dry days, so top growth will slow or die back. Next year, the growth rate may have slipped to half what it has been. Fewer leaves will form, less starch will be produced, and so new wood formation will slow and wound repair proceed more slowly. Stand by to trickle water to the tree every dry day for five or six years -- maybe longer. All this, and the tree may still fail. Such is hope.

Bridge grafting* creates new paths between the cambium above and below a girdling wound. It's something you would have to do right now, before leaves begin growth but while rising sap keeps the bark still "slipping" over a moist cambium. Bridge grafting's basic steps are:

- Cut a healthy twig from that tree, perhaps 1.5 inches longer than the girdled area is tall.
- At both ends of the twig, slice through the long axis a to make each end into a tongue, with exposed cambium on the flat, cut surface.
- Trim any rough edges in the chewed trunk area.
- Loosen bark above and below the damage to make slots to accept the twig end.
- With the twig held upright as it grew on the tree, its uncut surface facing out and its flat tongues ready to press against the tree, slip its cut ends between the tree's bark and its cambium.
- Repeat, to make several bridges.
- Cover the joined cambiums with grafting wax and tape.
- Hope the cambiums of twig and trunk grow together over time.

However, **grafting will probably not be an option** because the field of grafting is so sparsely populated that you may not find any experienced practitioners. If you do, they will probably be familiar with propagation grafts rather than repair grafts. Yet a skilled bridge grafter is the person you need since only with practice do the odds of the graft "taking" reach even as high as 50-50.

There's an aesthetic issue, too. If the bridge grafts take and hold until the tree grows over and around them, the repaired area will be very lumpy -- not very attractive. If you do chose to repair them, you might counter the grafts' looks by highlighting the unusual horticultural practice: Invest in interpretive signage to explain what's going on.

Last but not least, there's the loss of a "draw" for your relatively new public garden. Espalier trees are unusual and yours are significant features. People will come to a new garden when they hear others say, "You should go see these neat trees at..."

So, our advice to replace these trees comes in respect of long odds, a graft's looks, and the importance of these particular specimens

*Want to feel better about rabbits' winter damage to trees and shrubs? The last time we included bridge grafting in an article was in What's Coming Up #11, related to *beaver* damage. At least a rabbit leaves wood alone when there are fresh green things to eat, so protecting tree trunks from bunnies is usually an issue only in winter. Beavers, however... they chew all year.

**For an illustrated explanation of bridge grafting, copy this URL to your browser and scroll all the way to the end of the bulletin <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/grafting.html>

Rabbit and vole damage

Sights like (below) this are greeting many people this spring: Shrub canes and tree bases stripped of bark and cambium by rabbits and voles (meadow mice). Don't waste your time and the shrub's energy hoping for a miracle or to see one last floral show. Cut off the damaged wood right away so the plant can use its stored energy and the spring surge to create new branches. If the shrub or tree was healthy last year, you might see new shoots grow several feet this year.



Left: Rabbits are often to blame for trees and shrubs gnawed in winter, but voles (a.k.a. meadow mice) do serious damage, too. If furrows like this developed in your lawn during winter and you find burrow entrance holes about the size of 25¢ coins in the garden, voles are living there. As well as chewing the bark at the bases of trees and shrubs, they have probably been devouring the crowns of ornamental grasses, bulbs (tulips, crocuses and lilies are favorites) and perennials with thick, starchy roots such as *Liatris* and *Hibiscus*.

Off with its head: One-cut answer to the girdled trunk

One of the worst wounds a woody plant can sustain is damage at its base, such as when a weed whip or chewing animal destroys the cambium. That thin layer of cells beneath the bark is the sole source of new wood and only conduit for energy transfer from leaves to roots.

A trunk has been girdled when the bark and the moist layer beneath has been eaten or peeled away from most or all of its circumference. In the next growing season, that plant may leaf out in spring then die back soon after or suddenly during the summer. What happens is that water can make its way up through the woody xylem in spring, so the emerging foliage has all it needs to resume life. Later, when it is the turn of the leaves to return the favor and ship energy to the roots in the form of carbohydrates made via photosynthesis, there is an unbridgeable gap in the downward path. The roots are cut off. Unable to produce their own energy, they use up their reserves, starve, and die. As the root system fails, foliage wilts and dies.

One way to save a girdled plant is to cut it off at the point of damage. This seems drastic but is a recognition that the top is already forfeit. If it is a species that maintains dormant growing points -- most deciduous plants and some evergreens -- such a plant can begin again from dormant buds at its trunk base. It's a one-cut solution that is a cut to the chase, letting the plant use the reserves stored in its roots toward new wood and foliage it will be able to keep.

Regrowth can be amazingly in its speed and size. If a plant was healthy before its girdling wound, it may develop one or more new shoots from its base that reach up 3 feet or more in their first year.

In these cases we do lose the shape the plant had developed, and must start over training for single- or multi-trunk arrangement, layered branching or other attractive form.

If the plant was a grafted specimen and all the remains below the girdled section is the root stock, the regrown plant will be different in some or all aspects. Usually, it is better to remove that plant entirely than to invest time and training in something that will be too large, less floriferous, or lacking other features of the grafted variety, such as pest resistance or colorful foliage.



Above: There's no hope of a come-back from a grafted plant if the bark is chewed off all the way to the graft union. In the case of this young apple tree, what might grow back from below the damage would be an apple but certainly not a 'Red Delicious.'

Not all introductions worked well. Rabbits were an unmitigated environmental disaster. Unchecked by any natural predator, they bred at a staggering rate and chewed their way across vast areas of pastureland as well as any garden that came their way. Attempts to control them by introducing ferrets, weasels and stoats did much more harm than good. Although these predators probably killed a reasonable number of rabbits, they also devastated populations of kiwi and raided the nests of flighted birds.

- from *A History of Gardening in New Zealand* by Bee Dawson -

Tip cuttings: Growing on from what people are saying this week

So much goes on in email exchanges between newsletters! We wish we could include it all. Excerpts:

Shrubs that slow in growth get boring

I have three leatherleaf **viburnum** bushes that started to show signs of weakness last summer. While distributing mulch I noticed the **base of each plant had holes bored** into the bark and a portion of the bark destroyed. - M.D. -

...bored trunks have been girdled by insects. They've left the bark intact but chewed away all the cambium beneath. (See *Off with its head* on page 8 for a definition of girdling, and its prognosis.)

Borers find easiest access when the plant is weak or old. So evaluate the growing conditions there, and improve what you can:

- If it has become **shady** as nearby trees grew, can you prune to let in more light?
- Has the **drainage** been compromised by compaction or grade change?
- Have **other insects or disease** affected the foliage, reducing the plant's overall energy?
- Has there been a **change in the chemistry** of that environment? Review and compare current and past use of insecticides, fungicides, weed preventers, weed killers, and mulches.

Cut out the bored trunks. Do it now so the plant can grow new canes during the spring surge. Young, vigorous growth is almost always borer resistant.

We covered this topic in issue #92. Do take a look there for more.



Left: *Viburnum* trunk with borer damage.

Right: Rhododendron has its own borer, a different insect but similar lifestyle and damage.



Homegrown is key to being chemical free

Our son has a **severe sensitivity to chemicals** and so we are looking for what kind of mulch and plants we can plant around our house that do not have pesticides on them. Do you know where we can find mulch like this, or who grows plants organically? - R.D. -

We don't know any sources of or practical way to be sure you are buying chemical-free mulch. Most bark mulch is simply ground, stockpiled and then sold. Pine straw is gathered and baled, composted mulches heated, turned and then bagged or piled, etc. However, we do know that some mulches may be treated with colorants. We've known of batches treated with an herbicide because they sat long enough to cool, gather seeds and support weed growth. They may be stored in a landscape supply yard alongside products that have pesticide residue, and acquire traces of those chemicals from the loading equipment that moves between the piles.

The **safest mulch is material whose entire production you control**. One example is your own trees' leaves. Another is chipped trimmings from known trees and shrubs.

If your homegrown mulch supply is limited, you can make it cover twice as much ground by first spreading a layer of newspaper, then covering that with mulch. Then, a one inch layer will do, where two or more inches would otherwise be required to suppress weed seed germination.

For plants grown without pesticides, we'd start with inquiries at a farm market or local nursery that is not simply a retail outlet but a grower. We wouldn't expect to find an organic grower of ornamental plants, since there isn't a demand there to match that for organically grown vegetables and fruits. We would, however, hope to find a grower who could tell us which



pesticides and fertilizers were used in a given plant's production, or perhaps let us buy plant's a year in advance and do some custom chemical-free growing for us.

Newspaper under mulch can help save money or make homegrown mulch go twice as far. Spread the paper then just enough mulch to hide it. One cubic yard of mulch spread three inches deep will cover 100 square feet of bare ground, 200 square feet of established perennial bed. The same amount spread one inch deep over paper goes three times as far.

Green thumbs up to talking while gardening. Whether we talk to plants, ourselves or a gardening buddy, putting a thought into words makes it more likely to be recalled.

Green thumbs down to overlooking weaknesses and irregularities in growth now, in spring. Now is when we can see them clearly and have time to intercede the plant a better chance this year -- or ourselves a chance to replace a weakling with something better.



Is talking to oneself more prevalent among gardeners than non-gardeners? We think so. "Ah, I see you there, you bindweed," Janet said as she weeded and saw the shoots at left. "Under there by the trunk of that new pine -- I bet you came in with the pine's root ball, didn't you? Think you can sneak out into my garden? Think again! Take that!" The "conversation" comes back to her each time she sees that new pine. She's already grubbed about in that space near the pine's trunk this spring, looking for shoots from bits of bindweed root that surely remain. She will keep doing that all year, forcing the roots spend energy to develop shoots but denying them any pay-back from mature leaves. Even something as pernicious as bindweed can be starved out in this way.

Below: At cut-back time in spring we should notice dead centers on perennials and make note that they need division and renewal!



Don't wait until it's 70°F before you start gardening! Weeds are already growing ahead of us when it's 55. and it's not bad, working in 55 or 60 degree weather. You can recognize a weed by its root alone, so you can go after it early. Dig now and take out all the horsetail root you can find. Perennials (in the bed) take the disturbance well, this time of year, and the horsetail will be set back sufficiently so Round-up or repeated pulling of remaining bits will actually begin to make headway.
- Diane Marion, professional gardener -

Other trouble seen while cutting



Left: Here are two clumps of maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*) the same age and type, growing in the same bed. (Easier to see and feel as you cut, than to capture in photos! Check the bottom photo on page 12 to see a circle of grass blades, as here on the left. These clumps are both in that row of ornamental grasses.) Notice (top left) that one is not so much a clump as a collection of dead spots interspersed with clusters of living stalks, many of those with pink discolorations. Compare that circled clump to the one on the right, which fills a spot of the same size with tightly packed stems the color and resilience of life. We know there must be something amiss. We make note of such differences now as we visit each plant at the beginning of the season to clip or weed, so we can look into and deal with trouble on a preventive basis rather than find ourselves facing weak growth and ugliness during the fullness of summer. This clump is one to be removed and burned, as we've learned the signs, seen the spread of this stalk borer and have thus far been unable to control it.



Above, and right: These branches are not the honey brown of the healthy yew twig (included above, left of Janet's hand). They're black. When you see deviations like this, don't ignore them. Look into yew (*Taxus*) and off-color wood, such as by taking a cutting to your Extension* or garden center trouble shooter, sending an email and photo to someone like us, reading about yew in plant pest books or doing an internet search for *Taxus twig color*. This will probably net references to *Taxus* mealybug or Fletcher scale and the



sooty mold that forms where excrement from sucking insects builds up. Since this yew is weak -- repeated shearing has left it in hollow-ball state with a high wood:leaf ratio -- it may not be able to afford the strain of insect feeding, too. It will help to encourage its overall health -- prune more wisely to admit light to the center for a greater depth of foliage, make sure it has water, apply a slow release fertilize, and correct any environmental obstacles such as compacted soil. It's also wise to watch its new growth for signs of infestation, and consider control measures such as periodic forceful rinsing of foliage, release of predator insects, dormant oil, etc.

*csrees.usda.gov/Extension/

This week in our garden

Grow with us! This week:

We're running hard even though the spring schedule's just begun! So bear with us as we simply talk out loud while we work:



We're **cutting back big grasses**. We have such a love-hate relationship with them. They're so big, so dramatic, so attractive in winter, but so shabby now in spring. Certainly, there's no quicker way to get a clean looking garden than to cut them back now. Always a good card to play for sympathy, too. "What did I do today? Are you kidding me!?! You can't see I cut all those grasses back? Aren't you glad you don't have to do that?!"

It's no exaggeration. We have to be on our knees to cut them all the way to ground level so the center remains lively. (Hate to divide these monsters any more than absolutely necessary!) 15 minutes and 100 cuts with the loppers for each clump. Phew, sure makes us love the smaller grasses, more.

We pity anyone with 10, 20, or 100 such grasses in their care. Good reason to rent or own a brush trimmer -- like a little buzz saw on a wand. Even though we hate the noise of power tools, the gasoline they use, and the vibrations that assault us as we hold them, they're a life saver when there's cutting to be done on such a scale.

Power cutting doesn't make the clean up quicker. Tying the



What a difference four hours makes: Grasses cut, beds edged and weeded, and leaves taken off the lawn. (But not to be discarded! They're stockpiled, going back down as mulch in the beds once we come back and divide grasses.)

intact grasses into a bundle *before* we cut does that. Also saves time to bale them, rather than trying to stuff them into yard waste bags.

Cutting back the woody plants we treat like perennials, such as butterfly bush/summer lilac (*Buddleia davidii*), blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris*), barberries (*Berberis*), dwarf spirea (*Spiraea bumalda* and *S. japonica*), hybrid roses, etc. We cut them back hard -- to within a couple inches of the ground -- and they come back from dormant buds at the bases of those canes.

Avoid hand and wrist strain!

Be good to yourself as well as your plants. Cutting with loppers rather than hand pruners means using larger motion and bigger muscles, which can help you avoid repetitive motion stress to hands and wrists.

Innocent, unsuspecting butterfly bush:



Left and below: We don't mess around with woody cut-backs. This butterfly bush will come back strong from a buds at the base of a stem, we prefer it as a 5' plant with all its main stems straight and arranged like a fountain spray, so we cut it to 2" stubs.

Five minutes later:



We weed well around any shrubs we'll cut back because even a little bit of shade on their stem bases will slow or even prevent that new growth.

Left: See the gold foliage in this bed, as captured last May? With gold leaves all summer and blue flowers in August, *Caryopteris* (*C. x clandonensis* 'Worcester Gold') is a major source of color in this landscape. Turn the page to see how we treat them, and the pesty myrtle in that bed, to insure continued good show.



Since both leaf and bloom are more intense on younger wood, we cut the shrubs back hard every year or two in spring to keep them full of vigorous young wood. (Note: With Janet's apologies for the photos on this page, which are hers. Their lack of clarity not to be charged to Steven.)



Groundcovers are not good companions for cut-back shrubs. Aggressive year-round species such as myrtle (*Vinca minor*) are serious competition, shading out buds all along the branches.

Left: The myrtle (*Vinca minor*) in this bed has grown under and through the *Caryopteris*. This could kill the shrub, in any scenario. In this case its shade would certainly slow or stop the shrub's comeback after our cut since it's shading dormant buds in wood which take light and warmth as their cue to grow.



So we remove all groundcover myrtle from the base and root zone of the shrub (left)....

....before cutting it back (below).



We're **looking for the damage we've done to irrigation systems**. It's always something, and always better to see and fix it now rather than after wilted plants call the problem to our attention in June.



We create most irrigation trouble ourselves. No sense saying "Don't do that." It's simply going to happen that:

- We inadvertently cut lines while digging or weeding. It's the only time we curse our sharp spades and weeders.
- We run them over. What were we thinking, in agreeing to their placement along the shoulder of the road and the edge of the driveway?! We should have had them placed well into the beds and lawn, to spray *outward*. Time to make that change.
- We bury them, let mulch fall into their housings or plant too-tall plants in front of them. It's pretty simple to raise the whole sprinkler unit in spring, or elevate the head on a riser.
We melt them. Well, we haven't done it ourselves but we know people who have. It happens when they choose to burn ornamental grasses rather than cut them in spring.

Be careful when burning prairie gardens and meadows near buildings. Got any idea what the melting point of vinyl siding might be? I do, because it melted it on my office! The fire was 40 feet away and under control, but a big gust of wind blew hot air toward the building, and the next thing I knew the siding was hanging down off the walls. So be careful out there!

- Neil Diboll -
PrairieNursery.com

Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

An eternal student of gardening, Janet Macunovich has embraced the perspectives of Thomas Jefferson, 'an old man but a young gardener' and philosopher-garden writer Allen Lacy who can 'spend an entire lifetime in one corner of one garden and still not know all that's going on there'. She aims to keep studying all her life, in classrooms and in gardens. "It's such a privilege to work in other peoples' gardens," says Macunovich, "where the same plants I grow in my yard show me faces I wouldn't see otherwise. Some years I work in 100 gardens and don't see the same thing twice. To observe, research and experiment, then develop my understanding even further by writing it down for others, it's all better than gold.

An instructor who finds ways to reach every student. Horticultural photographer Steven Nikkila earned his degree in Landscape Technology from Oakland Community College in 1989. Since then he's helped thousands of people learn about photography, plants and gardens at gardening conferences, professional plant societies' symposia, community education organizations and botanical gardens.

He also served as a senior instructor for The Michigan School of Gardening from 1996 to 2008. "I think one of the most important things about both teaching and photography is the angle you take. Everything has to make sense and be useful to the particular audience. When a Boy Scout troop asked me to help them with tree I.D. and photography, I used essentially the same materials I'd put together for the Master Gardener program and an Extension Educators' workshop. But it was a whole different class once I tailored it for the Scouts' perspective."



Email questions to Janet or Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850.

Where to catch Janet, Steven and friends in-person:

It's time to *Garden by Janet and Steven - bring your gloves and tools!* These sessions are free. You must email or call (JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850) to reserve a spot and learn the location. Include your phone number so we can call you as the date approaches, in case weather changes the plan. All are limited-space. See page 19 for more about such sessions.

April 6, Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, *Garden by Janet* in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, *cutting back burning bushes and doing a garden check up.*

April 9, Saturday, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m., *Garden by Janet* in Waterford, Michigan. Come shadow her in *assessing a landscape and planning renovations.*

April 2, Saturday, Janet is part of English Gardens' *Garden Party* weekend in its **southeast Michigan** stores.

Low Maintenance Landscape will be discussed at the West Bloomfield location (248-851-7506) at 10:00 a.m., at the Royal Oak store (248-280-9500) at 1:00 p.m. and in Ann Arbor (734-332-7900) at 4:00 p.m.

April 3, Sunday, The *Garden Party* continues at English Gardens' **southeast Michigan** locations.

Janet will be advising on the *Low Maintenance Landscape* at the store in Clinton Township (586-286-6100) at noon and in Eastpointe (586-771-4200) at 3:00 p.m.

April 4, Monday, *Landscape Renovation*

& April 5, Tuesday, *Placing Trees in the Landscape*

These two classes are help for those who've decided to make a change or who are faced with an unexpected change, such as the loss of a large tree to emerald ash borer. Janet explains how-to at the **Cox Arboretum in Dayton, Ohio**. Attend one or both sessions. 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. Monday and 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. Tuesday. More information, fee and registration at 937-434-9005 and at the arboretum's website. <http://www.metroparks.org/Parks/ViewEvents.aspx?Park=Cox>

April 5, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. The Beverly Hills Community Garden presents "*An Organic Vegetable Garden Primer: Planning and Planting Q&A*" especially for beginning gardeners. Led by Janet. At the Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, 20000 West Thirteen Mile Road, **Beverly Hills, Michigan**. Email JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850 to reserve a spot.

April 6, *Garden By Janet*, Grosse Pointe, Michigan. See top of this page and page 19 for more.

April 12, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. The Beverly Hills Community Garden presents "*The Vegetable Garden is Planted; Ongoing Care and Troubleshooting Q&A*". Moderated by Janet Macunovich. At the Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, 20000 West Thirteen Mile Road, **Beverly Hills, Michigan**. Email JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850 to reserve a spot.

April 9, Saturday, 11:30 a.m. *Spring Start Up* and *Canned Goods: Gardens in Containers* are Janet's topics during the Ray Wiegand's Nursery Open House in **Macomb, Michigan**. Free. No reservations required. Call 586-286-3655 for more information.

April 10, Sunday, 11:00 a.m. Steven Nikkila will be discussing *Shade Gardens* and *8 Months of Color* during the Ray Wiegand's Nursery Open House in **Macomb, Michigan**. Free. No reservations required. Call 586-286-3655 for more information.

April 11, Monday, 7:00 p.m. Janet will cover *Great Plant Combinations* at the Huntington Woods Library, 26415 Scotia Road, **Huntington Woods, Michigan**. The program is hosted jointly by the County Downs Garden Club and Huntington Woods Tree Board. Free. Open to the public.

April 17, Sunday, 3:00 p.m. Plymouth Nursery's Open House in **Plymouth, Michigan** features Janet's *Best Foot Forward: Ideas for Entrance Gardens*. Free. No reservations required. Call 734-453-5500 for more information

Time to Tend your pond! Above: Scott Bates, owner of Grass Roots Nursery, is one of the most knowledgeable people in the country regarding water gardens. More than that, he explains how to and makes you laugh at the same time. As a moderator of the website forum that Janet and Steven administered along with expert friends, Bates not only answered questions and checked the accuracy of others' statements on the site, but gave us humorous, helpful pond puzzles.



At this nursery in New Boston, Michigan, Scott offers free weekend how-to sessions for pond owners. Check his website, grassrootsnursery.com or call 734-753-9200 for more information.

Saturday, April 30: Janet's double-header in **Saginaw, Michigan** at Abele Greenhouses:

Gardening on Clay Soil 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. How to work the soil and what to plant so you can reap the rewards of the richness of clay without breaking your back. and

Hardy Hydrangeas 1:00 -2:30 p.m. For those coaxing blue hydrangeas to bloom in zone 5, perplexed about pruning hydrangeas, fighting the Annabelle hydrangea flop, and more. Abele's is on Wadsworth Road in the crook of the I-75 / I-675 elbow. \$6 per session or \$10 for both. To register, call 989-752-5625.

Janet, Steven, how does your website grow?

We're making an open library of our work, for the quickest connections between all that we and this network have come up with over years, on any topic. It will include a real-time, moderated forum where everyone can be part of all the discussions that take place now only in email with individuals, between newsletters.

We aim to have that site up this year but have to cross a big hurdle in terms of development and hosting cost.

We would love your help. **Send your donation**, check or money order payable to Janet Macunovich, to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328.

Right: Our **Donatell** tale coneflower is tracking our website development progress and answering the question, "How much more do you need for the website?" We'll feature it here so you know how far we are toward our goal.

When the flower's **all blue**, we're gold!



Invite Janet or Steven or their expert friends to your club or community.

We go where we're invited! That's taken us all over the country and then some over the past 20 years. We address many topics, drawing from our list of **100+ talks**. We also continue **to meet groups' needs** and expand our horizons by developing new material or "hybridizing" from what we already have.

So, whether it's...

- a **how-to lesson for a garden club**,
- a **hands-on, on-site workshop** or
- a **multi-part class** for a small group,
...we're game!

We can also connect you to one or a whole line-up of other experts who know how to explain how-to. So give us a **call or send an email** to make a date, request our list of classes and talks or get a referral.

JMaxGarden@aol.com or **248-681-7850**. Our calendars fill about a year ahead for spring weekends, and six months ahead for other weekends and evenings. Give us your dates. Then we can meet you in *your* garden.



Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich (above, with their friend Chuck Martin, horticulturist at Dow Gardens in Midland, Michigan) have been digging, shooting, teaching how-to and appreciating the instructional skills of other experts for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the early '90s and ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring expert instructors such as Martin who not only knew their stuff in the garden but how to get their messages across to a group. Contact them at JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850 to set up a talk, workshop or class.

About *Garden by Janet & Steven* dates:

Since gardeners are let-me-see people who learn best with hands-on, from time to time we list *Garden by Janet & Steven* sessions here to afford you that chance to grow. You visit us where we're working to watch or work as you choose. Generally, there is no charge and we're in one of two types of locations:

- 1) At a **garden we tend through our business, Perennial Favorites**: Our clients understand our enthusiasm for teaching. Some open their gardens to small groups who want to see and practice "how to." When our work may be of interest to you, we invite you in.
- 2) In the **Detroit Zoo, Adopt-A-Garden** program where we're 23-year veterans. Many people have worked with us there, some for a day and others for years. You can check out this program by coming in as our student on a temporary pass. **To join Janet at the Zoo**, email mstgarden@gmail.com with the subject line of your email "Help at zoo."

Scheduling a *Garden by Janet & Steven*

Sometimes we are asked "Can you come do one of your workshops in my garden?" It's a possibility! At these sessions:

- Someone pays for the time, or we're on a site where we volunteer regularly. Although we love to share what we know, we need to eat and pay our bills.
- Our client knows our work well enough to allow us free rein, even to experiment.
- Our client allows strangers on site and trusts our supervision if they pitch in.
- We know the site and plant history enough to explain how these affect the work's "what" and "why."
- We've determined that the plants and site will serve as clear examples.
- We know from questions we've received that the work is of common interest.
- With rare exception, the site's visible from a public way so students can drive by to keep track of "what happens next."