

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila
answer your growing concerns
Issue #141, April 20, 2011

In this issue:

Aged black gold for gardens, pages 1 - 2
Mulch-choosing primer, pages 3- 6
Cut to the quick for great roses, pages 7 - 9
Gall darn weird growth! Pages 9 & 17
Tie first then clip: It's a hit! Page 10
Tip cuttings from the week's emails include:
Deer blasters & train guards, page 10
Fueling fall this spring, page 10
Planting potted bulbs, page 11
How common names snowball, page 11
Trees in planters, pages 11 - 12
Seeds and cuttings to smile about, page 12
Shoo-ing winter, page 12
Solving poor drainage, pages 13- 14
Feathery grub killer, page 14
Cool, epic & punny words, pages 14 - 15
Emerald ash borer alert, pages 14 & 18
In our garden
Desirable weeds, page 15
Rough stuff along bed edges, pages 15 - 16
Hairy find on blue beard, page 17
Stone's throw from a mower, page 17
Who are Janet and Steven? Page 19
Photos, books, magazines & CDs, pp. 21 - 23



Few flowers are more charming than the early spring ephemerals, like woodland anemone (*A. blanda*). How to have carpets of it, on page 15.

Where to catch Janet & Steven, pages 19 - 20
Invite us to your town, page 21
Back issues, website & forum info, pp. 9, 12 & 21

Our rainbow ends in pot of compost

Where can I **obtain compost**? I'm told I can mix it in, or use it **as mulch** and it will improve the soil. But I can't make much in my little compost pile. - R.A. -

Compost is garden gold. In new beds we add three to four inches of it and mix it in. It adds humus, which increases water, air and nutrients in a soil. It steps up soil life -- worms and microscopic creatures -- which is a natural defense against pest and disease problems. We also use it as a **mulch one- to two inches deep** where we want a great backdrop, something dark and crumbly.

It's rare that a home compost pile produces enough to sate its user. To make truckloads takes huge piles fed by massive quantities of leaves and grass clippings, turned not by garden fork but by bulldozers.

The raw materials, machinery, and incentive for composting all came together in the 1990's when yard waste was banned from landfills. Municipal- and **commercial compost facilities** now return our clippings to our gardens.

Some cities and townships run their own composting facility and make the finished product available for pick up by residents. Gardeners catch on quickly to its worth. We've watched people shovel compost into pick-up truck beds and trash bins, load it into plastic-lined trunks of luxury sedans, and pile it on tarps inside mini-vans. **Call your local public works department** to learn if this is happening in your town.

If you can't get compost through your municipality or you aren't up for do-it-yourself hauling and delivery, **call landscape supply centers** to find one that delivers compost by the cubic yard. Ten years ago, there were only a few in our area but now there are many.



Some people worry about the safety of compost produced on a large scale, because its raw materials may have contain contaminants that remain in the finished product. We do not dismiss this possibility but our concerns are minor now that we've looked into the testing done on finished product, reports from Rodale Institute and others about degradation of disease organisms in composting, and the processes used to keep so much material "cooking" so it can be quickly moved back off the site. It also helps to have talked to managers of operations such as this one run by Veolia (a waste management company) and SOCRRA (a governmental agency, Southeast Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority). They are professionals who stay current on technology and take pride in what they do, which is clear in the order and beauty at their sites.

Much thought about which mulch

Most of us have many choices in what to put on the soil as a weed suppressing, moisture saving blanket. On the next four pages, pictures convey our thoughts for your decision matrix.



Left: Dark, bare soil can show off plants to perfection, but it's also tough to keep weed-free and tougher to keep moist than a mulched bed. So we choose mulch that's fine and dark, to have the best of both worlds.

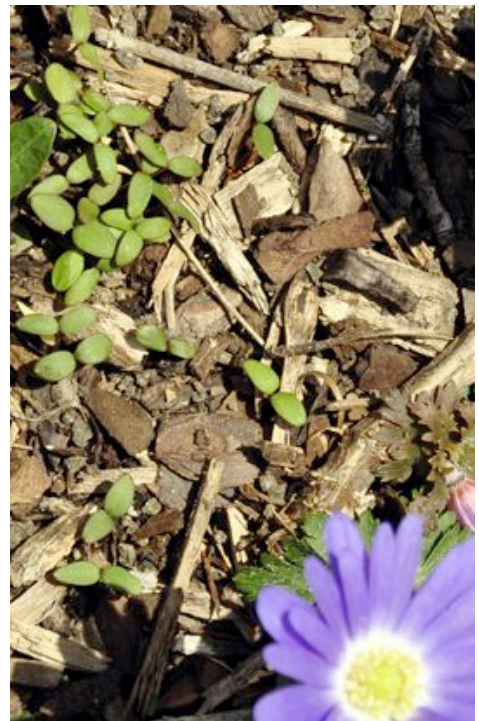


Right: Pine needles make great mulch. That they make the soil too acid is an old wives' tale. They are slippery to walk on, however!



Left: Given the choice of two bark products (here, dark composted woody fines and lighter processed bark) we opt for darker stuff around perennials, which can be visually lost in a mulch's pattern and color.

Composted woody fines is dark when first applied (below, left) but after a year its dark portion has been absorbed into the soil, leaving bits of wood (below). This year's layer of mulch will cover the wood, which will eventually decompose.





Brunnera macrophylla, bigleaf forget-me not & leopardsbane, *Doronicum caucasicum*)

Left: Our favorite mulch for perennials is leaf litter, augmented as necessary by a "veneer mulch" of finely ground bark. Although large, established perennials seem to grow well enough despite the temporary nitrogen tie-up that comes from putting wood and bark on a bed, small and new plants definitely grow more quickly in a leafy mulch.

Below: Some other mulches comprised of non-bark, non-woody plant parts go easy on soil nitrogen and so are better for small and new perennials. Here are cocoa hulls, which we love to use.. and to smell.



Mertensia virginica, Virginia bluebells

We are devoted to our own and others' dogs but we're reporters of fact, too. So we have had three veterinarians looking out for over 7 years for bona fide accounts of pets hurt by cocoa hulls. We have seen no evidence that our pets or others are likely to be hurt by this stuff. Please do not send us copied scare stories about such incidents unless you can send with them the name of the person or veterinarian involved. Our vets will be glad to look into it. Not one of the reports circulated in those sensational emails has traced to any real people. Meanwhile, on our own we found *one* account, of a beagle that died of an impacted bowel, with cocoa hulls just one of many "what on Earth?!" substances found in its intestines. With apologies, we say: Some dogs are simply stupid eaters. If you have such a stupid beagle, you are not protecting it from cocoa hulls but from itself.



We don't ever "Work in old mulch" but simply let that happen through the actions of soil animals. We add new mulch as needed to keep the layer topped up to 1-1/2 to 2 inches.

Right and below: Mulch changes color when it's wet, and that's a good thing since it means it's holding water and decomposing. Our idea of a good mulch is one that is gone in 12 months. These two photos are of the same bed, same mulch, dry (right) and wet (below). The mulch is a finely ground bark sold in bags as "Soil Conditioner" and by some landscape suppliers in bulk as "premium ground fir bark" or "red pine fines."



We who tend the soil as closely as our plants can become a bit goofy over wonderful mulches. Visiting a Tennessee botanical garden and discussing the topic with the horticulturists there, our report of mulches we use was greeted with an enthusiastic crowd, "Yes! We can get those pine fines, in bulk, too - we're really lucky!"



Here's almost half a cubic yard of mulch. It's enough to form a two-inch blanket over 150 square feet of established perennial garden. That's a garden where there is enough space between plant crowns for healthy growth and air movement, yet the plants' canopies will expand to form a solid cover by mid-summer.

This same amount of mulch will cover 200 square feet or more if perennials in the bed are crowded or include large colonies of groundcover.

If used between shrubs or trees, on bare soil or a newly planted perennial bed, this 1/2 cubic yard of mulch spread at 2" depth will cover less than 100 square feet.

Mulch should not rest against perennial stems that formed in the open air. (Herbaceous perennials *can* be covered with loose mulch of reasonable depth in fall and emerge right through that layer in spring.) The dark areas around each *Dianthus* (right) are where mulch tails off and the soil color shows through. Plants spread their skirts as they grow, effectively suppressing weeds there.



Despite the "green" sound of its name, we are not fans of enviro-mulch -- mulch made by grinding wooden pallets and then coloring it red (left), black or yellow. It's lumber, which means it's *dry* wood, which takes a very long time to decompose, tying up great deal of soil nitrogen in the process. Its appearance is coarse and its colors garish -- tough visual competition for perennials and even some shrubs and trees. In addition, the dyes used to color the chipped pallet wood do run sometimes and can stain the surfaces and foliage they touch.

Wood's not natural mulch for a woodland garden. Do you see forest trees shatter into a zillion pieces and fall? No. They fall, then decompose, then spread. - Janet -

Roses on the cutting edge

I was told to not **cut back the roses** until April. How far back should I cut them? - M.J. -

We cut **hybrid tea roses** to just **a few inches tall every spring**, before or as new growth begins. Cut off all dead and damaged wood. Good canes are white inside, so if you see brown centers, keep cutting lower until your cut reveals clean wood. Cut thin, weak canes hard, even cut them out completely. Cut sturdier wood back to a hefty bud.

Don't worry. Left with its liveliest wood, a healthy hybrid tea rose progresses from stumps to a **sturdy four foot shrub each year**.



Above: We've pruned this hybrid tea rose to leave just two stout, healthy canes. The red bud swelling near the top of the foreground cane is the leaf bud we selected to become the year's main cane, positioned to grow up and away from the plant's center. Note the new roots that have formed from the canes' bases. Leafy mulch will serve them well; woody, dry mulch discourage them.



Left: Its position well above the dark ground makes it easier to see the graft union of this tree rose, and our tough cuts back to nubs of good wood. The tea rose pictured above will be just such a crown next year, and cut as hard.

Two other notes about this tree rose: 1) The support that's cinching it to its support must be cut, *now*, or it will girdle the trunk as it expands in spring. That will kill everything above the girdle. 2) We snapped this photo while still working on how to cut the central, decrepit brown stub out of this crown without damaging the healthy canes around it. Roses do like to be difficult...

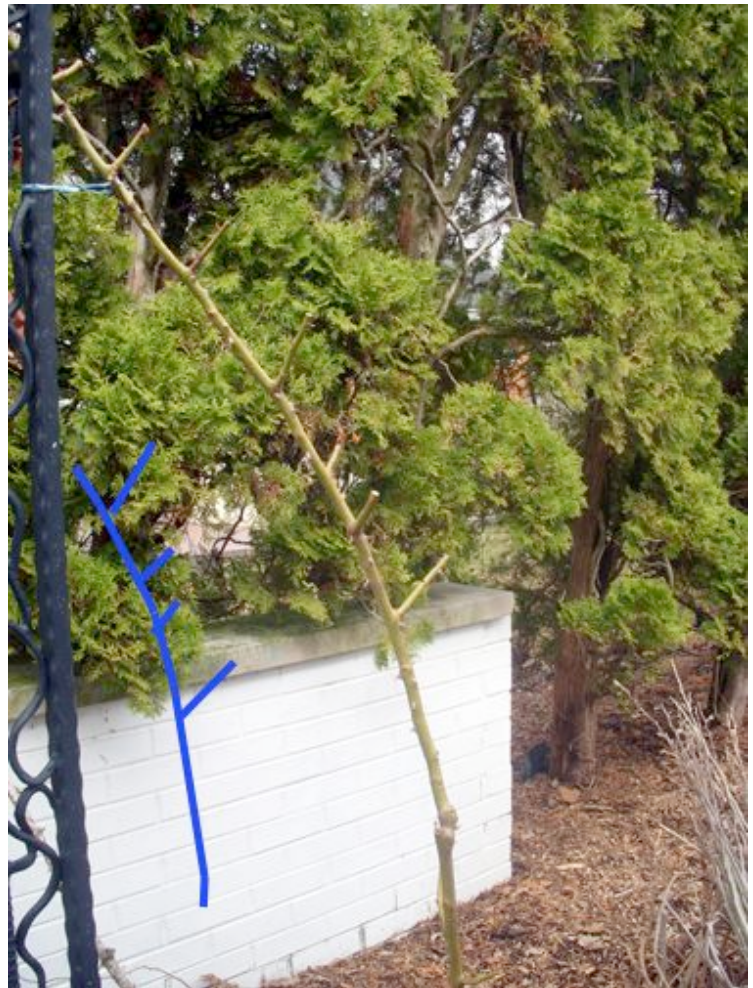
Cut back ramblers (including groundcover- and climbing roses) so that the **main canes remain**, each with stubs of its sturdiest side branches. Shorten the main canes themselves as necessary to remove weak or dead tips. Clip excess canes, weak- and old growth back to the base. Every few years or as needed, cut a main cane all the way back to let a sturdy younger cane take its place.

Make the **final cut** on each stem so that the top leafbud or the red bump that marks a dormant leafbud is **pointing outward**. New growth will then form gracefully, up and out from the shrub's center. Dab Elmer's glue over each cut if you've noticed many brown centers, so the scent of the pith is contained and fewer rose cane borers* will be attracted to your roses.

The flowers will form on brand new canes of a hybrid tea rose. On a rambler, they grow only from wood that's been through a winter. They develop on side branches of such canes.

*When our website's up (see page 21) you'll be able to click on words like this to see related issues and photos... for now, attachment file size limits the images we can fit in each newsletter. For a look at brown centers, check the article on borers in issue #140.

Right: Here's one cane of a rambler rose Janet cut several weeks ago. She reduced each side branch off the main cane to a stout stub with a well-positioned bud. In case you can't see it, we copied its outline in blue, to the left in this photo.



Left: One reason rose pruning is such a difficult practice to convey is that it's difficult to depict. Bare bones, thorny stems photograph poorly. Arrows here point to where we've stubbed back side shoots of this rambler's main canes.

Old rose, old issue
Shrub roses, also called "old roses", are pruned much like ramblers. For illustrations, see issue #88.

Galling thing about odd growth on roses...

When you see discolored, deformed growth on a rose -- really, on any woody plant -- cut below it to good wood. Because some of that deformity can be caused by fungus and bacteria, avoid cutting during wet weather when such problems spread most readily. No matter when you cut suspect wood, sterilize your pruning blades between cuts with hydrogen peroxide, alcohol or bleach.



For growths on rose twigs that look fuzzier than these, starting out pink and mossy, then aging to brown, check your rose books and on-line for images for a rose branch hosting mossy rose gall wasp (*Diplolepis rosae*). You'll probably end up looking at images such as at: www.ipmimages.org/browse/detail.cfm?imgnum=1370041

Looking for back issues?

Maybe we mention it, or you're directed to it when you use the index we send to all readers each winter. If you've lost one, or weren't on board 'back when', you can:

- 1) Send us an email. We can often re-send an issue or two. (Our response time varies; be patient with us.) Or,
- 2) Ask a friend who also reads *What's Coming Up* to relay a copy. Or,
- 3) Order our CDs. (Page 22) Or,
- 4) Donate to help us get our website up where all back issues will be available at a click. \$20 is great but even \$1 helps! Send checks payable to Janet Macunovich to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328.

The gnarly growth at the base of a side branch on this rose (above, left) and the terrible deformity to the base of the rose

(left) are both the result of the bacterium known as crown gall (*Agrobacterium tumefaciens*). It's a pathogen that has a very wide host group, including *Euonymus* (below), forsythia and 100 other woody species. So if you see it, prune below it and sterilize your clippers before your next cut.



Aiming for Answers: Hit or Miss? Tie-and-clip is a hit!

There are no sure bets in dealing with living things, but every situation we face helps us learn more possibilities. This is especially true when we share with each other what we've observed.

So we're always glad to hear what you can add to any topic you read here, especially after trying it. We all get ahead by sharing, whether what we say involves a hit -- like this week -- or a miss -- something that might begin, "What were you thinking when you told us to *do that?!?*"

In the last issue we showed you pre-bundling and then cutting barberry. To which Linnea Garvey of Plymouth Nursery in Plymouth, Michigan wrote:

When we **cut back our ornamental grasses**, we lasso twine around them several times to keep them collected, then we use an electric hedge trimmer and cut close to the base of the plant. It works great! A little raking and you are all done.

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. Here are four pages of excerpts from the recent chatter:

Blast it, another sneaky deer!

We're fighting a losing battle against deer. Suggestions? - G.T. -

Resistant plants ...(the deer are simply less likely to eat them). **Fencing** in winter... **repellents** during the growing season, beginning immediately as plants emerge. ...plus animal-detering **sprinklers** (such as the Scarecrow® brand*) pointed at the lanes you know deer use to enter your yard. A motion detector in the sprinkler sends a startling blast of water to ward off approaching deer. Move it every couple of weeks. It works -- keeps catching *us*, anyway.

* We expect there are others out there but this is the one we see locally and have been using.

<http://www.contech-inc.com/products/scarecrow/>

** Will we have advertising on or website? (More about the website on page 21.) For our own books and CDs and classes, yes. For other things, no, except as references like this where we feel you may want to look into a particular product or service.

Spring gets in your eyes.

Don't let it blind you to fall glory.

We fall for anything with a flower on it at the garden center. It's understandable after winter, especially in a slow, late spring. Yet don't forget **fall color**. Ask as you buy, "What color does it turn in fall?"

"Train" animals to stay away?

We're hoping to hear from those with model railroads in your gardens: Are your trains on remote, random start-up? Have any rabbit/raccoon/deer trouble? Seems to us that having a train start up, sound its horn and chug around at unexpected intervals could be the best all-round animal deterrent, ever.

One of the best scarecrows we ever used was a kid's toy duck with big eyes (eyes seem to have great effect) and a motion detector that triggered a quack. We stationed it at the base of the plant we figured was next on the menu. - Janet -

Belay, then bury those bulbs in pots

Bought three big pots of spring bulbs.. want to plant them in the garden. - C.P. -

Hardy species like tulips, daffs and hyacinths can become long term residents... must be gradually **hardened off** to spring cold this first year. Otherwise they can die in the transition from a warm greenhouse to cold air and soil.

Set the pot outdoors each day for three or four days, bring it in at night, then de-pot and plant the bulbs. They're planted shallow in a pot. **Set them deeper** in the garden, with at least 6 inches of soil over the bulb's nose. This will bury some foliage -- that's okay.

Beware the common name trap: snowballing confusion

L.K.: My neighbor has a **hydrangea** bush about 7-8 feet tall... wants to cut it back... Can it be **cut back** so much... and when?

J & S: Depends... if it has conical clusters of flowers in August, then it can be cut hard right now (*Hydrangea paniculata*, see issue #139)...

Conical clusters in June-July and... leaves like big oak leaves... oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*)... cut back hard now. You will lose the bloom for this year. Or you can cut it right after it blooms. Or you can cut half the stems now, half after bloom.

L.K.: Sorry to be a pain, it's just an old-fashioned overgrown **snowball bush**...

J & S: Not a pain at all. We figured by its height it was a panicle- or oakleaf hydrangea. Now we're thinking it's not a hydrangea but a viburnum. The non-fruiting form of European **cranberry viburnum** (*V. opulus* 'Sterilis') is called "snowball bush"... Can be cut back hard but will lose the bloom that year... does that viburnum-thing of suckering like made after a hard cut so thin it as it re-grows.... As an alternative... give it the **same treatment as an overgrown lilac**, taking out 1/3 of the big canes at ground level each spring for three years.

Root relief for planter's long term residents

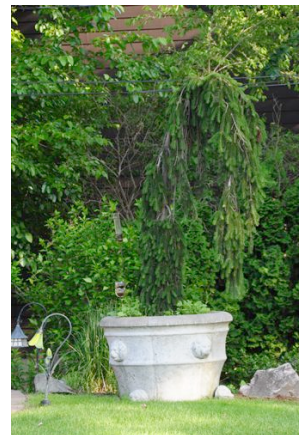
...tree in a big pot on the balcony. After all these years should it be repotted? - T -

Soiless **potting mixes break down**... Pore spaces collapse... aeration and drainage decline. Perennial plants -- including shrubs or trees -- that have been growing for years in large containers, can use new potting mix. **Two ways to renew it**...

If you can tip the pot and slide the plant out... **slice off the bottom of the root ball**, as if the root ball was a log you were cutting a round disk 1- to 2 inches thick from its bottom. You'll cut roots -- do it. Then put two inches of new potting mix into the pot and slide the plant back in.

Why deep is good for bulbs

Shallow-planted bulbs in a garden suffer P-trouble: They *perish*, emerge *prematurely* and get frosted, or *proliferate* wildly because they're too moist all summer, becoming too crowded to bloom. So long as the soil's well drained, deep is much better. We plant tulips, daffs and hyacinths 10-12" deep, minor bulbs about 4-5".



Alternate method... root knife, slice down to **cut vee's** at several places **around the edge** of the pot. Remove those cores of old mix and roots. **Fill in** with fresh potting mix.

At the very least, replace some potting mix at the surface...

Add slow-release fertilizer such as poultry manure when you put new soilless mix into perennial pots... two to three spoonfuls for a 12-13" pot.

Starting seeds and cuttings is good for the soul

I planted those Lupin seeds... "The Plant Propagator's Bible" by Miranda Smith... said you should **germinate lupin seeds in the dark**. I went back after I had planted them, in my cellar under lights, and covered them up. They have sprouted and I have now exposed them to the lights. She also advises doing the same for larkspur, delphinium, phlox, sweet pea, pansy and others.

I... **grow lemon verbena from cuttings...** now trying ...butterfly bush and *Caryopteris*...

I am finding this fun and cheaper than buying new plants. - N.M. -

It is fun to start stuff from seeds and cuttings. Even if it didn't save money, it would still be rewarding. Absolutely nothing beats visiting the little plants that you started from scratch, and seeing how fast they grow. Too bad half the world doesn't know the thrill!

Do you favor this fast, brief surf? (Pp. 10-14) Help us do more of it!

You can help us make all of our between-the-issues banter and research available to everyone. We'll do that on a **website with a free forum** and a comprehensive, searchable library of our writing.

When we were senior instructors in charge of the Michigan School of Gardening, we managed its on-line forum. Every topic we handled was available to all users there. We and the school's other instructors used our gardening expertise plus tools built into the website to be sure that every post was accurate, or appropriately qualified and explained. We're so glad to be hearing from you that you support reviving that forum. (More on page 21 at the blue-ing flower.)

What we've been doing in our newsletters and emails all these years has been in large part a labor of love. Lately we've added our dollars and your contributions to fund the programming and launch of a secure, easy, fully searchable, illustrated forum.

Donations gladly accepted! \$20 is great but every dollar helps. Send a check to Janet Macunovich at 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328-3041.

We intend to keep both website and this newsletter free and without strings, ads or Spam. **Your donations are helping to make it happen.**

Irrigation Forum Led by: <i>GailMorrell</i>	15	42	Oct 1 2007, 08:58 PM In: fertilizing By: <i>StevenNikkila</i>
Lawns Forum Led by: <i>SueGrubba</i>	83	184	Jan 2 2008, 05:02 PM In: ice and snow any problem on la... By: <i>SueGrubba</i>
Organic Gardening Forum Led by: <i>NancyPerry</i>	15	27	Jan 7 2008, 08:40 PM In: Newspaper & magazine inks... By: <i>JanetMacunovich</i>
Ornamental Grasses Forum Led by: <i>SueGrubba</i>			Jan 13 2008, 11:02 PM In: Ornamental grasses in containe... By: <i>KarenBovio</i>
Outdoor Lighting Forum Led by: <i>SueGrubba</i>			Jan 6 2008, 10:29 PM In: Nightlighting and winter wildl... By: <i>SueGrubba</i>
Perennials Forum Led by: <i>SueGrubba, ChuckMartin</i>			Jan 14 2008, 08:44 PM In: Winter flower By: <i>JanetMacunovich</i>
Practical and General Gardening Forum Led by: <i>GailMorrell</i>			Yesterday, 04:42 PM In: Metal window boxes By: <i>GailMorrell</i>
Professional Gardeners Forum Led by: <i>MiltHurley</i>			Jan 5 2008, 07:19 PM In: Gardening Talks By: <i>DebiHall</i>
Propagation Forum Led by: <i>KarenBovio</i>	15	30	Jan 14 2008, 08:52 PM In: Started my seeds By: <i>JanetMacunovich</i>
Rock Gardens Forum Led by: <i>StevenNikkila</i>	13	23	Feb 6 2007, 04:49 PM In: Rock gardens: overwintering a ... By: <i>StevenNikkila</i>
Roses Forum Led by: <i>NancyLindley</i>	86	181	Jan 14 2008, 08:03 PM In: Hip Hip Hoeray By: <i>Corkv</i>
Shrubs Forum Led by: <i>StevenNikkila</i>	221	489	Jan 13 2008, 08:40 PM In: pruning deer-damaged rhododend... By: <i>KarenBovio</i>

Oh what fun our gardeners' forum was, and will be again. Free, and ad-free, too.

Attention, winter: Enough already!

This clever e-mail came to us by way of M.M.:

INSTALLING SPRING...|||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||||| 44% DONE.

Install delayed....please wait.

Installation failed. Please try again. 404 error: Season not found. Season "Spring" cannot be located. The season you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable. Please try again

When we compare current plant development to the bloom time calendar we've kept for a couple of decades, we read this year as **almost 3 weeks behind**. Yet such things as the existence of natural hybrids between red maple and silver maple tell us these late springs are "normal." Those flowers are separated in all normal springs by two to three weeks. The pollen exchange that must occur for hybridization must happen in these abnormal years.

It's been a very frustrating spring for pro gardeners who respect guidelines such as no pruning in wet weather and staying off beds that are still draining. Scheduled work is pushed back and back. Worst, they know there simply will not be enough hours and days to get done what must be done, once spring finally comes in a last-minute rush. Yet there is always **a silver lining**, and this year we're finding it in plants that usually bloom for such a short time we can miss them entirely.

Right: **Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) is an example. When it opens in April the weather may be so warm that the flowers are fertilized and drop their petals all in a day. This year, cool weather's been keeping bloodroot pollinators at bay and flowers have lasted for over a week.



Another plus to a late spring are unusual bloom combinations. We remember one spring so late -- we think it was 1980 -- when spring plants were so far off schedule that by the time peonies were in full bloom, early hostas were also flowering.

Even best soil fails without a drain

I have an area that **doesn't drain well**... What kind of dirt/soil would help drainage. - J. -

...can only be helped by moving the water out of the soil, more quickly. No matter how good the soil, when its pores fill up with water they can't clear until the water below moves along.

If you can't **install a drain tile** where the drainage is poor, to grow the average garden plant you'll need to add soil to **raise the bed** as far above grade as water sits below for more than 24 hours. That is, dig a hole 18 inches deep, fill it with water, and then check how much water is left after 24 hours. If 12 inches of water remains in the hole, raise the bed 12 inches above grade.

(Thus a drainage system can cost less than raised beds. There is no soil to buy or retainers to build, and you can do the trenching yourself.)

Birds of a feather grub together

...The lawn grub picture (in issue #140) makes me think of the starlings pecking in my lawn. I've come to think of them as my little feathered lawn crew and they make me smile every time I see them. - R.H. -

Scrabbling in the garden, word play at the change of seasons

We gardeners earn admiring murmurs when we display our garden's produce in vases and on plates. Why not do the same by tossing a nifty horticultural term or two on the table during the next Scrabble game? For instance:

adventitious: adjective; ad ven TIH shus; arising in an unusual location; *Roots that develop from stems accidentally buried, and shoots that erupt from roots are called **adventitious** growth.*

epicormic: adjective; ep uh KOR mik; A shoot arising spontaneously from an adventitious or dormant bud on the stem or branch of a woody plant, often following exposure to increased light levels; *When a summer storm snaps limbs from a tree, **epicormic** shoots may develop rapidly from the branch stub.*

Sudden, strong epicormic growth is one sign that borer insects have seriously weakened the links between leaves and roots. It happens when emerald ash borer (EAB) destroys vital tissue underneath the bark on main limbs. (Sorry folks, EAB has not gone away and is now chewing up trees on a front 200 miles out from its start in our home town.) If you see an ash with epicormic shoots (right, arrows) or this same thing on any tree that has never grown that way before, look for signs of trouble in the wood above the shoots.

More EAB on page 18.

coppice sprout: noun; CAHP piss SPROWT; A stem arising from an adventitious or dormant bud near the base of a woody plant after a cut-back; *When we prune to renew a lilac, viburnum, hydrangea, ninebark or other bush, we employ that shrub's ability to produce **coppice sprouts** after we cut some or all of its canes 'way back.*

If you can't raise a bed high enough...

...to be above poor drainage, then plant only **what can grow in wet soil**... sunny buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), swamp buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), hardy hibiscus (*H. moscheutos*), canna and Siberian iris. Shady spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), richweed (*Collinsonia canadensis*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), and whorled loosestrife (*Lysimachia quadrifolia* which is a North America native, not the invasive alien that happens to share part of its *common* name).

... you will be limited in not being able to grow **what requires good drainage**, such as yew, bleeding heart, peony.... Keep in mind that those plants that need good drainage may do all right - acceptably, anyway -- through the growing season, and then **die over winter** because they cannot repair water damage while dormant.



friable: adjective; FRY uh buhl; easily crumbled; *It isn't a calendar date that signals the start of the growing season but when the soil drains and warms enough to be friable.*

pluvial: adjective; PLEW vee uhl; of or relating to rain

nival: adjective; NY vahl; characterized by, abounding with or living in or under snow

vernal: adjective; VUR nahl; appearing or occurring in the spring

Aprilian: adjective; ay PRIL ee un; pertaining to April

We can all enjoy nival scenery, and pluvial days, bringing greenery,

But oh, to see Aprilian skies and the vernal reflections in your eyes!

When our scrabbling became the punster's muse

We somehow played the muse last week when we published these **scrabbling words**:

I have no idea what possessed me to do this as I have so many other things I should be doing, but OUCH here goes:

They found the skeletonized **miner** at the bottom of the canyon. While he **node** he had **stolon** the crown from the museum without getting caught, he **blotched** his chance to get away and **pithed** away a fortune, because he didn't properly **notch** his mule's saddle.

Couldn't resist, sorry. - D.G. -

This week in our garden

Grow with us! This week:

Consider **another reason to avoid using Preen** (or other pre-emergence weedkillers) as a regular weed control strategy -- the joy of having self sown naturalizers in the garden. Our most cheery gardens are those where Johnny jump-ups (*Viola tricolor*), woodland anemone (*A. blanda* and *A. sylvestris*), winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*) and others colonize free space, putting on a more expansive show each spring. They do it in large part by seeding themselves around. Yet seedlings are discouraged where herbicides lace the topsoil.

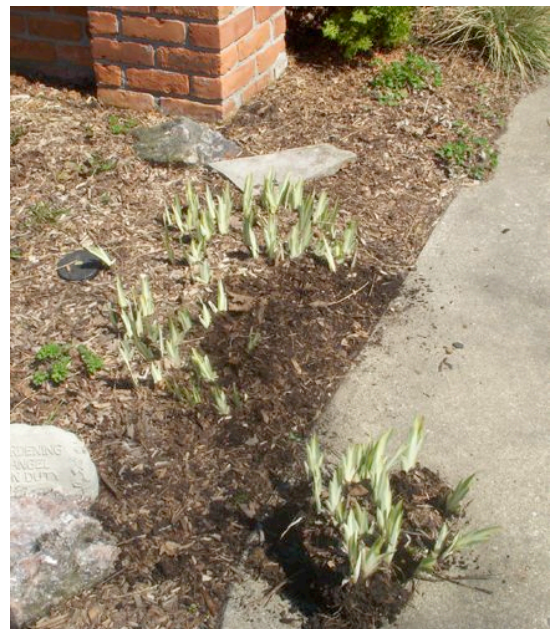


Woods anemone seedlings (arrow) carry this cheery spring ephemeral's show throughout a herbicide-free bed.

Deal with lawn grass or weeds that have infiltrated perennials or groundcover at the edge of a bed. Get tough. We don't just pluck grass from the top of those established plants. We lift them entirely and remove the weeds from below where the visual difference in roots makes this simple and the weed comes out easily. Then, we divide the perennial or groundcover because divisions reestablish more rapidly, bloom better and have cleaner foliage..

Right: When weeds cluster in the crowns of zebra iris (*Iris pallida argenteo-variegata*) the simplest reckoning is to lift the iris and re-set them after removing all the weedy soil.

Then if you are paying attention you'll realize the colony is too crowded and due for a thinning anyway. So why not use those irises for a temporary show in a planter? (Right, center.) They can take the cold long before you could place anything from a greenhouse in that container.



A short time later we ran into an extra hellebore, popped it out and added it to the show. (Bottom, right.)

Left: This evergreen ginger (*Asarum splendens*) had to be lifted to free it from hawkweed. Rather than simply setting it back in, we made it into 12 pieces (below, left). Since each piece now has more space from which to draw water and nutrients, they'll expand more quickly than the mother clump could.



Stop spending so much time figuring a way around the work. You could have been done with it by now if you'd just gotten to it in the first place!
- John Macunovich -

Keep on learning. We found **odd growths on blue mist spirea** (also called bluebeard, *Caryopteris x clandonensis*) and now know that there's an eriophyid mite that can infest and weaken their stem and we should look out for it by noticing and pruning out this growth.

See how some of this *Caryopteris*' stems have a few root-like growths, and others are virtually bearded with them? That's not normal and your normal reaction should be to cut out that wood below the deformity and clean your clippers before making your next cut on that or any related plant. The pests that infested these stems are mites. It's likely that every plant and many a "higher life form" has one or more mites that evolved to live in it. This *Caryopteris* pest is one of the eriophyid mites, a group that probably has more unknown and undescribed species than any other arthropod (spiders, mites, insects, crustaceans and some other groups are classified as arthropods). Rather than try to learn so many as individuals we can learn to recognize the damage they cause. Often, this kind of mite causes the host organism to form galls -- odd bumps and growths.



Guard our eyes whenever **mowers** are operating nearby. It's standard procedure but we'll do it more attentively this year.

When lots of plowing caused snow banks to encroach farther onto the verges of roads and driveways, debris such as gravel, concrete chips and asphalt rubble were left to melt down onto surfaces where mowers run.

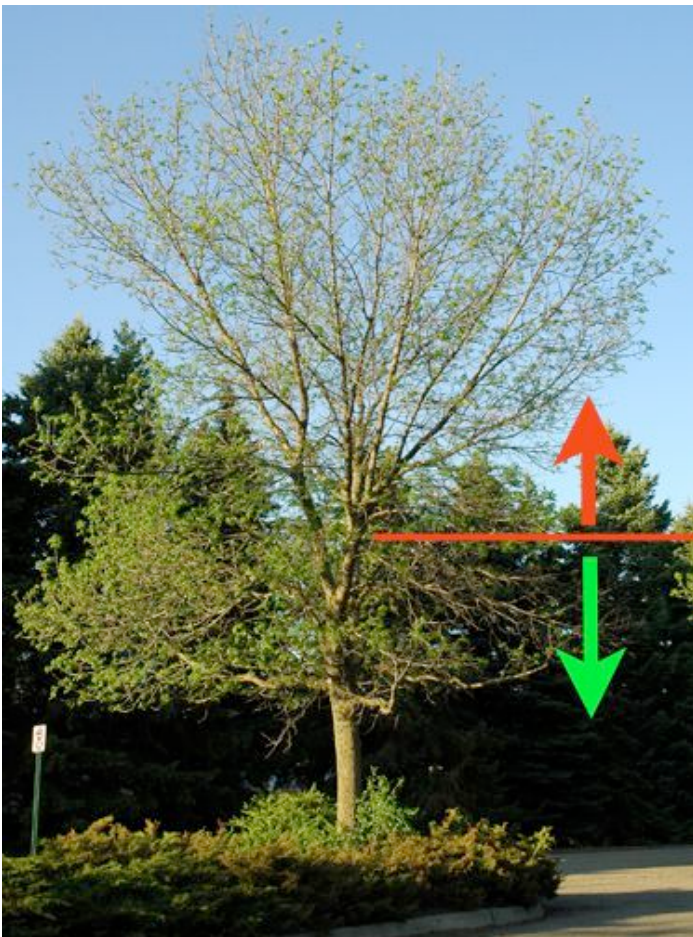
There is always the chance that a mower can suck up and expel pebbles with great force, but that likelihood increases with the amount of loose debris in the lawn.

Resume our **alerts about emerald ash borer (EAB)**. In tree crises as in gardening in general, others need the help of those who have "been there."

Epicormic shoots (as defined on page 14) have erupted from this ash's main branches (right). It is thin of leaf above the red line and more dense below that line. (below) Its low-level density is due to epicormic shoots that have erupted from the main branches below the EAB feeding sites. The shoots are the tree's desperate move to replace a set of limbs too badly damaged to be saved. In Southeast Michigan and Ontario when we first started to see these effects in 2000 -2002, we didn't know what the problem was, so we couldn't stem the proliferation of the pest. Now the enemy's known and the battle is pitched, but it's on a huge front -- across ten States and much of Ontario*. If you are in that area, learn to recognize this and tell others. Maybe some ashes can still be saved. We certainly have *none* left here at the EAB epicenter.



*Copy this URL to see the current map and cry:
www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/plant_pest_info/emerald_ash_b/downloads/multistateeab.pdf



Green thumbs up to you who jumped through that tiny window of nice weather in very early April to clip and weed your garden. You are going to be ahead of the rest of us all year!

Green thumbs down to how much longer it takes to spread mulch, once plants are up and growing. We've been avoiding the damage we can do by walking on wet soil by staying out of beds... but now when they finally drain to walkability the plants will

leap up and we'll be stuck with that more tedious mulching method.

Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

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.



The gardener's eye. Steven Nikkila is a professional gardener and horticultural photographer who finds dimensions and makes connections others miss. "Maybe it comes from having to sit so still and wait for just the right shot," he says, "but I see the greatest things happen out there. I love to show and tell others about them." One of his favorite instances is the changed outlook people have after seeing his images of a butterfly successfully defending its flowers against a hungry hummingbird. His photos have solved mysteries, too, such as when he noted and captured water droplets from a sprinkler glistening prettily on a plant, but obviously on only one side of it. He solved that plant's "unknown ailment" by putting a riser on the sprinkler head to carry its water over the top to wet the entire root zone.

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.

More chances to *Garden by Janet and Steven - bring your gloves and tools!* These two sessions are free. See page 20 for more about such sessions.

May 7, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to noon, ***Garden by Janet*** at the Detroit Zoo, in Huntington Woods, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for hands-on instruction in cutting back after winter, early season weed prevention, and pruning. To join Janet at the zoo, email mstgarden@yahoo.com with the subject line "I'll garden at the Zoo."

May 28, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. to noon, again a ***Garden by Janet*** at the Detroit Zoo. Email mstgarden@yahoo.com with the subject line "I'll garden at the Zoo."

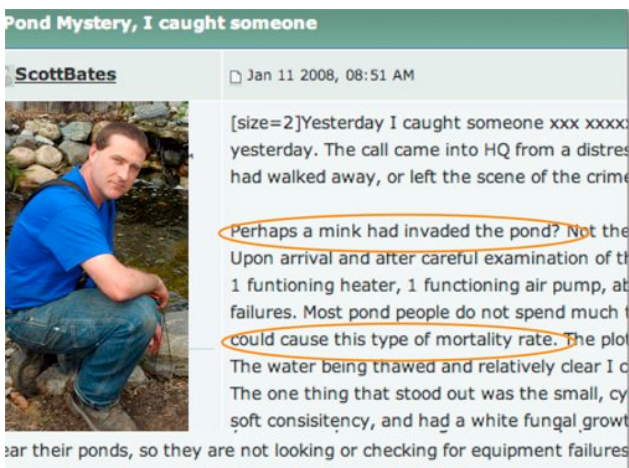
May 11, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. at Theodore Roosevelt High School, 540 Eureka Road in **Wyandotte, Michigan** the Wyandotte Beautification Commission presents Janet sharing her ideas for **Best Foot Forward: Ideas for Entrance Gardens**. \$12.00. For more information at www.wyandotte.net/egov/apps/events/calendar.exe?path=03&search_timeframe=30&id=1098

May 14, Saturday, 2:00 p.m., the Burr Oak Garden Club brings Janet to **Burr Oak, Michigan** (327 N. Third Street) to give pointers on **Easy, Beautiful Landscapes**. \$8 in advance, \$10 at the door, call 269-489-2230 for ticket information.

May 17, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. at the Plymouth Library, 223 S. Main Street in **Plymouth, Michigan**, Janet discusses the **Garden of the Future**. Free. Call 734-453-0750 for information or to reserve a seat.

May 21, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. at Four Seasons Garden Center in **Oak Park, Michigan**, 14471 West Eleven Mile Road, between Greenfield Road and Coolidge Road. Janet explains why to use more **Fabulous Foliage** this year. Free. Call 248-543-4400 to reserve a seat.

Time to Tend your pond! Below: Scott Bates, owner of Grass Roots Nursery, is one of the most knowledgeable ware garden experts in the country. More than that, he makes you laugh as he explains "how to." At his 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.



Above: As a moderator of the website forum that Janet and Steven administered, Bates not only answered questions and checked the accuracy of others' statements on the site, but gave us humorous, helpful pond puzzles.

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."

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.

Whether it's a **how-to lesson for a garden club**, a **multi-part class** for a small group, or a **hands-on, on-site workshop**, 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**.

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

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

Janet, Steven, how does your website grow?

We get home each day, wash off the fertilizer residue, stash our latest "lookit this!" samples (this week it was lots of lilac and weed root stuff; the one bug involved was dead -- Fraxy the cat was disappointed none of it was prey), then dig in on the website. It will be an open library of our work, where you can find what you need while we keep going forward (no repeats!) with this work we love... perhaps for another 30 years.

We have an email lag now, but it's a spring thing. (Thanks for bearing with us.) Oh, for a live forum *now* where all the topics we see each week are open to everyone. Oh, for webinars and video and more... but this project is just like a garden, which must grow at its own pace!

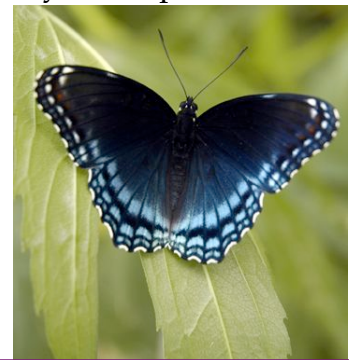
We aim to have the site up this year. Some readers are giving us a boost toward meeting the development and hosting costs. If you can help, too, **send your donation**, check payable to Janet Macunovich, to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328. \$20 is great, but every dollar is appreciated.



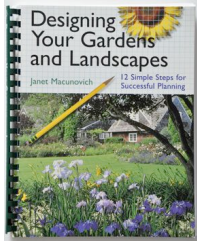
You can have **Steven's photos for your walls** -- selected sized, framed, matted or printed on cloth to your order -- or for greeting cards or special projects. Prices vary based on the project, so describe what you're up to and he'll assemble a custom sampler for you.

Examples:
Matted, framed,
overall 11 x 15", \$48

36 x 48' no-fade
cloth tapestry, \$215



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First published in 1990 as *Easy Garden Design*, a 150-page step-by-step recipe that's become a design classic. Janet developed, uses and has trained thousands of others to use this process. People say: "This is exactly the simple, clear approach I need!" This design process is applicable world-wide.

Soft cover, spiral bound. B&W illustrations by Janet. \$19.00

Caring for Perennials

Janet's unique approach to perennial care how-to, the real-time story of one bed from early spring to season's end. The 180 engaging and fact-filled pages make you part of all Janet does and you might ever need to do in each task's appropriate season and sequence. Includes a chart of what to do, when for 70 top perennials. Advice in this book is applicable in all of temperate U.S. and Canada. The perennial chart includes a key to adapt its timing for far southern or northern edges of that range.

Soft cover book. Text by Janet Macunovich. Color illustrations by Steven Nikkila. \$20.00



Asking About Asters CD.

A digital library of six years of Janet's work: weekly columns, newsletters and over 200 extra Q&A letters to individual gardeners. 1,681 questions answered about soil preparation, fertilizing, pruning, design, choosing plants, foiling bugs and much more. No repeated topics. Fully indexed; the entire collection can be searched from one index.

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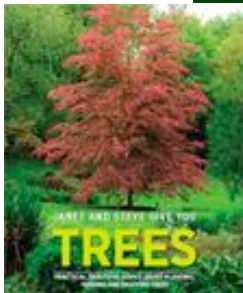
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1 CD in jewel case, Windows- and Mac compatible. \$20.00

Janet & Steven's complete digital library New for 2011

Set of two CDs: *Asking About Asters* and *Potting Up Perennials*. \$30.00



Janet and Steven give you: Trees*

A choice collection of Janet and Steven's advice for tree selection, planting and care. Each article made its debut in *Michigan Gardener* magazine and has been on hold since, awaiting completion of its fellows until this comprehensive compilation became possible. Topics include: Selecting trees; fall color; what's happening to ash trees; replacing a big tree; descriptions, lists and photos of great trees; why starting small is a good idea when planting; planting how-to, why's and why not's; staking, watering and fertilizing; mulching; rescuing a tree from the lawn; preventing construction damage; pruning to keep trees and shrubs small; removing suckers; detecting girdling roots; and dealing with maple tar spot and lecanium scale.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pages. Color illustrations. \$12.00

Janet and Steven give you: Landscape Ideas*

Janet and Steven's favorite articles on landscape design and renovation: Designing with foliage color; covering up after the bulb season; doubling up perennials for 3-season color; shady solutions; using usual plants in unusual ways; designing hypo-allergenic gardens; Murphy's Laws applied to gardens; renovation how-to; fragrant plants and designs; attracting wildlife; rockwork; invasive plants; discovering a site's hidden assets; using herbs in a landscape; and how to cheat to improve a garden quickly. These articles appeared first in *Michigan Gardener* magazine individually between 1999 and 2011. Now they're collected in this set for your design library.

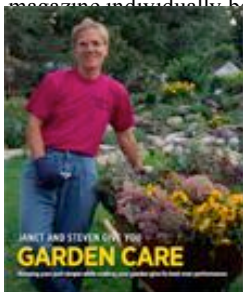
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Janet and Steven give you: Garden Care*

Vital how-to for tending a garden, from Janet and Steven's favorite articles on: bed preparation; soil testing; making a weed-free bed; spring start-up; improving hard-packed soil; fertilizing; watering; cutting back and deadheading; repairing irrigation; drought-tolerant plants; sharpening tools; tweaking in summer; staking; and the art of fall garden clean up. Items in this collection were selected from among Janet and Steven's ten years of *Michigan Gardener* articles. Each made its debut in that magazine, waited for its companion pieces and now they all join your library in this more durable and comprehensive form.

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