

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns  
Issue #45, June 13, 2009

### Here you'll find:

New life for a tasty old tree, pages 1-2  
Fruit's a bust with too little pollen, page 3  
Spikes: Determined deadheading required, pages 4-5  
Say no to iffy shrubs near foundation, pages 6-7  
Turning on the viburnum berries, page 7  
Variegated plants: When green's no good, page 8  
Now cut it out! Bulb leaf relief, pages 8-9  
Bush is a beauty at 45 mph, page 10  
Aphids? Ready, aim, fire -- with water! Page 11  
Enlist help to seize perfection, page 11  
Who's Janet? How do I contact her? Page 12  
Where to catch Janet in-person, page 12  
Right: Foxtail lily -- what a beauty! Don't miss it. Page 11  
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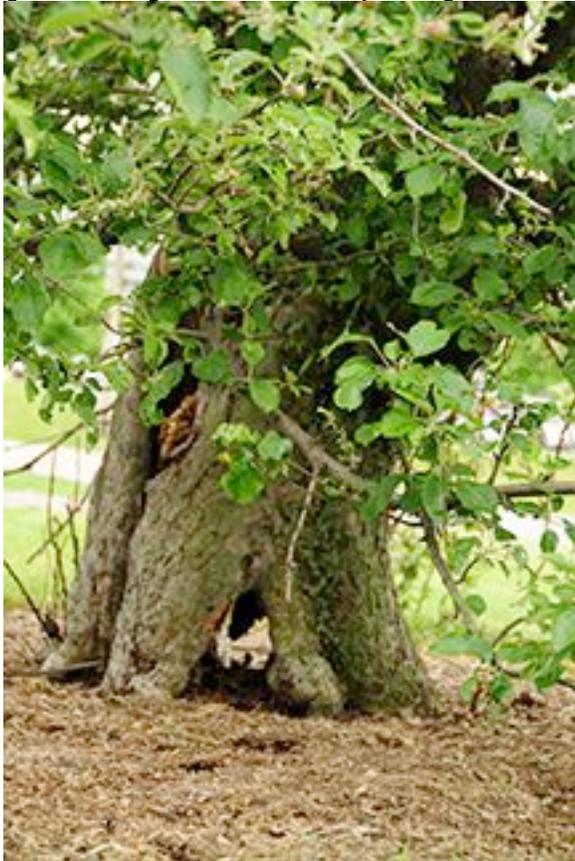


### Apple and pear preserves: Cloning that great old fruit tree

Hello Janet! What about propagating an **old pear or apple tree** that is on the way out but has fruit that is just so good? I have a pear tree near my house that **produces the best tasting fruit**. I **don't know what kind it is**. It was old and craggy when I bought the house 30 years ago. It is gradually dying. I hope it doesn't fall on the house.

Can I **save seeds**? If so, what is the best method and how should they be planted? Could I take a **cutting and try to root it**? I don't know if this would be of interest to others who read your newsletter but there might be other people with aging favorites that would like to replace them.  
- C.R. -

To reproduce a prize fruit tree or shrub, C.R., **don't rely on seed**. Although some apples and pears can produce fruit by self pollination, most bear fruit or set abundant fruit only when some other type of apple/crabapple or pear contributes pollen. So the seed inside the fruit has genes that differ from the tree that bore it. Trees from that seed **may bear fruit that differs** from the original apple in looks, ripening time, smell, taste and even how it stores.



Most fruit trees and shrubs are the result of decades or centuries of happy chance preserved through cloning. That is, someone way back noticed a wild tree with larger or sweeter than average fruit, and grew a few of its seed. One or more trees from that generation produced well enough to earn their keep, and those who next collected seed took it from those winners. Over many human- and plant generations, the best of the best emerged, earned names (Macintosh, Bartlett, Concord, etc.) and growers opted to **clone those plants for exact duplication** rather than try their luck again from seed.

Left, and page 1: Venerable old apple and pear trees are fairly common. Despite extensive trunk damage this old apple may keep on producing for decades. But just in case, you can take tip cuttings now to clone the tree. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

**Cuttings and grafting** are plant cloning methods you can try. Of the two, growing from a cutting is easiest and **midsummer is a good time** to give it a try.

Look for **new shoots** that are still green but have become firm enough to **snap if bent**. Clip tip shoots that are 4- to 6 inches long, pull off (don't cut off) the bottom two leaves and then push that injured section of stem into moist, sandy soil. Completely cover the torn nodes.

Keep the leafy part of the cutting in the light but prevent it from wilting by tenting the pot, covering it with an upended glass jar or bottomless plastic milk jug sans lid, arranging for it to be misted several times an hour or growing it in a terrarium. Its remaining leaves will create starches the stem can use to repair its wounds. Cells in that wound wood are stem cells, able to form any and all types of plant tissue. Kept dark, in moist and airy (well drained) soil, those cells **will form roots**.

### **A crisp apple by any other name... is a flower**

In a neighborhood full of busy bees plus crabapples and apples of many kinds, the pollen involved in **your tree's fruit** formation may come from one neighbor's tree one year, another the next. In some years the **pollen from several trees' may mingle**. Yet the fruit you pick from your tree will always taste the same.

We can be sure that **a Jonagold apple tree will give us Jonagold fruit every year** because the part of an apple we eat is produced entirely from the mother tree's tissues. The flesh of that apple is simply the enlarged base of that apple tree's flower.

**Apple seed is a different story.** Half or more of the seed's genes may be quite unlike those in the cells that comprise the flesh. If a person with discriminating taste buds ate the seed, he or she might well detect a different taste each year.

### Skimpy fruit from wimpy pollen count

**Fruit that drops off** or quits, half formed, may be the victim of **insufficient pollination**. Seed forms when a grain of pollen unites with an ovum. As the seed grows it produces powerful hormones that direct the parent plant to keep the fruit growing, strengthen the stem, add lots of sugar, etc. The more seed that's forming, the more hormones are in play. Too few seeds and growth or ripening may stop or proceed very unevenly so that the fruit becomes lopsided, bitter, or otherwise "off."

You can't cause a plant to make more pollen but you can stay out of the way of or aid the processes that move pollen from plant to plant. Bees are major movers -- it's estimated that 80% of the world's food depends on them. So **don't spray insecticides** while your fruit tree or shrub is in bloom, because that **endangers bees**.

### Alone in the Garden? Never! Our mentors will always be with us:

Most of us had a **parent, neighbor or other veteran gardener** to guide us through our first attempts to grow. The **gardening advice they gave us** may include facts that took many years to develop and generations to confirm and tweak. Think how many observant eyes, growing seasons and trials went into this line about the right time to put a given seed into the ground: "When oak puts on its gosling grey 'tis time to sow barley night or day"?

Here's one I recall. Send yours -- I'll pass along all I can.

***Certainly you can cut flowers, child. The more you cut, the more you get.***  
- Mrs. Grossman, Janet's childhood neighbor -

I can cut a spike flower like this foxglove to enjoy its glorious first flush of bloom in a bouquet. More flower stalks will develop once I make this cut.

Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila



## Speaking of cutting: Spike flowers, de-mystified

It's that time again, when full-grown men and women are cowed by the **spike flowers** in their gardens. We're awed by the beauty of lupine, foxglove, hollyhock, delphinium, mullein, snapdragon, salvia and other plants that continue to produce flower buds at their tips even as seed forms lower on the stem where the earliest flowers bloomed.

So taken are we with these willowy gems that we **can't bear to deadhead** even though we know that clipping will almost certainly stimulate the plant to bloom some more. I regularly see gardeners stymied for so long that they remain reluctant to cut even after the flower spike is just a scraggly stalk loaded with ripening seed pods and tipped with a scant few blooms -- a pitiful shadow of what it once was.

**Come learn with me** as I poach a full-glory foxglove spike and tame a past-prime lupine in my own garden.



Above: Clip the foxglove's spire-like blooming stalk below the lowest flower, just above a good sized leaf. Don't cut to above the first, tiny leaf just below the bloom. A lower, larger leaf will be able to give more energy to the new flowering stalk which will develop where that leaf joins the stalk.

Below: Look close and you'll see that new growth is ready to go at a "node" at the base of each foxglove leaf (arrow). All new stem development is curtailed while flowers above these nodes are working to make seed. But



when you remove the flowers above them, growth begins there. Other nodes may produce stems, too, but the highest bud will become dominant. If that top bud's fueled by a shrimpy leaf, that leading flower stem will also be puny.

Right: This lupine along the path in my front yard has developed secondary flowering stems even before the first finishes. For a more dramatic rebloom, clip back all but one follower.

Don't hesitate to cut off such awkward, seedy flowering stems. I deadhead a spike before this stage, when the number of inches of seedy stem exceeds the number of inches filled with flower and bud.

Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila





Cut to below the lowest seed pod and above a substantial leaf.



Left: Can't bear to lose the remaining bloom? Strip off the seed pods and use the cut stems in a flower arrangement.

Right: I put these stems in a vase on my desk where I could enjoy them -- and so could my cat, Fraxinus.

(No, she won't become sick from eating the foxglove, because her senses are better than ours at detecting what should and shouldn't be eaten. Fraxie did like the purple mullein (another spring spike flower in this group), and later nibbled a lupin leaf, too.

Photos  
©2009 Steven Nikkila



## Shade tolerance an asset for foundation bushes

Kris explains, "I want to plant **bushes in the front of my house** ...along the foundation. I have clay soil that I amend every year, and shade. The one side of my house gets part shade, while the other side is shade."



"I want **the same bush on both sides of the front porch**. I was thinking 'Blue Muffin' viburnum or *Clethra*?"

"Also, I **want an evergreen bush for part shade**. I really don't like yews but would like a soft look like yew. I have a weeping mulberry, boxwoods, *Hydrangea* and 'Little Henry' *Itea* close to where this evergreen will be."

It's **tough to find** a plant that will **look the same on both sides** of a line where the sun is very different, Kris. Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum* such as variety 'Blue Muffin') is a good example. It tolerates some shade but truly loves sun. Put two of these bushes in two different light situations the one in more light will look denser, bloom more, bear more of its striking blue fruit.\* The sunnier plant will be denser even leafless in winter since it will have more twigs.

\*(If you selected arrowwood for its berries, see page 7, *Viburnums: Very- to barely berried.*)

Is there room to **let these shrubs grow?** Arrowwood (above) and summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) reach 6 to 8 feet tall and 5 feet wide. **Or will you prune regularly** to keep them small?

**Pruning can increase the differences** on either side of a solar divide. Even if you cut very carefully to give both plants the same overall outline, the sunnier plant will need harder cuts and perhaps more cuts each year than its partner in shade. The sunnier plant will respond with new twigs from both cut ends and its interior. If the plants are sun-lovers such as arrowwood the **more shaded plant** will probably sprout only from its cut tips. Then its center **will look more "hollow."**

**Summersweet** can handle quite a bit of shade as long as it **will not be dry**. It's native to part-shade or sun in moist soil. To give it two strikes -- shade and dry soil -- might put it in arrowwood's "loser" category.

I'd probably go back to the drawing board to **find more shade tolerant choices** than arrowwood. **Panicle hydrangea** (*Hydrangea paniculata*) does a respectable job of crossing a shade/part shade line without looking very different on one side than the other. Slender **deutzia** (*D. gracilis*) and sweetly scented **winter honeysuckle** (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) are two other candidates.

Below, right: Most summersweet shrubs (*Clethra alnifolia*) are white in bloom. Variety "Ruby Glow" (left) is pink in bud, and a paler pink once the fragrant blooms open in July..  
Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

If the area where you want **an evergreen** gets at least **half sun** (4-5 hours a day) consider **birdsnest spruce** (*Picea abies* 'Nidiformis'). It's not so feathery as yew, but has an attractive, no-prune natural roundness. A **dwarf hemlock** such as *Tsuga canadensis* 'Bennett' is also amenable to part shade. Dwarf hemlock is more feathery than a birdsnest spruce but also more rare at garden centers.

Below: Three birdsnest spruces spin round the corner of this foundation.



**Gardeners do first, read later.  
Why not? Plants are very  
gracious in accepting an  
apology.  
- Janet -**

### Viburnums: Very- to barely berried

In the genus *Viburnum* are many great landscape plants:

- **Fragrant** koreanspice (*Viburnum x carlesii*), judd (*V. x juddii*) and burkwood (*V. burkwoodii*);
- **Spring- and fall leaf color** specialists like *V. sargentii* and arrowwood;
- **Sculpted form**, in doublefile (*V. plicatum tomentosum*) and mapleleaf viburnum (*V. acerifolium*)
- **Winter endurance** champs like leatherleaf (*V. x rhytidophylloides*).

Many *Viburnums* (such as linden viburnum, *V. dilatatum*, right) are also prized for **richly colored, bird-favored berries**. Of note: *Viburnum* fruit production is the same as in apples -- it takes at least two varieties to insure abundant berries. So **include at least two cultivars** from your chosen species. In a hedge of arrowwood -- *Viburnum* 'Blue Muffin' -- include at least one 'Chicago Luster' or 'Autumn Jazz' if you expect the plants to be smothered in blue berries at the end of each summer.



## This week in Janet's garden

Grow with me! This week I will:

Intercede to **rescue my variegated plants** from their own instability.

Many of our white-edged, ivory-splashed, gold tone or otherwise patterned plants have a tendency to **develop shoots that are all-green like their parent species**. Left in place, any all-green portion will overgrow and overthrow other parts of the plant. Why? Because given two leaves of the same size but one all-green and the other somehow patterned with non-green, the all-green leaf has more total chlorophyll.

Chlorophyll is the ingredient that allows plants to harness solar energy. So an all green leaf can **capture more energy** and make more sugar than one with less green. With more starch to invest it can multiply more quickly. It simply **shades out and crowds out variegated bits**.

This week I stepped in to cut out leaf, stem and eye of all-green bits of:

Variegated bigleaf forget-me-not (*Brunnera macrophylla* 'Variegata')

*Euonymus fortunei*, almost all types including 'Ivory Jade', 'Emerald n Gold,' and 'Blondie'

*Hosta* 'Gold Standard'

*Sedum* 'Frosty Morn'

*Sedum* 'Tricolor'

*Sedum* 'Red Carpet'

Variegated porcelain vine (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* 'Elegans')\*

\*In defense of the integrity of variegated porcelain vine, it was not a reverted shoot that I removed but an all-green volunteer -- a seedling -- that differed from its parent. It had sprouted at the base of the vine and threaded its way throughout.

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**Cut back the foliage of established spring bulbs**, where those leaves are not contributing to the scene. I spare only young bulbs, such as divisions I've just made and replanted.

I realize that the majority of garden experts say, "Let a bulb's foliage fade before you cut it down." I once parroted that advice, too. Then one year about 20 years ago, I became so fed up with daffodil and tulip foliage in some of my gardens that I did not care if they died. I just had to get rid of them. So I voiced my regrets ("Sorry , you guys, nothing personal..") and cut away.

They all came back the next year. I cut them again. They came back again. And on and on.



This *Sedum* 'Frosty Morn' sported an all-green bud on its crown last year. Left to grow for one year, the green almost completely overwhelmed the cream-edged portion (on the left; the scrawniest stem). Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Ever since, I've been cutting them down **about the first of June** (roughly 8 weeks after they emerge from winter sleep). Along the way I've recognized, investigated and embraced these related facts:

- 1) If you are growing tiny bulbs to become big, marketable bulbs for sale that fall, of course you want every leaf to function as long as possible and contribute that much more starch to the bulb.
- 2) Most hard data about cultivating particular plants comes from **professional growers** whose aim is to **make bulbs bulk up quickly**. Their small starts grow rapidly into big, valuable plants. We think we should emulate these pros, but...
- 3) ...most home gardeners do *not* need their daffodil clumps or tulip clumps to multiply. In fact, many of us would love to **slow them down** so we don't have to divide them so often.
- 4) To **cut foliage back halfway through its season** denies the plant half the energy it could have had. That's fine, as most plants make enough energy in a growing season to triple themselves (replacement plus expansion plus reserves). Cutting that energy in two still leaves the plant replacement power plus a bit. That's *enough*.
- 5) To roll, fold or **braid bulb foliage is time consuming, irrational** and ugly, too. Once a leaf is covered -- shaded out -- even by itself, its photosynthetic power is reduced. Why not simply cut the leaf by half rather than roll and twist it to that same effect?
- 6) **Some bulbs don't come back** or don't manage to re-establish blooming condition so they become puny leaf-only creatures after their first year in place. This is usually not because of the gardener's actions but because those varieties are not suitable to perennializing in that environment. **Many tall, late-season, streaked and lily-flowered tulips** are in this group. No matter how you treat them, they will diminish rapidly.



This is my mom-in-law's front garden, where I planted annuals among the bulb foliage two weeks ago. I left the bulb leaves then to use them as a bit of just-in-case frost protection. This week I cut them all down -- daffodil, tulip, hyacinth and *Iris reticulata*. "If it isn't contributing to the picture," my photographer tells me, "it's detracting. So get rid of it." Experience tells me to have no fear -- these bulbs will be back and blooming well next year, even though my cut-down comes weeks before the leaves would have exited on their own.

Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

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**Accept what isn't stellar** this year, so long as it's healthy.

Instead, I **focus on what's knocking itself out** with bloom and lush foliage.

**Daffodils** are a prime example of the **non-stellar**. This spring they disappointed and puzzled gardeners all over the Midwest. I have now received enough reliable reports to say, "It's not anything we did or didn't do, but something Nature arranged. Those plants will be back with 20-30 blooms per clump next year rather than the measly 5 or 6 we saw this spring."

In the category, "Holey moley, mark 2009 as the **best year ever**" are: *Weigela*, black locust, peony, bearded iris, kousa dogwood (right)... (**Email me** with your garden's stand outs!)



Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

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**Keep my chin up** when things don't go quite my way, and help others do the same. Last year in my area we had regular soaking rains in parts of June and into July. Weeds flourished. Gardeners lost steam. But just when I needed it, Joe revived my spirits with this report:

"My new motto is LET THE WEEDS BE. ...except in the vegetable garden (where) the fruits of my labors have started to pay off. There ain't nothing like a fresh tomato!! And peppers fresh off the plant are sweeter and crispier! ...I do love having a garden, even if it's a lot of work."

## The 45mph garden

You can put a gardener behind the wheel but you can't take the flowers out of her eyes. Look at what's catching driver's attention and raising questions this week.

**Beauty bush** (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*) is knocking itself out this year. Since it's one of those shrubs that's large enough to be a small tree, is very fragrant, attracts butterflies such as the big swallowtails with its nectar and is quite tolerant of shade, the questions I often hear are:

- "What's that **pink** tree blooming on Manor Lane?"
- "This thing I pass as I'm walking our dog, **it smells great**, and it's just loaded with flowers."
- "**Butterflies**, hoo boy! I've never seen so many, fluttering all over this pink bushy tree."
- "There's this crabapple blooming away **in the shade** and I must know what it is!"



Beauty bush (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*)  
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

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

**Grins:** To Ma Nature stepping in between plants and their predators. When I see aphids (red ones, right; there are many other kinds and colors) I often reach for the hose and gun them down with a hard blast of water. Once down, the aphids can't readily find their way back up -- they were only up there to begin with because the adults laid them there as eggs. While they wander on the ground, however, they will be hunted by a dozen or more killers, from toads to earwigs, spiders and lightning bugs. I admit to cackling as I wield my water pistol, saying things like, "Ta ta, suckers, enjoy the hunt!" What will stay my hand is seeing that killers like lady beetles (below) have already moved into the aphids' ranks. One ladybug can eat 50 aphids a day...



**Grow-ans:** To missing perfect moments in a garden when our jobs or families require us to be elsewhere. Perhaps we can each find a helper to patrol our yards every day that we can't, and place one of each perfect bloom in a vase so we can enjoy them into the night. Indoors in cooler air and lower light, the flowers often last days longer than they would outdoors, too.



This foxtail lily (*Eremerus* 'Spring Valley hybrid' - brentandbeckysbulbs.com) is a hardy (Z5) spring ephemeral of stupendous impact. 5 to 6 feet tall, its color defies categorization. Bottom flowers open first; as tip blooms finish developing the lowest part of the inflorescence goes to seed. So this first day is its most glorious. I'm glad to have been there and to work with a photographer who understands, "Nope, not tomorrow. Today's the day!"

*Eremerus'* foliage is low and already on its way out as the flowers open. Ours at the Detroit Zoo is doubled up with baby's breath to cover the fading bulb

foliage and for its deep tap root that doesn't compete with *Eremerus'* shallower roots. In addition, since baby's breath rarely needs division we rarely disturb that area, avoiding damage to *Eremerus'* brittle roots.

*Eremerus* is a beautiful plant name and not hard to pronounce if you follow my lead. If you know the song that begins, "In the jungle, the mighty jungle the lion sleeps tonight," listen in your mind to the chorus singing between verses: "Uh-wee-moh-way, uh-wee-moh-way..." Now repeat that tune to say "er REE muh rus, er REE muh rus..."

Photos this page ©2009 Steven Nikkila



## Who's Janet?

**Someone fascinated by the *process* of gardening.** Janet Macunovich began gardening for others when she ran out of places to make new gardens at her own home, and, "was hooked from the first time I worked in someone else's yard. Now, 'my' gardens and experience stretch across counties and States yet every one's unique, full of the same plants behaving differently in each place. I've learned wonderful things in classes and interviews over 25 years, in thousands of hours of research for my books and articles, and in applying it all to gardens. But the flexibility of the process and its never-ending newness is the best fact of all. I'll be able to do this for a lifetime and still not see all the combinations." Janet also steps in and out of hundreds of other situations every year by helping readers who ask for advice. Email questions to her at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com).



## Where to catch Janet in-person:

**Tuesday, June 23, 7 p.m., "Continuous Color: Keeping color going in high summer."** In the auditorium at the Civic Center Library, 32777 Five Mile Road, Livonia, Michigan. Janet explains ways to extend, stall, and coax repeat performances from flowering plants. Free. No reservations necessary.

**Saturday, June 27, 8:00 a.m. - noon, "Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!"** Opportunity description, such as: At the Detroit Zoo, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for Janet's hands-on instruction in topic. We'll be deadheading, diagnosing problems, fertilizing annuals and more on this day. To join Janet on this day, email [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com) with the subject line "I'll volunteer at the Zoo with Janet."

## About attending Gardens by Janet sessions:

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

I've volunteered in the **Detroit Zoo Adopt-A-Garden** program for 20 years. More than 100 people have worked with me, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish much. You can join the program or you can try it for a time or two on a temporary pass as my student. **If you'd like to join me at the Detroit Zoo**, email [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com) with the subject line "I'll help at the zoo with Janet." That will connect you to my friend Deb Tosch who helps me schedule, plan and lead the work. You'll receive upcoming work dates and instructions for getting to the zoo and meeting my group.

Watch this space to join me in other gardening events and in gardens I design and tend.