

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns
Issue #169, January 4, 2011

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Holly: Eye candy, stomach trouble, pruning challenge, needy house guest... why do we love this plant so much?! Step into the New Year on a binge of holly facts. Pages 1 - 7, and 13 - 15.

Want garden color? Join Janet in Detroit January 21! Pg. 18

Holly brightens holidays but may not rate a place in your garden

Tell us about **what to do with live plants like this lovely little holly** (with fake berries) that I received at a luncheon. Should it be put into the ground and be protected with a pile of leaves or peat moss or something or should I be content just enjoying its temporary beauty? - G.D. -

You can go either way. Such pot crops are produced by the gazillions, intended to be **decorative but disposable**. (Well, maybe not gazillions but by the hundred thousands, anyway; see *Pot Crops* on page 3.) So deciding to **simply compost it** is okay. You have no obligation to conserve it as a rare and endangered item.

However, if you want to keep it you will have to gradually **acclimate it to outdoors**. Plants that have known only the mild temperatures of a greenhouse or home haven't acquired any hardiness and can't, now, if suddenly thrust into air that drops below freezing every day. Before it could handle the outdoors it would need at least a couple of weeks in autumnal cold-but-not-freezing air and good light. (Light's essential because hardening of cells requires energy.) Without that hardening time, the plant's cells may freeze and burst. It would lose leaves, twigs, even roots. (More in *The Soft Science of Hardening Off* on page 3.)



Gift holly in a pot should not be faulted for bearing fake berries. It's tough, if not impossible, to induce such a small plant to flower and fruit.

To reacclimate it, put it out for at least a few hours every day of its two week transition, at times when it's over 40°F. During frigid hours, bring it back in to a cool place indoors. If it's small, stashing it in the refrigerator is an option. Another option is to put it in a cold room in good light and let it to spend the winter there. Or give it a few weeks in the cold room, then move it to a cold-but-above-freezing garage, shed or cellar for the rest of the winter.

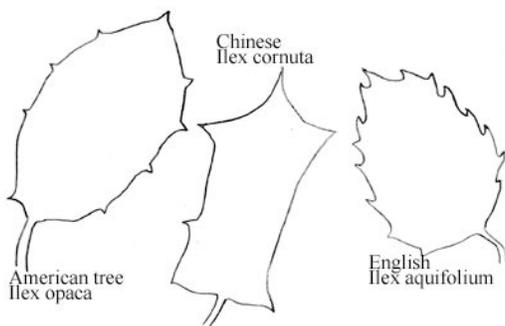
The twist to this story is that most of the 400 holly species are not hardy enough to thrive in the northern part of this continent. If the plant you're given is not hardy in your zone, it does not matter whether you keep it alive indoors or do heroic things to acclimate and protect it outside this winter -- because it will die *next* winter.

Of traditional hollies that are evergreen, with spiny leaves and red berries, the **Meserve hybrids*** are in **the hardy minority**. *I. x meserveae* inherited good looks from one parent and hardiness from the other. Varieties widely used in zone 5 landscapes are 'Blue Prince' and 'Blue Princess'. The Chinese hollies (*I. cornuta*) are marginal in general (zone 5-6), with a few hardier exceptions such as '**China Girl**' and '**China Boy**' which persist even in warm zone 4 when all other growing conditions are good. **American tree holly** (*I. opaca*) is also hardy to zone 5 but doesn't fare well where it faces wind as well as cold, so it is not grown as often in the north as the Meserve hybrids and Chinese holly.

The **traditional English holly** (*I. aquifolium*) and its hundreds of varieties, **isn't hardy** if it's colder than zone 7. It also needs the cool summers and moisture of maritime climates -- such as in northwest Europe where it's native. So we see it in the U.S. /Canadian Pacific Northwest and sometimes along the coast in mid-Atlantic States. Yet some of the best hollies for greenhouse pot crops are cultivars of English holly, so they're widely grown as holiday gift plants.



We wish we could grow the variegated English hollies! We've tried but must report "no go" even in those places we work which are a solid zone 6. This one is probably *Ilex aquifolium* 'Marmorata' (we wished to show you our favorite, 'Silver Queen' which has some marbling but also an elegant cream edge. We're currently at a loss for what we did with her photo but you can go to the internet and Search *Ilex aquifolium* Silver Queen to see it.)



Which means that those of us in zone 5 and colder areas who need to know if it's hardy should hope for a label with the species name. Alternatively, we can read the leaves to guess the species.

Left: American tree holly leaf is rather oval with out-facing spines. Chinese holly leaf is more rectangular with fewer, more pronounced spines, and edges that roll down. English holly is oval to oblong with a saw toothed edge.

Pot Crops*:

Meant to be enjoyed then thrown away

Millions of plants are produced each year in the U.S. as pot crops. In 2006, for instance, the total was over 168 million. Poinsettias were the largest component of that crop, at 41 million. Hollies are a minor component, with only a few hundred thousand grown and counted with 51 million "other" flowering and foliage plants.

Care to guess which four of the following plants join poinsettias to comprise the top 5?

The candidates are: Roses, African violets, spring bulbs, lilies, mums, azaleas, orchids

Answers on page 16. *See also Green Thumbs Up and Down on page 17

The soft science of hardening off nets us flowers in the fall

We figure two weeks as a minimum time for a woody plant to acquire cold hardiness. It is, however, only a guess and it's influenced as much by science as it is our own (in)tolerance for fussing over plants.

How long a given plant needs to become hardened to cold is best answered 'it depends,' with an example at right:

Perhaps you don't know it, but you have seen that some plants take their hardiness cues quickly. For instance, even a few days of cold is all that's needed to convince kale crops to bolt into flowering stage*. Also, some azaleas, forsythia, lilacs and other spring bloomers regularly open a few flowers if a fall warm spell follows as little as a week of cold weather. Those plants needed just that week to enter and complete dormancy, then take a cue at the next warm-up to count winter "done."

However, most hardy plants outdoors take 2 to 4 weeks to complete first stage hardening after being prompted by shorter days in fall. Then they use the next few weeks or a month of cold-above-freezing to complete second-stage hardening, and will resist waking for 500 - 1,000 hours or longer.

*<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/ho/ho-203.html> several days of cold can cause some species to bolt.

This has been explained by Dr. Curt Peterson of Michigan State University in this way:

Different species of plants acclimate at different rates and times, and plants with seed sources of southern origin have slower acclimation rates. The result is acclimation later in fall... Sensitive species will probably need a few more weeks to reach dormancy after the hardy plants have reached it.

Holly facts

First, the sexy stuff:

- Most of the 400 holly species are dioecious -- have separate male and female plants. Each plant bears only the flowers we call male (pollen producing) or female (fruit producing). Female flowers won't develop into fruit without pollen from a male.

Chinese holly leaves have particularly stiff, sharp spines. Flowers with prominent button center and no pollen mark this one as a female plant.





This winterberry holly (*I. verticillata*) is a female. The button-center flowers tell the tale. The stamens surrounding the button-like, female pistil in each flower are not functional -- no pollen develops there.

- **Sometimes fruit on a lone plant:** Some Chinese hollies (*I. cornuta*) are parthenocarpic -- females can set fruit without a male.
- 'Berri-Magic' hollies are popular because they set fruit "even if you plant just one." These are actually a male and female cutting grown together in the same pot.

For other plant sex issues, see *What's Coming Up*, issues #48, 52 and 121, the book "Asking About Asters" on our CD by the same name, and *Growing Concerns* issues #494, 495 and 500.

More holly facts, less sexy

- There are **hollies of all form** -- groundcover, mounded shrubs, narrow columns, spreading trees, and fast growing pyramids. Their sizes range from 12" miniatures to 50' trees.
- There are many **differences in leaf color, berry color and variegation** among holly species and varieties. Some have the traditional evergreen, spine-tipped leaf. Others are deciduous. Many are regularly mistaken for 'Some kind of boxwood.'
- Visit an arboretum with a holly collection to **appreciate the variety**. The Holly Society of America lists gardens with holly collections

<http://www.hollysocam.org/arboreta.htm>

- Dispelling a common misconception: **Bloom is not dependent on companionship**. A plant of a dioecious species will bloom even in isolation.
- **One male holly** plant can provide enough pollen to pollinate **many female** plants.
- **To match in leaf color or growth habit** between holly lad and lasses, stick with varieties of the same species. Male varieties have been selected in most species -- some are 'Blue Prince', 'China Boy', and American tree holly 'John Boy.'
- **Lady hollies are not particular**, however!

If a male holly of *any* species is blooming at the same time as the female and is within a few hundred feet -- bee flying range -- the female flowers can develop into fruit. So your 'Blue Princess', 'China Girl' or 'Satyr Hill' tree holly might consort with neighborhood males across species lines.



This Chinese holly (*I. cornuta*, probably 'Buford') a 20' spreading tree. Its flowers have a strong, sickly sweet odor and feathery, pollen bearing stamens -- a male, so there won't be berries. Yet the tree will be abuzz as its pollen develops more fully. Chinese holly male flowers are bee magnets.





Shorter, mounded forms of holly make fine hedges and foundation plants. If you shear them to keep them small and also want berries, be sure to make thinning cuts, too. That not only keeps the plant dense but keeps blooming wood coming from the interior. Growing back from a thinning cut, safe inside the shearing outline for a few years, that wood can flower and fruit. (More on pruning holly, see page 13.)

- Holly **berries are prized by birds.**
- Yet the berries are **toxic to many mammals**, causing "...nausea and multiple episodes of vomiting with occasional diarrhea." Yet the **"...leaves are nontoxic** and, in many species, are brewed for their content of caffeine..."

(From the *American Medical Association Guide to Poisonous and Injurious Plants.*)



We've known people who love the winter color of fruit so much that they net their hollies or engage in scare tactics to keep birds from feeding there. Then, berries may last right into the next blooming season before rotting and dropping off.

- Spiny leaves can be a serious issue. Chinese holly leaves (*Ilex cornuta*) are particularly hard to work around.
- If you dislike prickly plants but want a traditional evergreen with red berries, consider **prickle-free longstalk holly** (*I. pedunculosa*). It's hardy to zone 5 and does well even where summers are hot. However, it is often less colorful than other hollies in winter -- because the birds seem to like its fruit best and strip these plants first.

- **Holly can regenerate from bare wood** so if the plant overgrows you can cut it back hard.*
*See *In our gardens* on pages 13 - 15 for more on holly pruning.
- Corollary to the previous note: A holly that defoliates in bad weather or after a rough transplant should be given a chance to leaf out anew.
- Holly's wood is **rot-resistant**. If you prune out old canes to renew a holly, or cut a holly back hard, keep the sticks to prop up perennials; they'll last for years.

Holly trouble-shooter

Scale insects, leaf spot, holly leaf miner and winter damage (desiccation) are the problems holly growers might have to deal with. Standard procedures applies: Keep the plant healthy and it will resist problems on its own, but "shake hands" with the plant regularly. Saying hello every few weeks focuses your attention so you can see signs of any trouble in early stages when they are most simply managed.

About scale: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/in649>

<http://oregonstate.edu/dept/nurspest/cottony%20camellia%20scale.htm>



Left: This is cottony camellia scale on a holly.
Below: Don't wait until a scale population is so heavy as that. Watch for early signs, such as the sooty mold (dark interior leaves) that grows where the sticky liquid excrement from scale insects coats the leaf surfaces and twigs.



Leaf miner

Left: Arrows point to the damage that indicates a holly leaf miner is mining within each of those leaves. Catching the problem in its first year is key: Remove the leaf while the miner is still within and burn that foliage: Voila, no next generation of miners.

http://www.hgic.umd.edu/_media/documents/publications/holly_leaf_miners.pdf

Leaf spot

http://www.ppdl.org/dd/id/holly_leafspot-holly.html
and <http://extension.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/holly-leaf-spot>

"Spine spot" can be mistaken for a fungal leaf spot. If you see small gray spots with purple halos, put this on your suspect list, that it's caused by the piercing of a leaf by adjacent leaves. Below: The tiny wounds are spine spot, caused by that same wind which rattle nearby leaves so their tips pierced this blade.

Winter damage: desiccation

Right: This is not a variegated holly but one that suffered drying wind. This damage cannot be reversed. Leaves do not heal, but hang in until they are too damaged to support themselves. This leaf still has 75% of its surface, so it's only lost 25% of its energy production capacity. Protect the plant from future wind, prune to encourage new growth at all depths, and clean new foliage will replace this.



Midges/Berry stays green

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/ilex/opaca.htm

Holly problem round-up

http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/plant_pests/shrubs/hgic2055.html
and
<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/O&T/specificplants/note143/note143.html>

Holly categories: Traditional, deciduous, inconspicuous

In this holiday season issue we're addressing



the traditional, evergreen, spiny leaf, berry-bearing hollies. (Left.)



Ask us another time to present this kind of round-up for the other two holly groups:

- Deciduous, red berried hollies such as Michigan holly / winterberry (*I. verticillata*), Japanese winterberry (*I. serrata*) and possumhaw (*I. decidua*), or
- The many species that are often mistaken for "some kind of boxwood." Inkberry (*I. glabra*), Japanese box-leaf holly (*I. crenata*) and yaupon (*I. vomitoria*) are leaders in this group. Clue: Holly species have alternate arrangement of leaves. Boxwood leaf arrangement is opposite.

Above: These box-leaf evergreen hollies with black berries and spineless foliage await later discussion.

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. We pay homage to them here, with their stories and or their advice.

Here's an eloquent story with a powerful message: Never stop. Keep on growing! Here, advice comes not in quotes but actions. Notice the carrot storage method, and how example and outcome speak louder than words when it comes to a fertilizer recommendation.

There is a lady who kind of inspired me in the realm of vegetable gardening - Margaret B. of Chehalis, WA. At the age of 79 she was still growing vegetables to sell from her one-acre garden, had two milk-cows, one sheep, a few chickens. When she was 13 she and her brother began to grow vegetables as their father was gone and their mother was too ill to work and there was the mortgage on the farm. They paid off the mortgage and Maggie continued to garden and live on the farm until she moved to town in her early 80s.

Maggie grew approximately 4,000 lbs. of pole (green) beans every year to sell at Fuller's Market, along with carrots, beets, squash, strawberries, plums, chard, and I don't remember everything else. One year we purchased 200 lbs. of the sweetest carrots to store in straw in our pump house for the winter.

She finally sold the farm and moved into town and her entire backyard (in town) became another garden. She continued selling green beans and other vegetables and when she was in her early and mid-eighties picked 3,000 lbs of beans. She's now in a nursing home and I cannot see her as I live in Michigan, but she was a sweetheart. I know she had a load of manure put on her garden each year and I don't think she used anything but a hand-cultivator (the kind with a wheel) - no pesticides, etc.

Thanks again for a great newsletter. -
C.C. -

You're very welcome, C.C. We're glad you shared Maggie's story.

Is there pass-along gardening wisdom in your hands? Pay homage to all those generations of effort by telling others about it. Also, send it to us. We'll also pass along all we can.

Right: One of our mentors, Curt Pickens, grew up on a "hard scrabble farm." No one works harder than a farm family, where you work so you can eat!



Scrabbling in the garden, word play

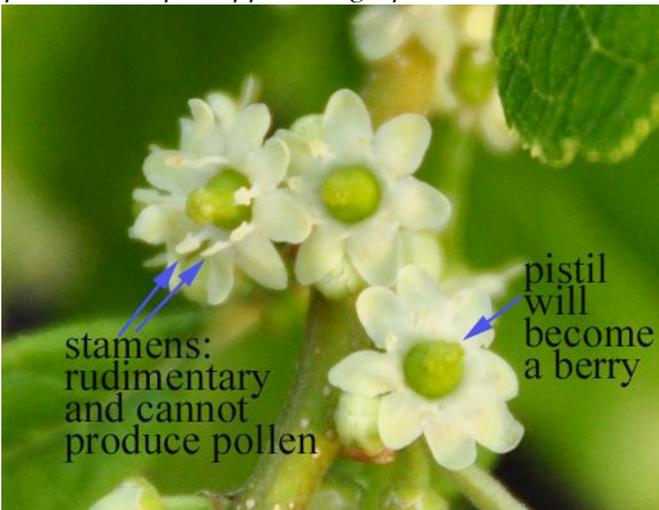
We gardeners earn admiring murmurs when we display our garden's produce in vases and on plates. We can stir up a bit of that admiration by tossing a nifty horticultural term or two on the table during word games. For instance:

Carp- and carpo-: adjective; fruit, referring to fruit/seed; *When we see -carp in a plant's scientific name we know there is something significant about the fruit, as in the American tree holly named Ilex opaca 'Xanthocarpa' for its yellow berries.* (Please hold those Scrabble tiles: -carp and -carpo are not complete words but elements to be combined with other words.)

Dioecious: adjective; dy EE shus; Having male and female flowers on separate plants; Since ginkgo trees are *dioecious*, if your tree is producing fruit you know that it's a female tree and also that there must be a male nearby which is contributing pollen. (Below: Dioecious female holly)

Monoecious: adjective; muh NEE shus; having both male and female structures on the same plant. *Dogwoods are monoecious, so if the tree is healthy enough to flower it should also produce its red fruits.*

Parthenocarpy: noun; PAR thu no KAR pee; the production of fruit without fertilization; *Parthenocarpy and parthenocarpic plants are a mystery that gives us seedless bananas, oranges, persimmon, pineapple and grapes.*



part of a flower. *A female holly plant's flowers are called pistillate because they have only a pistil and no pollen producing parts.*



Fraxinus (a.k.a. Fraxy or "get out of there, you!") says she can tell us all about phenology, in how much more snap and crunch there is to a *Kalanchoe* that grew where wind, cold and lots of sun kept it stout. It's also probably also loaded with extra defensive chemicals that can alter the taste. and she loves to learn such differences!

Phenology: noun; fu NAHL uh jee; the study of the influence of climate on biological phenomenon such as variations in fur, bark, or flower; *When we wander around a friend's garden in a different region from our own, remarking on things like stouter junipers with thicker bark in an oceanside setting, we are studying phenology.*

Pistil: noun; PISS tuhl; female reproductive

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

So much goes on in email exchanges between newsletters! Two excerpts from this past week:

Growing know-how: Light the head, warm the butt!

I'm an estate gardener and take lots of cuttings throughout the year... I have found that if you can provide a little bottom heat to the containers it will help and also I always water with a weak solution of organic fertilizer once they have started to grow and it works wonders. It has been great fun over the last 5 winters to experiment with cuttings from different plants and watching how quickly some take off compared to others! - D.T. -

D.T. is an estate gardener with acres of garden to manage and a greenhouse that must be fully utilized to fill all the beds with special plants.

So we asked: Do you also have supplemental light on the cuttings, D.T.? At our school, when we stuck cuttings for winter classes we would use our three-tier light rack this way: The top fluorescent fixture lowered to just inches above the cuttings. The light for the next shelf below moved all the way up on its track until the cuttings' shelf prevented it moving further. Thus the cuttings were sitting right on top of that fixture's warm ballast. In a cold room (heat down except at class time), lit 24/7, with warm butts, rosemary would root in 2 weeks!

Yes I have supplemental lighting - we use 1000 watt high pressure sodium lights. They generate lots of heat - they have to be a distance away so they don't cook the plants! Also have thermostat regulated heat mats (24" x 48") so I can adjust heat when I am starting seeds of different varieties and growing preferences. - D.T. -

Vi-ola the special flowers make us think...

(Issue 168 mentioned) pansies still blooming. I thought I was the only one... Oh that Daniel and his pansies! - J.K. -

How wonderful to walk in a garden and feel our connections to those who grew there before -- as we gather Daniel did pansies. It can happen any day of the year. We remember those who gave us various plants, too: "Ah, Aili, we do apologize! If this snowball bush was still in your yard you would certainly have it better controlled," or "Marjorie you grow the sweetest smelling iris!" and "Curt, we can't grow it so well as you did but it's still a pretty impressive gas plant!"

...that to say good bye with feeling, we should keep on growing

Horticulture lost a stellar man last month. Bob Stewart, of Arrowhead Alpines in Fowlerville, Michigan, was known all over the country for seed germination and propagation techniques as well as extremely fine plant selections. He passed away after a heroic battle with cancer. We will certainly remember him through the plants he turned us onto, and be very glad his wife Brigitta will keep them growing so we can always go back for more.

<http://www.arrowhead-alpines.com/>

This week in our garden

Grow with us! This week:

Simultaneously truckin' all-out on the website launch (woo hoo -- it might be up by the time you open this!) as we **enjoy the post-holiday slow down**. Yup, that's do-able. Only wish we could adequately convey the fun of lounging under our yew branch as a substitute for sitting in the garden. However, it seems that capturing it is one of those "being there" things!



Catch up on ideas that glimmered as we passed by during the busy season.

1) Did growing conditions make a huge **difference between two clones** of a *Kalanchoe tomentosa* 'Chocolate Soldier'? We gave away one of three cuttings received from a friend and now many months later arranged to see the two side by side.

One grew cold and relatively bright on a south facing metal windowsill. The other grew in a warm room four feet away from a south facing window shaded by a porch roof.



The colder, brighter plant has thicker, sturdier stems (arrows, left), more of its varieties' coloration on leaf tips, and smaller, tougher leaves. The warmer plant is larger with more fragile stems and less "chocolate" spotting.



You can make cuttings, too!
Join Janet on February 4
in Detroit! See page 18.

2) Learn if what we saw is **effective salt protection** for trees' root zones.



In a home garden, a curb can protect a garden from salt-laden meltwater. Where there's fast-moving traffic, wheels splash salt *over* curbs.

So these trees' root balls are covered. Good move!



But will the salty water end up concentrated in that gap between tarp and pavement?

We've heard of other techniques, but not seen comparisons or heard about the practicalities. Here's a place where a side by side test might be done.

Wonder if the landscape managers might cover every other tree pit with baled straw, next year? The trees' subsequent growth would tell whether the straw might do a better job of filtering salt, make it simpler to remove the residue from the root zone.

The test could also include what some gardeners do who manage salt spray over beds in downtown Chicago walkways. They roll out sod over the beds, then take it and its salt burden away in spring.

3) Now, if only we could recall where we filed that list we made, of bright ideas and other things to check out *this* winter...

The best gardening is experimental as well as ephemeral.
- Christopher Lloyd -

Order honing stones and oil, because it's almost tool party time. See page 19.



Review progress of long term garden projects. Such as: **Holey moley, time for a holly intervention!**

Over the last two years we've been reducing and rejuvenating a holly. Thought you might like to see the reality of "cut it back hard" applied to a typical landscape plant that got out of hand:

The subject: (Left) A chunky tree holly, newly planted, per our design.

The need: (Below, left) One May, when the plant had been in place not quite five years, we came back to visit. Its minders had clipped it annually, yet it had become a foot taller and 18 inches wider.

That's too big. It was so wide there was no longer room for perennials in the space between holly and walkway. (Our apologies: When we took these photos we did not intend to make this plant teach a pruning lesson, so we did not check our old files to capture the same angle. Even so, we think you can see the increase.) Such "creep" happens at just inches per year, but adds up. It happens when there is no firm plan for a plant or when the gardener does not notice the annual growth rate and cut at least that hard each year.

Some complications: It had become a "shell" -- foliage concentrated at the branch tips from being repeatedly sheared without any thinning cuts to allow light into the center. Thus the interior of the plant was a mass of thin branches without leaves, plus twigs dead or dying because they had too little leaf to support their needs.

Our action: We cut it back by 24" in height and took 18" off each side - enough so it could grow for at least a year before needing to be cut again. We also removed all dead and very weak wood from the center. This was a "bite the bullet" plan, in that it removed most of the foliage to put



us quickly into the best starting position. Options we rejected: Replace the plant. Or cut in stages over a longer time: Shorten the top, let it fill, then cut the sides.

Evaluation after one summer's growth: (Above, right) Here it is before the next spring's growth began. "Breaks" -- new foliage growing from previously bare wood -- are still scarce on one side, the shadiest face. We figure that area's next chance to break will be during the spring growth spurt about to begin, and it should be a stronger response than last summer since nearby trees have not yet leafed out to block the light. So we simply remove more dead and thin wood, leaving most of the foliage intact to provide energy for a good running start.



Evaluation after 16 months. Left: Here it is two growing seasons after our first "attack." It's filling in now, noticeable if you compare the density at the top to that previous photo taken 7 months before.

Below: There are now breaks -- new growth -- from the old wood. And some dead twigs. Those were some of the thin branches we left in place in our first two sessions, telling us they were too far gone, too weak to bounce back.



Second big clip.

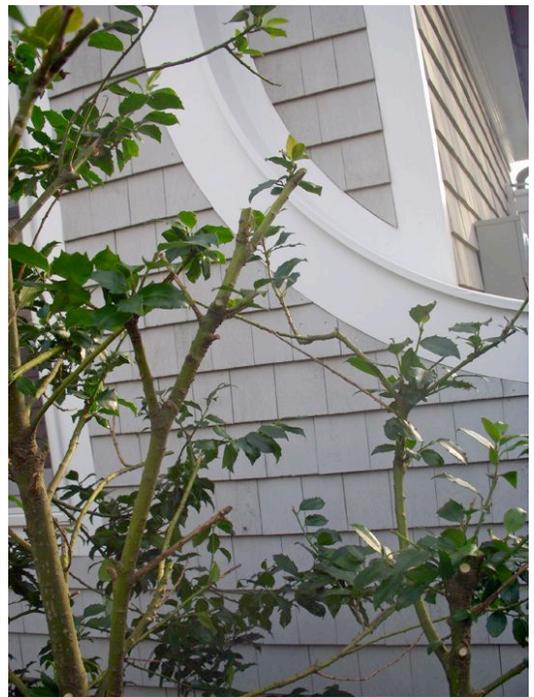
Upper left: before the clip. Lower left: after the clip. We removed the dead wood and clipped branches like the one in the photo above to just above the strong breaks.

That left the shrub the right height and width, and poised to come back strong next spring. It's certainly thinner than when it was new but better looking every time we leave it.

Notice how much better it looks with that clutter of energy-draining scantily-leaved wood removed.

***Bushes? Like hair! They grow back.
Stop worrying about it!***

-Frances Kissinger -



Those cuts removed a lot more wood (above, left: all our trimmings are on the ground to the right). However, now the plant is primed to fill in all its bare spots.



In the spring -- not quite 2 years since beginning the intervention -- we'll look again and expect to see lots of breaks that will each grow six inches or more. Our dense, perfectly sized pyramidal beauty will be back.

With annual clipping right after bloom to reduce it by six inches, plus thinning to encourage growth from the interior, it can remain that size, stay dense, flower and fruit.

Complications. Always. This is real life! In this second year of rejuvenation, the property was assailed by dry salty winds as a hurricane decayed offshore. The plant probably spent a lot of energy keeping itself whole, energy that might otherwise have gone into developing more breaks... Ah well. Stay tuned for next spring's report. (Surprised we're still on the job? Sometimes we are, too! Our clients are great, and have confidence in us even when results take time.)

The future fruit. Tree holly can have beautiful fruit but in this case we erased any chance of that by hard pruning.

Right: See the flower buds that have formed on this Meserve holly branch? It's a first-year twig. Those buds will form even on twigs growing in the shrub's interior, so long as sufficient light reaches there. So you can keep a holly small and still have berries if you not only cut the top and sides right after bloom, but cut some branches further back. Then, new branches like this are always forming in the interior. For every tip with potential fruit you clip from the outer edge, there will be one left in the interior. In time the plant will have plenty of flowering, fruiting branches *within the outline we set!*



The 45mph garden: Spring witchhazel



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

When it's mild, early bloomers like spring witchhazel (*Hamamelis x mollis*) may "wake up" and open their flowers. We certainly notice them as we drive along in wooded areas.

Witchhazel does well planted in full sun if the area is wind protected. On its own it finds all it needs by hanging out into the sun from within the edge of that big living wind screen called a forest.

S.C. reported this week:

Just out to get newspaper--believe the **witchhazel** is in bloom!! What happened to winter?

During the gray days of winter, the least bit of color pops. Spring witchhazel in bloom.

Right: Once you see one, you notice them all over. Aaaaand, how about that, a **tree holly** in the background, doing just fine at over 20' tall in a wind protected place in zone 5. We made a note to check back in a few years to see how its top holds up once it grows above the shelter of the roof.



Pot crops, ranked by number sold (From page 3.)

Poinsettia: 41,135,000 pots sold

Spring bulbs: 16,099,000

Mums: 14,776,000

Orchids: 14,774,000

Azaleas: 9,118,000

Roses (primarily miniatures): 8,098,000

African violets: 6,845,000

Lilies: 6,226,000

"Other" (many species including cyclamen, holly, ivy, Persian violet, etc.) 51,228,000

2006 sales figures. Wholesale sales, total all categories, approximately \$620 million.

If you thought lilies were higher on the list, you may be remembering their rank as a *cut flower*. See What's Coming Up 159.

Green thumbs up to "amateur" horticulturists' contributions to gardening.* When it comes to developing great new plants, some efforts just are not undertaken on a commercial basis. That includes those that take a lifetime: To select the right parents, hybridize, grow seedlings on to maturity, choose the best and then hybridize some more. Other projects may be too expensive for many nurseries to take on, even if the right sponsors can be "sold" on a plant's potential. In addition, the effort calls for continuity of "eye" and feel for the plants, talents that don't transfer well through corporate personnel changes. So here's to those with a simple passion to tweak plants who have moved us all forward for centuries and continue to do so.

Green thumbs down to a perfectly good horticultural term being usurped by the medical marijuana producers. Whatever will we call the plants grown in pots for sale as decorations now that following an index reference to "pot crop" is likely to tell us all we never wanted to know about *Cannabis* production?

***Amateur?** In the 1950's Kathleen Meserve of St. James on Long Island, New York took inspiration from a garden club lecture to develop a better Christmas holly. She crossed English holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) with a very hardy groundcover holly from Japan (*I. rugosa*) to create hybrids with the look of English holly and the hardiness of the Japanese. She received a horticultural award of merit and we tip our hats to this "amateur" every time we admire her work in *I. x meserveae* 'Blue Princess', 'Blue Prince', 'Blue Angel', etc. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/30/nyregion/kathleen-k-meserve-93-bred-holly-hybrids.html>

Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

Janet's a lady who gets a lot of mileage out of a garden. That's how Macunovich was once described by a client of her business, Perennial Favorites. "I love what you plant for me, Janet," she explained. "I even think I get to know the plants pretty well but then you come here with your stories about the plants and *why* something is growing a certain way. I love it, it's like you open up windows I didn't know were there." Janet brings the same depth and enthusiasm to books and articles she writes, classes she teaches and practical how-to materials she develops.



He's a guy who sees not a beautiful plant but exactly where a gardener fits into a picture. Steven Nikkila's a horticultural photographer who's also planted hundreds of gardens in dozens of different situations in running a gardening business with his wife, Janet Macunovich. That work's paired him with people whose gardening experience levels have ranged from just sprouting to heavily branched. Steven's history of showing so many people "how to" plus his own broad knowledge of what has been or needs to be done in a garden adds to his photos. His alterations in composition, angle or light have caused thousands of gardeners to say "Oh, I see!"

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

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

*See January 18 and February 9 and "Invite Janet or Steven" on page 20.

Tuesday, January 10, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., Janet helps you plan, tend or improve a **Mixed Border**, that garden type which includes all types of flowering plants from bulbs to shrubs. In **Dexter, Michigan**, sponsored by the Dexter Garden Club at the Dexter Senior Center, 7720 Dexter-Ann Arbor Road. Limited seating. Contact jnnwestman@yahoo.com to reserve a seat.

Saturday mornings, January 21 and February 4, 2012, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The 21st annual *Winter Seminar Series* offered by **The Detroit Garden Center** (DGC) at Historic Trinity Church near Detroit's famous Eastern Market. Janet presents *Eight Months of Color* on January 21 and a *Propagation Workshop* February 4. Popular garden educator Cheryl English leads the January 28 session on *Trees, Shrubs and Vines for Your Garden*. You pay a pittance for a great deal of fun and learning, thanks to generous educational outreach by the DGC. For more information or to reserve a seat for one or all three, contact the DGC at 313-259-6363 or detroitgardenctr@yahoo.com



Right: The gardeners spread out to put a new knowledge to the hands-on test. What a grand place to learn about gardening! What wonderful people gather there! That's why we've been meeting on winter Saturdays for 21 years now. Join us! Call or email the Detroit Garden Center to reserve your seat!

Wednesday, January 18, 2012, from 7:20 to 8:30 p.m. our friend, certified arborist Deb Hall, gives you help in *Pruning* in a presentation hosted by the Open Gate Garden Club. In **Fenton, Michigan** at the St. John Activity Center, 600 N. Adelaide Street. For more information contact Linda Blanco ay 810-964-9989 or Mary Kaye Schmelzer at 248-634-7618.

Saturday, January 28, 2012, Janet & Steven give you design help in *Continuous Color in the Landscape* and share ideas in *50 Favorite Gardens, Before-After* at *A Winter Day in the Garden*. This is a conference sponsored for all gardeners by the Crawford County, Illinois Master Gardeners, in **Robinson, Illinois** at Lincoln Trail College. For registration information, contact hdennis@illinois.edu or 618-546-1549.

Thursday, February 2, 2012, Steven helps you employ *8 Months of Color* in your landscape designs. This is a talk geared for professional gardeners and landscapers who are patrons of Ray Wiegand's Nursery Wholesale Department, 47747 Romeo Plank Road north of 21 Mile Road, **Macomb, Michigan**. To register, call 586-286-3658.

Thursday, February 9, 2012, 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. hear our friend Deb Hall, certified arborist, columnist and owner of the garden service Twigz. Deb will explain how to do ingenious and beautiful things with *Found Art for the Garden*. This talk is sponsored by The Shelby Gardeners Club at their regular meeting. The public is welcome. At the Burgess-Shadbush Nature Center, 4101 River Bends Drive off Ryan Road south of 22 Mile Road in **Shelby Township, Michigan**. For more information call club president Karen McCuen: 586-786-0816.

Thursdays, February 9, February 16 and March 1, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Janet leads *Rev up the Veg!*, a three-part series for eco-friendly gardeners whose aim is for their best year ever of growing edible plants. Hosted by the Beverly Hills Community Gardeners.

February 9, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. It's *Learn from Last Year*: The thinking gardener's review of last year's successes and challenges. What was best about last year and can we make it happen again? What were the problems and what might we do about them this year?

February 16, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. *Dreams and Visions* An in-depth look at tried-and-true methods plus new twists for growing specific plants. We discuss old standards as well as new varieties.

March 1, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. *Countdown to Get Growing* This session starts at step one and goes through all the basics of growing edibles. It's an essential "what to do first, and next, this year." It's great for anyone brand new to gardening, with plenty of tips for the experienced grower, too.

All sessions meet in the lower level social hall, Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, 2000 West Thirteen Mile Road, on the northeast corner of Evergreen Road and Thirteen Mile Road. The public is welcome but you must reserve a seat. To do so, contact Matt Roman at msroman6@gmail.com.

Tool cleaning and sharpening parties!

Bring your tools, learn how and then make them like new.

Each winter for the past 9 years we've volunteered at gardeners' get-togethers to help you make your tools like new. We demonstrate how to, then help you get to it in work space provided by the party host. The company is grand -- other gardeners bearing their favorite tools and pleased to set a spell with others and chat while working.

This year we'll be at the following parties.

Sunday, February 5, in the afternoon at the **Taylor Conservatory**, 22314 Northline Road, **Taylor, Michigan**. Stay tuned here for the time and registration information. Or if you're already a volunteer at the Conservatory, for heaven's sake take advantage of your perks and put dibs on a seat!

Sunday, February 26, 2:00 p.m. at **Monroe County Extension, Monroe, Michigan**. Hosted by the Monroe area Master Gardeners. Seats are now being offered to active Master Gardener Volunteers. Seats that remain will be made available. Stay tuned here for how to register when that opening comes.

Thursday, March 1, *two sessions*, 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. at Wayne County Extension, 5454 Venoy Road, **Wayne, Michigan**. Hosted by the Wayne County Master Gardeners. Seats are now being offered to active Master Gardener Volunteers. Seats that remain will be made available. Stay tuned here for how to register.

Sunday, March 4, 2:00 p.m. at **Ray Wiegand's Nursery**, 47747 Romeo Plank Road, **Macomb, Michigan**. Call 586-286-3655 for more information or to reserve your place.

One more, for which we're still working out the details. **Stay tuned for:**
A party in **Milford, Michigan**. (Working on January 22 or February 19)

These are limited space workshops, so call or email early to reserve a seat. Most hosts offer seats free of charge or ask only a small contribution toward community-use materials.

Come prepared -- check *What's Coming Up #29* for a description of what we do and what supplies you may wish to bring with you, along with your weeder, pruners, spade, etc. (For a copy of #29, email us or ask the party host.)

See you there!

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** meeting,
 - a **hands-on workshop** at a site of your choosing 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 in advance for spring weekends, and six months ahead for most other weekends and evenings. So give us some lead time. Then we can meet you in *your* garden.



Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich have been digging, shooting and teaching how-to for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the early '90s and then ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring expert instructors who knew their stuff in the garden as well as knowing how to get their messages across in front of a group. Deb Hall, above, with Steven, is one of those experts whose educational efforts we are glad to support. To set up a talk, workshop or class with Janet and Steven or obtain a list of other speakers, send an email to JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850.

Time to garden your walls...



Steven's decorated many walls with great garden and Nature images. He can help you do the same with photos that capture the garden beauty you love, framed or on canvas to your specifications.

You can own any of Steven's images from *What's Coming Up*.* Or if you have a flower, type of scene or hue in mind you can request your dream. His library includes tens of thousands of plants and natural images, so Steven can assemble a customized photo sampler for you. Email us at JMaxGarden@aol.com for details, to request a sampler or to place an order.

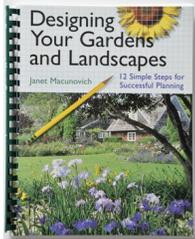
Prices for **Steven's garden art** vary. Examples:
Matted, framed, overall 11 x 15", \$48
Cloth tapestry, fade-proof 36 x 48" \$215

Describe your dream image or color to Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com. He'll send you a photo sampler and price list.



*Images in our newsletter are depicted in low-resolution to facilitate e-mail transmission. Steven's originals and art created from them are full resolution, with so much clear detail they are sharp even as wall-size cloth banners

You asked for our advice "on paper". We wrote and sell these books plus CDs:



Designing Your Gardens and Landscapes

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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Potting Up Perennials CD. New for 2011

Practical, beautiful answers about perennials and all kinds of flowers, trees, shrubs, design, pruning and much more is in this collection of 2009 & 2011's *What's Coming Up*. Includes 101 issues with over 1,700 pages, 1,600 articles and 2,400 images. Has a comprehensive index with how-to guide so you can search for any topic or detail in any of the 101 issues. Bonus on this CD: Steven Nikkila's Daydream Screen Saver, 74 of his most vivid works from gardens and nature.

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*

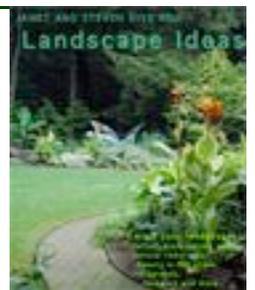
A choice collection of Janet and Steven's advice for tree selection, planting and care. Each article made its debut in *Michigan Gardener* magazine and has been on hold since, awaiting completion of its fellows until this comprehensive compilation became possible. Topics include: Selecting trees; fall 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.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pp. Color Ill.'s. \$12.00



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.

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

Janet and Steven give you: Trees, Landscape Ideas and Garden Care *

Set of three 10" x 13" magazines, 48 pages each. \$30.00



***For a look inside, email JMaxGarden@aol.com with the subject line "Magazine peek."**

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