

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns
Issue 19, December 13, 2008

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Waxy cups and turkey tails:

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Lot's filled with pines... and lots of mushrooms

Hi Janet,

This is our **2nd year in this house** and not until this year, after leaving for a 2 week vacation, did **the fungi begin!** I had been watering regularly due to the fact only last year I planted a flat of pachysandra on one side and myrtle on the other (it was originally all dirt). When we returned from vacation some of the fungi was as big as some of my smaller rocks! I can probably pick up a mushroom size fungi ball every 3 days or so.

This area gets NO sunlight due to the many huge pines, but I have cut back on watering. What's your thought? - B.K. -

Dear B.K.,

Fungi's everywhere and spores can hang around a long time waiting for the right conditions. Since many fungi can live in places too dark, damp, airless, acid or alkaline for most plants, if something comes along to **make what's been a barren environment a bit better** -- but not enough to make it great for plants -- **fungi are able to get a start.**

Afterward, fungi or "lower plants" such as moss may seem to have the upper hand in

'Shroom words: Just because

Toadstool: Not just any mushroom but one of the poisonous types.

Conk: Woody, shelf-like mushroom usually associated with tree trunks and large limbs

Deliquesce: To dissolve in water, as do some mushrooms' gills

Polypore: One of a group of mushroom species that form conks

Olid: Particularly evil-smelling, well used in describing the various stinkhorn mushrooms

such places. Yet it's not because they push out plants, like aggressive weeds do. They simply are **more able to grow where plants cannot.**

Your attention to the new plants may have been what nudged the site up a notch from completely barren to tolerable for fungi. Consider this scenario:

Two or three years ago you appeared and focused attention -- **water** -- on a bare area. That **changed the environment.** (You also

added some plants. That's environmental change, too, but until the plants establish they have less impact than water.)

Some dormant spores or barely surviving fungal threads were encouraged by the moisture and began to grow. You didn't see any sign of it **that first year** or even two because the growth going on **was all underground**. Threads grew, establishing a hearty base.

At some point last year they reached maturity. **This year** as soon as the conditions were right (*no one* knows what "right" is), they started **producing mushrooms**.

I wrote a while back (issue GC757) about **trying to eliminate mushrooms**. In summary: It's **futile and also not wise**.

Look **on the bright side**. With names like scarlet waxy cup*, jack o' lantern* and hen of the woods* as well as some startlingly beautiful* forms and colors, mushrooms are as worthy of cultivation and study as flowers. They could certainly challenge an experienced gardener.

Perhaps you'll lead the way into that next frontier, wherein a gardener and friend stroll a shady lot. One says, "Ooooo, a violet toothed polypore. I wish those would grow in my yard. And is that a scarlet waxy cup...!"

"Go on" replies the other, " I know you're not really envious. I've seen those gorgeous netted rhodotus* and American caesar*s you grow!"

Of course, lots of mushrooms have earned names like wolf's milk slime, red tree brain, dead man's fingers* (which wouldn't be in your pine woods since it prefers deciduous trees) and witch's butter*. Frankly, **if I had a mushroom garden** and those were my weeds I might be happier than at present. It could certainly be more fun to curse a lizards' claw or stinky squid than it is to come up with oaths against a wild morning glory or dandelion.

Maybe you should up the ante and increase the light as well as the water in that area, so garden plants can grow. That means pruning or removing a few trees.

*Paste this URL into your browser and type a name into "search" to learn more: www.mushroomexpert.com

Now I real-eyes: Mushroom = *flower*



Conks always catch our eye as Steve Nikkila and I walk in the woods. Many in this group become quite woody, and expand each year so that you can count growth rings. They're usually produced by fungi that are not first-line infectors but which live in already dead wood. They indicate a problem within the tree, perhaps an old wound now grown over, but are not themselves the problem.



Each conk-forming fungal species makes a distinctive conk. Most are edible although too woody to be palatable except when very young. I'm not enough of a mushroom-er to identify these with any certainty but I do have fun after a walk when we page through mushroom identification guides or websites debating if that one might have been a turkey tail, this one a hexagonal-pored polypore or that other, scrambled egg slime. Photos ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Toxic plants: Plant problem or human hearsay?

I have a few **moonflower plants** and the latest with the teenagers has scared me. I know it can be quite invasive but love the flower. I took down one plant that was about 6 foot round after several prunings & have burned it! - B. -

Dear B.,
I'm not sure what the latest with the teenagers is. Moonflowers, (*Datura* species) are **poisonous plants** from which **hallucinogenic extracts can be made**. Every few years that fact's reported by the media. I've yet to hear a firsthand report that there was actual mischief.

It's possible that a person who can identify the plant, harvest the right part at the right time and process it the right way could create a drug. However, those are **pretty big "ifs."**

To us -- gardeners -- that plant's pretty distinctive. To others, it's a green thing lost in a jumble of other green things. Likewise, *we* may know when a plant's in bud or seed or other growth phase ripe for use but it's visual Greek to others. And as for turning plant parts into useful products of any kind, just look how few people even know what to do with a pumpkin other than carve it into a face.

Big chunks of **the average garden** are **potentially pharmaceutical**. I could write and editors looking for headlines might pick up press releases about (you fill in the blanks): How someone with murderous intent might dice up the roots of _____ and slip it into cafeteria salads; or that _____ should be banned because evil pranksters could dry the leaves and slip the crumbled bits into herb jars to cause temporary paralysis in members of rival gangs; etc.

I think it's not plants' existence that makes them dangerous. Slow news days, on the other hand, can certainly make it seem so.

Mulling over mulberry's haircut

Janet,
What is the best way to **remove the dead branches** from underneath a mulberry tree? Should you remove all the dead branches and **when** is the best time? - Diane -

Hi Diane,
I crawl in under the crown, sometime between fall's killing frosts and the first week of April, on a day when the temperature is not going to plummet 30 or 40 degrees right after the cut. Then, I **cut from the inside out**. I take out more than just dead wood. I **cut it way back** to leave just the nubs of each main branch. It grows rapidly so that the branches from a five foot tree may cascade nearly to the ground by mid-summer.

That's not a rule, just **my preference**. I like the feel of a waterfall more than the mushroom-like form that develops when a weeping mulberry (*Morus alba* 'Pendula') is sheared repeatedly. That straight hem doesn't do **justice to this tree's potential for grace**. It



reminds me of bobbed haircuts created by placing a bowl over one's head and trimming off all hair below the rim.

Repeated shearing without some annual thinning also **leads to a build-up of deadwood** in the crown. Then, you can play catch-up: Spend an hour or two under the tree's canopy wielding a keyhole saw and sharp chisel. Alternatively, you can fall back on my pruning method every few years. As it grows back from this severe cut, resume shearing it.



To keep a weeping mulberry in line, I saw off the main branches in late winter or early spring so all it has left are main limbs sticking out one foot from the trunk. If it's too hard to imagine or too drastic for you to follow my recipe, read on:

Photos ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Steve Nikkila has hundreds of thousands of great pictures in file but no before-after of pruning weeping mulberries. We can't let a gap like that go unstopped! So how about if I show you how-to, this coming April 1 or thereabouts? I'll need a volunteer with an established weeping mulberry that's visible from a public way (so those involved can check back at will to watch the patient recover). That person must also give me the okay to bring along the photographer, involve interested gardeners and grant carte blanche to 'cut away.' Then, those who want to participate can do so, and over the season I can post for everyone the before, cut and grown-back photos. Seeing it with your own eyes or cutting it with your own hands is the best way to learn and to build confidence. This invitation to offer up your mulberry is open to all. Email me if you're game!

Premature with the pre-emergent weed killer

Hello Janet,

One of my daughter-in-laws said her neighbor who has a wonderful garden, told her to put **Preen on the garden in fall**. She said it would prevent the weed seeds from sprouting next spring. Would you let me know if this works? - G. -

Hi G.,

If your daughter-in-law has a **problem with winter weeds, there may be some benefit**. Winter weeds are annuals such as chickweed, tall rocket and henbit*. They sprout in the cool of late fall

or during winter thaws, then lurk until the very first warm spell in spring when they grow great guns, bloom and drop seed all over before we ever get out to the garden.

A blanket of mulch is as effective as pre-emergent herbicide, and is less worrisome in terms of pollution. Every time there's a heavy rain or fast thaw herbicide granules may rinse away into storm drains. By spring, the effectiveness of the application will be greatly reduced.

Pre-emergent weed killers such as Preen® work only on seeds, killing them as they sprout. Such chemicals won't touch perennial weeds already established. They are **best used during a garden's first years**, when former residents of the bed try to come back from seed. After a gardener has tended the bed for a few seasons and new, desirable plants have become established, there's little to no need for pre-emergents. Gardeners who continue to use them year after year are often wasting money and increasing the levels of herbicide mixed into the soil so that eventually the plants we do want to grow begin to have problems.

I've visited and interviewed horticulturists at almost **30 big public gardens** over the last 15 years, since I first compiled the information for my book "Caring for Perennials." I've found **no one who uses pre-emergent herbicides on any regular basis**. Several showed me areas where chronically weak plants mark a lingering impact of herbicide in spots treated with such products years ago, when they were thought to be wonder drugs for the garden.

*Paste this URL into your browser and click on a weed name to learn more: <http://weedid.aces.uiuc.edu/>

This week in Janet's garden

Grow with me! This week I will:

Compile another year's written work. I'm determined to make available a complete, searchable archive. This week I sent you information about installment one. (More on that in the special section here on pages 8-11.) That installment has 1,346 topics from 2008 plus 1993 through 1998. Now I'm working on 1999 and 2007. I hope to have the gap nearly closed by spring.

Use some garden-worthy words which were listed recently by the Collins English Dictionary people. These are words they have deemed too-little used and so will drop from the dictionary to make way for new terms. I was saddened to see "olid" there, a word that's so perfect for what it means: evil smelling. Try it. To say it will make your nose wrinkle as if in disgust. Yet it's to be outed to make room for the likes of "drive-by" and "bada-bing."

Usage in print drives inclusion in the dictionary. Left-behind words can make a

comeback. Wheatgrass, for instance, was gone for decades and then revived by the whole foods movement. Yet if a word stays gone too long, it's gone for good, like an extinct species.

So here's my effort toward the continued life of several others marked for the dust bin:

"I notice you vilipend that fubsy thing," said the gardener's visitor.
"Oh that? I do! But I need something griseous there, so until something better comes along..."

Sound ridiculous? Yet -- like gardening! Perhaps we sound just as inane to non-gardeners when they overhear, "I went ahead and espaliered that *Euonymus* because it was just too invasive in with the *Pachysandra* and *Ajuga*."

Vilipend: To treat with contempt

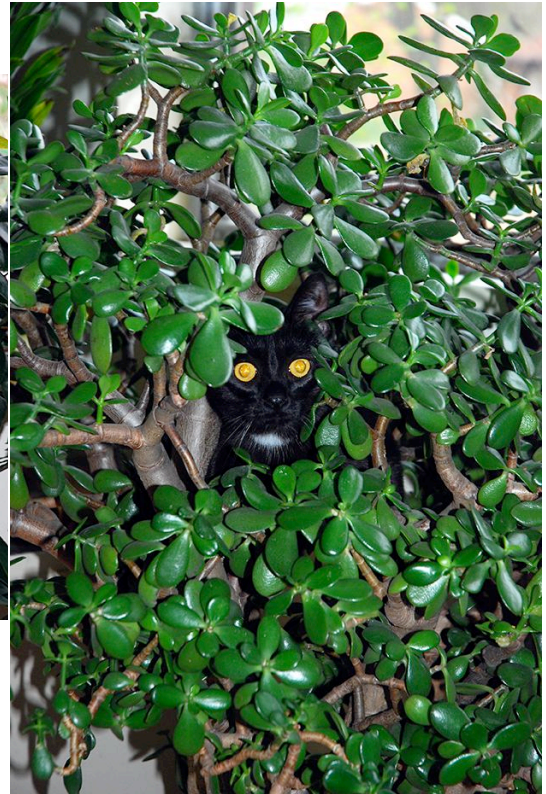
Fubsy: Squat

Griseous: Somewhat gray

Prepare for the annual **cat-proofing of the Christmas tree**. Years ago, after repeated midnight crashes when our cat's jungle instincts surfaced, we placed a hook in the ceiling and tethered the tree there with fishing line. Now, whenever we decide to rearrange the living room to give the tree a new spot, I locate a rafter and set a new anchor into the ceiling.

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

Grins: To the backgrounds our plants and gardens provide for making family memories. Thanks, Olive! Thanks jade!



She hasn't even seen a Christmas tree yet but given her propensity to camp in the jade tree, I suspect we have another jungle kitty on our hands, in Olive here. Olive where? Look closer!

Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Grow-ans: To using **green-tag extension cords** for outdoor holiday lights. Those UL (Underwriters' Laboratory) tags on cords and appliances represent a safety guide. Red is okay for use indoors and out, green should be used only indoors out of the weather.

Who's Janet?

The toddler who asked "Why?" grown up and out in the garden. One day when her daughter was two and peppering her with "why," Janet Macunovich's parents laughed and said, "Now it's *your* turn! You drove us crazy with 'why' when you were little!"

"Used to?" said Janet's husband. "She's still doing it!"

Janet's been gardening professionally for over 25 years and loves most to solve garden puzzles, from what to plant where to meet diverse expectations, to why a plant acts one way in one situation and differently elsewhere. She's studied at colleges, botanical gardens, professional associations' workshops and in her own garden and extensive library. "I love to find and recognize the important patterns and underlying causes," she says.

Email questions to her at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

Where to catch Janet in-person:

(More January dates are coming. Thanks for your input regarding class topics and locations!)

December date to be announced, "Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!" In Waterford, we're **clipping an upright Japanese maple to restrict its size**. This workshop was snowed out in its first schedule date so we're watching for the next good date. Want to come learn? Email or call me (JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850) to reserve a spot and learn the location. Include your phone number so I can call you when we set that date. This is a limited-space workshop.

Saturday, January 24, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. "Favorite Plant Picks for Your Garden" Skip the trial and error method of choosing plants. Take a look at which cultivars and landscape plants I've seen perform best in southeast Michigan, then put together a list of successful plants for your garden. This class is sponsored by The Detroit Garden Center as part of its 18th annual winter seminar series. It's held at Historic Trinity Church auditorium, 1345 Gratiot near Easter Market in Detroit. There is a fee to attend. For information and to register contact The Detroit Garden Center at 313-259-6363, detroitgardenctr@yahoo.com or www.detroitgardencenter.org.

Saturday, January 31, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. "Saving Time and Staying Healthy in the Garden". How to get more done in less time, along with practical strategies for preventing hand and back injuries with proper methods and ergonomic tools. Part of The Detroit Garden Center's winter seminar series - see January 24 listing to find out more about registration.

**Continue to next page for information about
Your free Index to Janet's 2008 articles. Also her collected work now for sale**

Your free Index to Janet's 2008 articles. Also her collected work now for sale

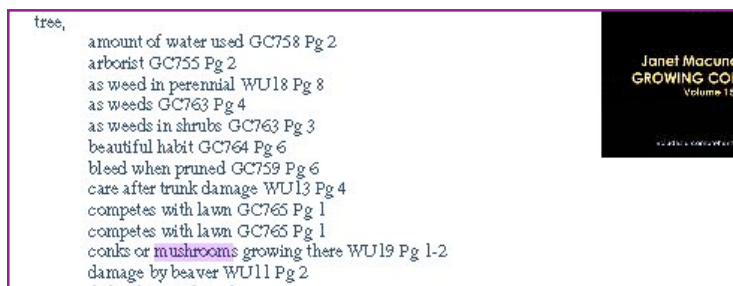
On December 9 you should have received a complete index of my 2008 weekly columns. If it did not make it to your email box and you would like a copy of this fully searchable index, please email to me and I'll re-send. JMaxGarden.aol.com

In addition, inside that index was information for anyone who wants to order back issues of my 2008 columns, now available on CD along with five additional years of collected articles.

Thanks to all of you who took a look at it and wrote to me with your reactions and questions. Here are the most frequently asked questions and my answers.

I haven't figured out how to use it.

If you save **my articles** you have up to **52 separate files** per year. Lots of good information but no **good way to find one bit you recall seeing**... somewhere. Take today's article. If you see a mushroom on a tree trunk next spring and can't recall what that signifies, you can open the index and "Find" for mushroom or conk, and entries such as below will be highlighted:



The WU19 Pg 1-2 will point you to What's Coming Up Issue #19, pages 1 and 2.

Does the index go with the CD you're selling?

The index **links you to everything in all six books** that are on the CD. That's "Outlooks on Oaks" (all of 2008's What's Coming Up and Growing Concerns issues) and five volumes of previous years' published and private-file work:

- Asking About Asters
- Bunches of Bushes
- Clipping a Crabapple
- Dividing the Daisies, and
- Evergreen Entries.

If you search the index for a topic you're interested in and the result is a simple page number, such as 182, you're thus referred to one of the pre-2008 books. The picture of that book appears on its pages of the index, pointing out which file to open to read the referenced article.

I bought a book from you years ago, of your articles. How does this relate?

I first issued the books that accompany my 2008 articles on this CD in a very limited quantity as Growing Concerns 1994, Growing Concerns 1995, etc. through 1998. Those books contained everything from my Detroit News columns of that time in expanded form. (Because my newspaper column inches were limited I often answered individual readers at length and

published abbreviated replies in the paper; I used the originals in the books). The books also included hundreds of Q&A I couldn't fit into the newspaper at all.



I've now **updated those books and added to them in these e-versions**. Yet I kept their pages aligned so that anyone with hard copies of those books who prefers (like me!) to read from paper can now use just one index on CD to find anything in those five books.

Do I need what's on the CD?

You do **if you want my 2008 articles and/or my 1994 through 1998 work**. If you are content with and have saved what I've already sent you on a weekly basis, now you have an index and you're set. Keep on saving, because I'll keep writing and I'll update the index annually.

However, many **people have asked me for back issues and for an index**. Others wanted to replace all the paper copies of articles they had saved with **something in electronic format**.

It was for those people that I put this work together. And for me. I have logs I use to track what I've written about, when, all the questions people have sent to me, and what topics I've scheduled for upcoming articles, but this index offers me more detail all in one place. Everything I've written is indexed with more and alternate key words and plant names.

I've saved many of your articles but they don't have the same page numbers as in the index.

I'm sorry! And thank you for reminding me.

You must have been printing out **my articles as published by Practical Gardening**. Here's a list that will make those work with the index. I meant to and forgot to send it. If you hadn't asked...

In my index I corrected problems with Practical Gardening's issue-numbering system; they were vexing to me at the time but out of my control. For instance, if you count all my issues of Growing Concerns from August 1993 to New Year's Eve 2007, they number 749, yet the Practical Gardening issue number for that time was in the 800's. In addition, the page numbers within each article changed because **I had to re-publish all my work from January through June, 2008**. The text is my property and the images Steve Nikkila's, but the formatting was not. Also, that format was not geared to downloading and sharing but website posting, with space for ads. **I reorganized (and sometimes added to) each of those issues as I re-made it for this CD**. Now they look more like my current What's Coming Up issues. I think you'll like them.

(See next page for a list of new issue numbers related to Practical Gardening issue date.)

Re-issue number, which is its number in Index:

Date issued by Practical Gardening

GC750	was issued on	01/05/08
GC751	was issued on	01/12/08
GC752	was issued on	01/19/08
GC753	was issued on	01/26/08
GC754	was issued on	02/02/08
GC755	was issued on	02/09/08
GC756	was issued on	02/16/08
GC757	was issued on	02/23/08
GC758	was issued on	03/01/08
GC759	was issued on	03/08/08
GC760	was issued on	03/15/08
GC761	was issued on	03/22/08
GC762	was issued on	03/29/08
GC763	was issued on	04/05/08
GC764	was issued on	04/12/08
GC765	was issued on	04/19/08
GC766	was issued on	04/26/08
GC767	was issued on	05/03/08
GC768	was issued on	05/10/08
GC769	was issued on	05/17/08
GC770	was issued on	05/24/08
GC771	was issued on	05/31/08

From June 7 thru August 9, 2008 there were no new Growing Concerns issued.

Those presented to Practical Gardening subscribers during that time were archived issues I will include in proper sequence as I finish recapturing pre-2008 material in share-able form for you.

If there are other questions please email or call me. I will continue to send answers directly to those who ask but also compile and post them here for others may be wondering the same things. I will not become an email-box-pest who inundates you with offers and explanations.

On the next page is the **explanation of the CD** from inside the index:

A gardening dream come true:

A complete library of how-to, how-come and what-if.
From a writer with a green thumb and a golden gift for practical explanation, here is:

Asking About Asters Janet Macunovich's Growing Concerns Special Edition

Gems from a 20-year, 12,000-gardener discussion:

- Fully researched, with recommended references
- 1,346 questions with in-depth answers
- 335 never seen before on newspaper or website!
- 240 illustrations. 1,200+ pages
- Five one-cover books
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All fully searchable.
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anywhere and pop into any
computer.
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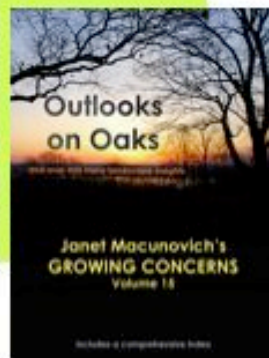
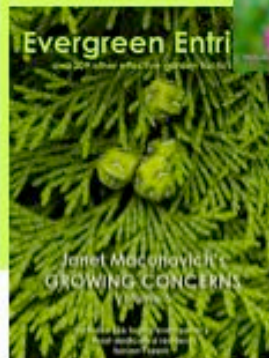
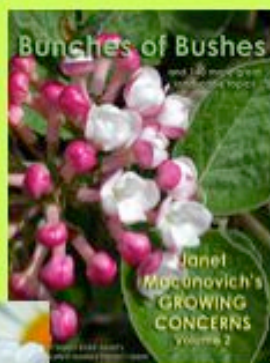
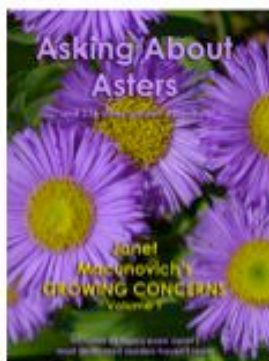
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Include your name and complete
mailing address.

Stay tuned to
JMaxGarden@aol.com for
information about the 2009 release
of more from Janet's Growing
Concerns files. (Are you on my
mailing list? You should be! Just
send me an email to receive my
free weekly newsletter. Then you
can begin compiling your own
free library and annual index.)



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