

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns

Issue 114, October 13, 2010



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Sun and a saw can fix languishing lilacs

I have a line of old **common lilacs** across the back of my yard. My mother decided to do this about 30 years ago when she was catsitting for me while I was on vacation. She took suckers from one really old lilac which I had brought with me when I moved into this house 52 years ago. That really old lilac is older than I am as I

have a photo of myself as a very little girl in front of that lilac when it was full grown.

The lilacs all prospered and grew, creating much needed privacy. The **decline began slowly** several years ago when the man living behind me erected a tall board fence, reducing sunlight considerably. It seemed I was always too busy to care for them properly which contributed to their decline even further.

A few years ago I began pruning to keep them from growing into overhead wires and to try to get them to have leaves on the bottom. I began removing the oldest canes and cutting back the tops using a drop crotch method. I have since planted a large perennial garden in front of all this, cutting off the sunlight even further from the lilacs.

Right now, I can no longer cut too far down or I will have cut off all leaves and I am **fearful that they will no longer sprout leaves** from further down the branches. Some of the new replacement wood is not growing straight up and is generally a mess. I cannot have them removed at this time because it would take heavy equipment to get them out which would ruin my garden and my fence. What would you suggest? - E.W. -

Cut the lilacs right to the ground. Do it at the end of winter, before the shrubs begin to leaf out. Let them devote all their energy to sprouting new from the roots.

If you don't cut them, they will face another year of too much wood and too few leaves. That will further **drain the shrubs' reserves**, which is not a great idea as they may be pretty low on spare energy. (See "*Decline: When a woody plant slides into debt*," page #.)

Cutting out all the large trunks can give the shrubs an additional break. It'll discourage insects called **lilac borers** that are almost certainly there and have been **gaining the upper hand** as the shrubs become woodier. (See *Lilac Borer: Better to prune than to spray*.)

Large diameter wood is susceptible to lilac borers -- this big trunk is an example. Use a saw to cut out such wood -- right to ground level if possible. Then the borers won't find places to live. New suckers will come from the roots.



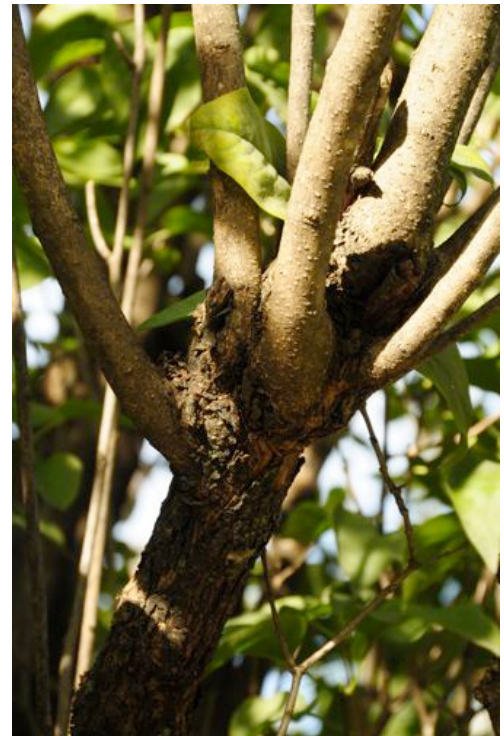
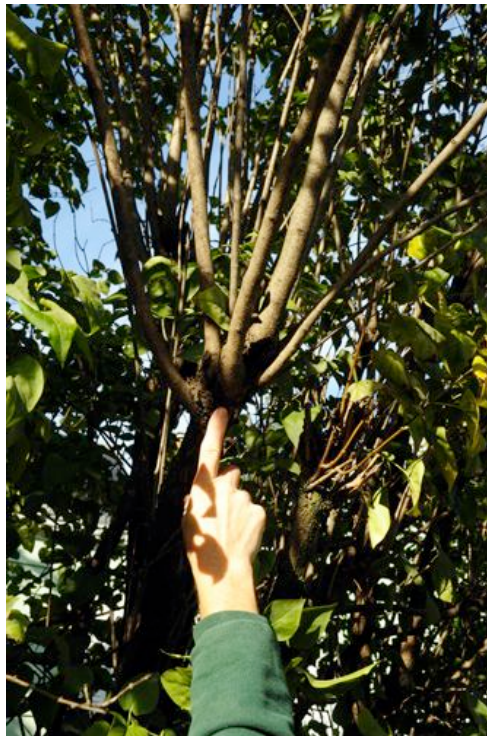
To keep a lilac lively, cut at least some of its older canes right to the ground each year. Do it in early spring or right after the plant blooms. You can cut several per year or cut all the canes at once. Afterward, keep cutting annually to remove some of the oldest wood. Also thin the suckers -- sprouts from the roots -- if they are crowded (as above). Leave 2 or 3 stout, straight suckers for each trunk removed. With less competition for light those shoots will grow up and branch out quickly.

When we cut back a woody branch, warmth and light stimulate dormant buds under the bark. Shoots erupt from just below the cut. **Sometimes cuts fail to sprout or sprout weakly** because there's **too little light** -- as when fences and overhanging gardens cast shade. Drop crotch cuts may receive plenty of light but if the lower wood was borer-weakened those sprouts may be weak and become deformed.

After you cut the lilacs back, you might **keep the perennial garden cut down** to let light reach the stumps. Just mow the perennials in spring and again after about a month -- a year or even two of this won't kill established perennials.

If you can, **bring light to the stumped-back lilacs in other ways**. You might paint your side of the fence with whitewash, or ask the neighbor if you may cut a few windows into the fence. (Promise to fill the gaps later with decorative lath or plastic mirrors. More on that, if you wish, at another time. Just email to ask!)

We bet the lilacs will sprout from their bases. The challenge will be to **keep new shoots healthy** until they reach the sunnier spaces above the fence. Lay a soaker hose at their feet and let it drip all summer, keep the area weed free, and apply slow release fertilizer in spring and again in fall.



Tried and true on trees, risqué to say: Drop crotch pruning

This is reducing a plant's height or width by cutting back each main branch to just above a respectable-sized side branch.

The chosen side branch becomes the new tip. Select a side branch that's about 1/3 the diameter of the current main limb.

If after the cut the big branch ends in a measly twig, or it's just a stub without any side branch, the cut end will generally produce multiple new shoots. This clutter of new limbs can mar the plant's form. In addition, those branches compete so heavily with each other that they tend to bloom with less vigor than a selected, single limb.

Drop crotch pruning is most useful on plants that maintain their trunk(s) for a lifetime. For lilacs and other shrubs that replace trunks throughout their lifetime, it's better to *renewal prune* -- take out whole trunks a few at a time or even all at once.

For more on drop crotch pruning:

www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/approaches.htm

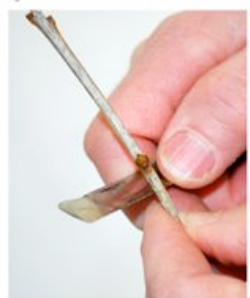
This big lilac branch qualified for removal at ground level via **renewal pruning** -- removing some of the oldest wood every year on fast-growing shrubs. Instead the limb was chopped back to 5'. It generated many shoots from just below the cut. Now those new branches are declining in vigor because the limb that supports them has become decrepit with age and attack by its pests.

If the lilacs don't grow back, or grow only poorly, take that as your ticket out of this struggle to keep a species growing where it can no longer prosper. **Dig out the stumps** (it doesn't have to involve heavy equipment, see "How 'bout we just pop out..." on page #) **or plant around them.**

Make cuttings of special indoor plants that have begun to gain steam in their new growing season. I'm taking a lesson and making notes as I do because this same, simple procedure can be used in June to multiply many fine landscape plants.



On the 1st of March I took cuttings from my rosemary, (left) which grows under lights all winter. It has been pushing out new growth for two months and is now firming up that growth. I cut to have old wood at the bottom of each cutting plus a tip that's new but no longer very soft. I stripped the lower leaves and "stuck" the stripped portion down into moist potting mix plus coarse sand. I closed the stuck cuttings in a terrarium and put them under lights. Now, two weeks later it has grown hefty roots (right).



Just as simply, my young friend Cody took dormant "hardwood" cuttings of a special lilac and pulled off their lower buds to make a wound. He peeled a bit of the bark at each cutting's base to expose the moist, green cambium, then stuck those cuttings and tented their pot with clear plastic. After two weeks with the pot's bottom kept warm, the cuttings' lower ends had callused -- begun to develop new tissue. In a month or two they will have roots of their own.

By then in early June, many outdoor shrubs and trees will have softened becoming firm, ripe for cutting!

Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

No-repeat rule led to CD

We write to help you but also to keep our own minds growing, so we avoid repeat topics on these pages. When you email us a question and we find it revisits past topics, we'll send you an individual answer, or perhaps a back issue. Here, we like to move on.

Those who save back issues can look to issues #32 and #63 for more about cuttings and borers. Also, both issues will be on our next CD of collected work, with a complete index to the topics. *Potting Up Perennials* is that next CD. To order it, see the last page of any issue!

If these are the last remnants of an historic lilac you want to preserve, take cuttings soon. Cut some of the straightest young branches after the leaves fall. Dig a trench a couple inches deep in sandy, well drained soil, lay the branches horizontally there and bury them for the winter. In the spring, take cuttings from those branches, root them and plant them in a sunny place where they can prosper for another 30 or 40 years.

Left: For more on making new shrubs from cuttings, see *What's Coming Up* issue #32.

Below: Issue #63 has more about lilac borer.



The larvae emerge in spring about the time red maples bloom -- exit holes from recent years are visible as neat quarter-inch circles in this lilac trunk; older holes look more like concave belly buttons. As moths they'll mate, then go to lay eggs on trunks an inch in diameter or larger, targeting weak places including those weakened by earlier borer work.

Removing older canes from a lilac each year limits the places where borers can live. Chip or burn what you cut out in fall because any borers in it are old enough to survive even in dead wood, emerge in spring and continue the infestation.

Keep a lilac growing well with regular water, fertilizer and by culling older wood. There, borers can't get ahead and do much damage. Let the plants become stressed from neglect or by poor siting in shade or wet soil, then grow old for lack of renewal pruning, and borers can become numerous. The cumulative damage can be a killer.



There's a pest living inside the lilac trunk pictured on this page -- I looked for it because the lilac had become thin of leaf. (top)

The forebears of current borers made these round exit holes in its bark, impressive hollows within the wood, and if we peeled the bark we'd see scribbly excavations in the cambium, too. Because it can also live on its relative, the ash tree, this insect is called red headed ash borer. It's not the same as the emerald ash borer that's causing widespread loss of ash trees throughout the upper Midwest, but is undesirable nonetheless. Thank goodness that simple pruning, proper irrigation and considerate fertilization are all it takes to give a lilac some immunity. Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Lilac Borer: Better to prune than to spray

Any lilac with trunks over an inch thick almost certainly hosts lilac borer caterpillars.

The **borers are moths** which lay eggs in low and **weak crotches of lilac**. The tiny caterpillars chew into the trunk, graze on the cambium all summer, wait out winter deeper in the wood, chew back out into the open in early spring, become a moth, lay eggs...

As borer damage accumulates the lilac canes weaken.

The leaves become strange (right). They will probably be smaller, maybe puckered along the edges, browning out by late summer. Flowering falls off.

Borers are a fact of life for lilac shrubs. A few are no big deal if the shrub's vigorously growing. For one thing, that shrub won't have many weak spots that borers can use as entry sites. As a cane becomes old, if borers weaken it, the shrub just lets that wood die. It has plenty of new shoots to fill the gap.

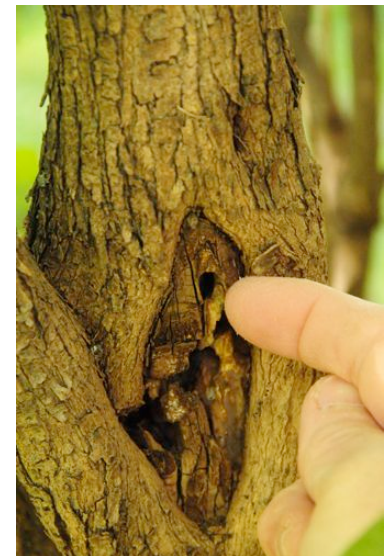


Left: If you doubt that borers are a fact of life for lilacs, check your shrub. We think you'll find spots like these we're pointing at. Where just one or two borers made their way in, the wound may nearly close over, as in the dimple-like lower spot in this photo. Where a crotch is weak and several borers find it or several years' damage accumulates, it's quite noticeable, as in the upper spot.

Below: The hole a borer makes on its way out of the wood in spring is nearly pencil-thick.

Got borers?
Prune regularly to take out the oldest wood.

This renewal pruning puts you on the shrub's side in the growth cycle. At lilac collections in arboreturns this is standard operating procedure: Cut the thickest, oldest wood right out at ground level each year. Allow suckers from the roots to develop to replace it. Borers won't bother those small-caliber limbs because branches



under an inch in diameter don't offer enough substance for the caterpillars. If a lilac's branches are all just 3 - 5 years old, there are none of the big, old limbs borer moths favor for egg laying.

Decline: When a woody plant slides into debt

Leaves turn sunlight into sugar and starch, fueling their own needs and also supplying energy to the plant's wood and roots.

Each year, each leaf makes enough energy that the plant can put a bit aside. In the wood and roots **a surplus accumulates**. It's **used to rebound from unusual losses** such as root damage, leaves lost to a spring freeze or even defoliation by an insect swarm. Large, well established woody plants have ample reserves and are able to operate at a loss for years.

When losses outpace growth the plant starts each year with fewer or smaller leaves than before. With less leaf surface the plant can't meet its energy needs. Reserves run out. The woody portions of the plant **begin to die back**. Limbs die and are shed, or the ends of big limbs fail to leaf out, die and new shoots appear further back.

If the plant can't reach a new balance, the loss continues and becomes **decline**. Decline may go on for centuries if the tree or shrub is well sited. It's rapid if the plant is handicapped by poor growing conditions, numerous pests, or heavy and recurring losses to storms and pruning.

Decline caught early is relatively simple to correct. Attentive watering, fertilizing, soil improvement and pest management help the plant to make and keep more leaves and reserve more energy.

Decline that's **well underway is tougher to arrest**. To the restorative strategies mentioned above, we might add pruning out the weakest wood or even pollarding and stumping back. Pollarding is cutting main limbs back to the trunk. Stumping back is cutting trunks or canes to the ground. In either case, when dormant buds sprout from under the bark or at the trunk base, each leaf will have less wood to support as the plant bounces back.



The thing about decline is that it's more certain than our memory. Plants age at a steady rate and their pests build up gradually. Meanwhile, we lose track of how long it's been since we planted this or tended that. Thus we feel the plant "suddenly" got bad and are surprised at how much effort it takes to turn the situation around. In this issue on pages 1 and 2 the reader's question includes phrases that prove this point. Do you recognize yourself in these statements? "The decline began several years ago...", "A few years ago I began pruning..." and "I have since planted..."

Take these all together and see how they add up to more than the few years the gardener imagines -- enough for decline to set in.

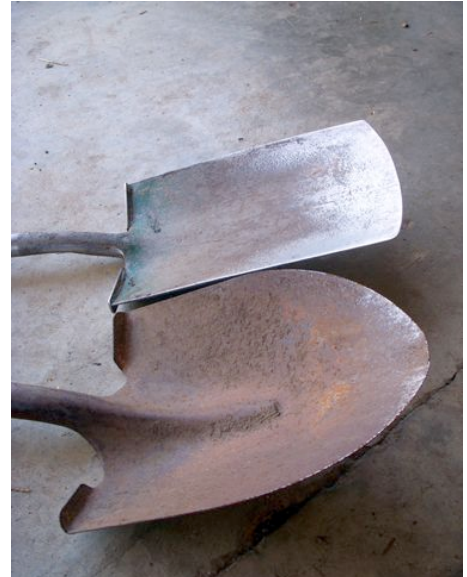
This lilac hedge was treated with one-cut renewal pruning about ten years ago. That's cutting the whole plant down to stubs rather than removing about one-third of its canes each year. It made a good comeback but now it's showing signs of trouble. Chances are that the gardener won't notice the cupped, early-browning leaves (this lilac's leaves appear on page 5), smaller blooms and decreased density, and so won't think to do any renewal pruning until there is significant dieback. At that point the plants will make a slower comeback.

How 'bout we just pop out that shrub?

If you've removed shrubs before "just pop out" may not figure in your vocabulary. It's work! Yet, it doesn't have to be so hard as some say it is.

- 1) Use saw or loppers to cut off all limbs except one or two sturdy, central canes. They will serve later as a lever.
- 2) Use a spade to slice straight down in a circle all around the base. If you can't cut through the roots with your spade, move out until you're cutting smaller roots.

A shovel (foreground in this photo) has a pointed tip, so it's great for penetrating and lifting soil. Yet it's little help in digging out shrubs, since its tip is designed to slide around obstacles s-- in this case, the roots. Use a spade, instead (background in this photo). A spade has a sharp, rectangular blade which *does* cut roots. Whichever digging tool you use -- wear boots.

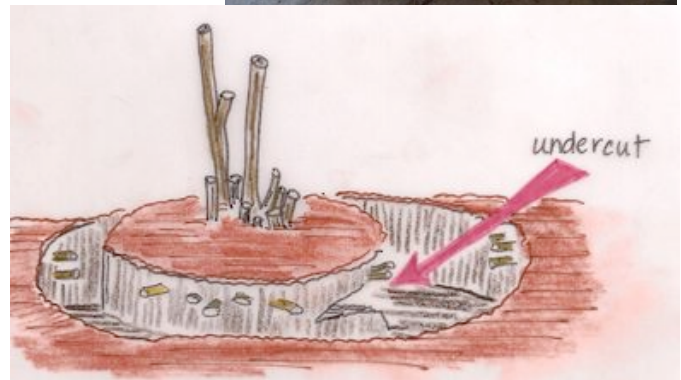


If the roots are very large, use a trowel to clear soil away from their sides and then use an ax, saw or loppers to cut a section from each one.

- 3) Cut again, making a larger ring around the plant. Remove the soil between the two cuts to make a trench.

- 4) Now undercut the root mass by slicing in and down from within the trench.

- 5) Lean on the trunk/lever. If the shrub wiggles*, tip it and undercut further with spade, loppers, ax or saw. Roll the stump out and away.



- 6) If there is no wiggle, loosen a wedge of root and soil by cutting radially through the roots toward the trunk(s), as if you're slicing a piece of pie. Remove that section, then undercut from there where you are closer to the center of the root zone.

*If you choose to use a vehicle to help you pull out shrubs, you might do so at this point. Use a chain or cable attached to a towing hitch that's mounted on the vehicle's frame. Don't pull with a hitch attached to a bumper -- we've seen cars lose a bumper this way. Then clear the area of helpers and spectators so no one will be lashed by a snapped cable or hit by hurtling shrubs, soil and debris. Move everyone well outside the circle for which the hitch is center point and the cable is radius. Then pull slowly and steadily to tip the plant. Ease off once the plant tips, letting the cable go slack, then cut remaining roots and pull slowly again. Do not pull with a vehicle resting on lawn unless you plan to renovate that lawn afterward.

Lilac: The everybush stand-in

Lilacs are not only very common but have sentimental attachment for many people. That may be why we receive more questions about lilacs than other bushes.

However, if you have a spirea, forsythia, viburnum, redbud dogwood or privet in trouble like this issue's lilac, know this: Everything we wrote here about lilac decline and renewal applies to just about every other deciduous shrub. They all decline when conditions change and can benefit from renewal pruning. Although only the lilac has lilac borer problems, every other plant has its own pest that can complicate its recovery.

Hedges in a shaded yard

When nearby trees grow or new buildings and fences change a sunny lot line into a shaded spot, it's time to make a new hedge of plants able to grow well in shade. If you view the area year-round, look for plants that have evergreen@ or persistent# foliage. Here are some we use:

Beech# (American *Fagus grandifolia* or European *F. sylvatica*) hardy to zone 4

Euonymus@ (*E. fortunei*) zone 5

Leatherleaf viburnum# (*V. x rhytidophylloides*) zone 5

Oregon grapeholly@ (*Mahonia aquifolium*) zone 5

Yew@ (*Taxus* varieties) zone 4

Readying to rake? Suggestions from shredders.

Recently some of you raised questions about **leaf shredding equipment**. What works best? What kind of shredder should a person buy, who wants to use all of Nature's fall bounty?

We asked for your input. Here's a summary of **your advice**. Thanks!

I had a Gardener's Supply shredder that was basically **a big weed whip thing**. It worked well on dry leaves, it was **fun to use** and I had room to store it in our garage. It didn't work well on wet leaves (clogged up) or twigs.

We let our shredder go because even though it was great to chop up sticks as well as leaves, it was a big machine used only once or twice a year, that **took up storage room!**

If you're a **serious shredder**, get a machine with **6 or 8 horsepower**, something that can chip branches 2 or 3 inches in diameter. It won't bog down with wet leaves.



We liked our Mighty Mac 8hp chipper shredder. It worked! We sold it when we moved out of that house, and we miss it. (Above, that old favorite model.) We bought a different model later, and really liked that you could set the hopper to horizontal, just lay it on the ground. Now we don't have to lift stuff to the hopper but can **just rake right into it**.

If you have a **chipper-shredder**, put it on the lawn when you run it. If it sets on pavement while it runs, it will rattle itself into the repair shop.

Get an electric start, if you get a chipper shredder. We had one with a pull cord for years and when we got a new one that started with the push of a button it was heaven!

Our leaf blower is also a **leaf vacuum**. It sucks up the leaves, shreds them and sends them into a collection bag. It's **not for big volume** but if we vacuum every day or two as leaves fall, it's great.

My neighbor dumps leaves in a **metal garbage can**, sticks in her **weed whip to chop them**, then dumps them out as mulch. Makes a heck of a racket but as long as the leaves are dry, it works, and no extra tool required.

We bought one of those electric shredders that sits on stilts or you can put it right over an open garbage can, and put leaves in it. It was **worthless, unless the leaves were really dry**. Even then you have to feed them in such tiny bits you can be there forever.



In our town we can rake leaves to the edge of the road, then the city comes and vacuums them up. I don't rake mine to the road, I use them. But I sometimes use my neighbors' leaves a few days after they rake them out. The **cars driving over the piles** crunches them all up.



Why get a separate machine? **Just mow them**. You can even leave them on the lawn after you run the mower over them!

I used to shred the leaves. Now I **just use whole leaves**. Janet told us whole leaves would work and she was right, they do break down and the gardens love them.



Steven and Janet: We sometimes shred leaves in fall. (Top, raking at a neighbor's, and our 8 hp chipper/shredder.) We might also shred cut-down healthy perennials (middle) and use them as mulch. But we found that once our soil became alive with microorganisms and worms, even when we used whole leaves several inches deep, they would decompose by spring (bottom). So now we let Nature shred for us!

Faces red like the burning bush: Introducing the Invasiveness Alert

Betty of the Massachusetts Master Gardeners reminded us to have a care, when recently we included **burning bush** (*Euonymus alatus*) in an article about using shrubs as small trees.

Burning bush, a shrub from northeastern Asia, has been a mainstay of the planted landscape in North America for well over a century. However, it's also **escaped into natural areas** in the Eastern U.S. and in Ontario. In Massachusetts, sale of this **invasive species** has been banned. (Existing burning bushes there may remain and can be pruned into trees as we described.)

We're usually aware of plant species that have taken a turn to the dark side in our own area. However, **we sometimes forget** which plants we use without concern have become nuisances or threats elsewhere, where they have some edge they lack in our region. For instance, butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) and saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*) have been pretty tame in

Invasiveness alert: Burning bush

In some environments, including Massachusetts, *Euonymus alatus* (**burning bush**) is able to naturalize and expand into wild areas to the detriment of native plants. If your garden is situated so that seeds of this plant can move into or be carried by animals into natural areas, please think twice about planting it.

Alternative species

Euonymus alatus (burning bush) does have fine qualities such as good form and fall color. To have those features without the invasiveness, look into our native North American wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpureus*).

Besides the fun of having a "wahoo" in your garden, you'd have great purple-red fall color and nice form -- it's actually a small tree, 15 to 25', but amenable to being kept pruned as a shrub. You'd also have beautiful red seed pods in late fall (left).

It's native from the Atlantic coast north to Ontario and west to the Dakotas and Texas. Hardy to zones 3 - 7. Wahoo's available to home gardeners from places such as Forestfarm (www.forestfarm.com) and to garden centers from wholesalers such as Klyn nursery.



Michigan. We say that based on 25 years' use in varied sites and having checked with botanical garden horticulturists hereabouts. Yet butterfly bush is a demon in dry places with long growing seasons, while saltcedar has been crowding natives from seasonal floodplains in the desert Southwest.

It's good to know a plant's potential, since things can change. The callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) known as 'Bradford' is an example. Millions of these trees were planted, starting about 40 years ago as we replaced blighted American elms. Decades later, when additional clones of the callery pear began to be planted in the American landscape, we learned that Bradford's good behavior rested in large part on its only-ness. Once it could cross-pollinate with genetically different members of its species, it began to produce fertile fruit. Then it suddenly became a serious weed in many places in the U.S.

That leads to **the tough question of what to do about existing plants** once we've learned a species is invasive. Sometimes our investment in a plant is so great, even those who crusade against other invasive plants fall silent. Norway maples (*Acer platanoides*) are a case in point. It's well known that they are wicked usurpers of woodlands, yet they're also critical parts of the urban landscape by virtue of age, number and ability to survive in tough places.

We've decided to address such variable bad guys by using a flag of invasiveness. When we see we're mentioning a plant that's okay for some but bad for others, **we'll flag it**, as on the previous page, and also **suggest tamer alternatives**.

Our thanks to Betty! Now, this request to all of you: Be sure to let us know if you see where we should have but failed to use it.

This week in Janet's garden

Grow with me! This week:

We plant bulbs -- we have hundreds of bulbs waiting to go into the ground, all crying, "Set us free to root into the moist fall soil!"

In most cases we plant big bulbs with a spade, 3 and 4 at a time (top, right) into holes 6" x 6" x 10" deep (right). Often, we move the covering perennials right out of the way, plant the bulbs, then re-plant the perennials.

We add fertilizer only if a soil test or our own assessment of plant growth in the area tells us we have a deficit. If it's needed we mix in a slow release organic material as we backfill the planting hole.

Right: We set bulbs about 10" deep -- just deeper than the spade blade, so we won't damage the bulbs in future years as we work in the bed. I have my spade in the hole to show its depth but Steven points out I've made such a mess with all the loose soil that it's hard to distinguish details. So we've outlined in orange the 10" deep square I dug and "arrowed" the bulb in!

Dig out cannas, amaryllis, dahlias and other tender plants* we intend to save. Time to let them dry a bit and shed their soil before we clean them up for storage in cool back rooms and closets.

*It is not necessary to wait to dig until after tender plants are killed back by frost. Refer to Issue #113.



Green thumbs up to looking for the collar on a branch, to know where we can cut with least damage to the tree.



The arrows mark the branch bark collar on this Japanese maple branch. With your net cut, without nicking the collar, remove all that stub. Then the cambium of the larger branch or trunk will grow quickly from the collar to cover the gap.

Green thumbs down to flocks of starlings. They're everywhere in fall, says C.N., so thick in the trees around his home that he can't hear anything except their calls. "And the *sound* of bird poop raining down! I have to be under an umbrella to get to my car!"

We extend this week's thumbs down to Man's failure to learn when it comes to **introducing species to new lands.**

Starlings were introduced before 1900 into the U.S. by Europeans longing for the sounds of home (including one who, it's said, aimed to populate New York City's Central Park with all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's works). Today, starlings flock in groups of a thousand or more in many city areas, coming to roost each night in a favorite tree. In agricultural areas they can wreak great havoc at harvest time, coming in flocks of tens of thousands.

Starlings were introduced in the U.S. in the last half of the 1800's. It seems we had not learned from what was already history in the U.S., the Caribbean, New Zealand and other "new lands":

Mongoose, introduced during the 1800's on **Caribbean** islands to control snakes and rodents, inflicted irreparable damage by eating eggs of ground nesting birds.

Norway maple trees are tolerant of air pollution and so were heavily planted in the smoggy, sulfur ridden U.S. cities of the early 1800's. By 1900 this European interloper was listed in many areas of the U.S. as having escaped into natural areas. Today the species is a serious **threat to the North American forest** environment. With their dense shade, shallow roots, chemical exudates and prolific seeding, they crowd out indigenous trees and understory plants, too.

When **possums** were introduced in **New Zealand** in 1837 to start a fur industry, they naturalized rapidly and caused much destruction in garden, farm and forest. Although 20 million a year were killed during the height of the fur trade, and many more were killed by farmers and gardeners, they remain entrenched today.

Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

A professional gardener and educator since 1984, Janet Macunovich has been operating for twice that many years as "**Practical Patty**," a title bestowed by her Aunt Melrose. She's helped many people improve their gardens and their lives by sharing her experience and knowledge in understandable terms and practical tactics. When not writing this newsletter she's designing, planting and tending gardens through her business, Perennial Favorites.

Right: To those who've written to say, "Do you ever sleep, Janet?!" Be assured, she does. And occasionally, she takes time off, too. Here, with black labs Kolme and Kiyo all enjoying the moment.

Below: Steven's good at doing two things at once. (As when he was steering the boat and focusing his camera on "his girls" at right.)



The guy with the dirty camera. Professional gardener and horticultural photographer Steven Nikkila is often on both ends of a "shoot" -- doing the garden work as well as capturing it for the enlightenment and enjoyment of others. He says a camera's worst enemies are water, sand and the camera owner. Like almost everything he includes in his photos, publications and gardens, that is based on personal experience. When you see his shots of gardens and gardeners at work, and hear his explanations how-to, keep in mind that he was peeling off gloves -- or muddying the camera! -- between every shot. Nikkila feels that, "doing the work myself that I describe in my articles and photos makes me better at teaching, writing and photography. Yet even after 20 years of doing this, I'm still lousy when it comes to keeping cameras clean!"

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

Where to catch Janet and Steven in-person:

Tuesdays, October 26 and November 2, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. Janet continues sessions for those who are working on their own *Basic Landscape Design*.

In *Basic Landscape Design: Choosing plants and materials* on **October 26**, take a virtual tour of landscape plants and materials. Learn to turn a wish list into a shopping list, recognize the best buy and choose the healthiest plants.

In *Basic Landscape Design: Making it real* on **November 2**, dig into the nitty gritty of doing groundwork and planting so that what you do adds up to a landscape that looks great now and also ten years from now.

All at Four Seasons Garden Center in **Oak Park, Michigan**, 14471 West Eleven Mile Road, between Greenfield Road and Coolidge Road. No registration required. Satisfaction guaranteed: Pay as you leave! \$20 per session or \$45 for the series. Cash or check payable to Janet Macunovich.



Monday, October 25, 6:00 p.m. Steven helps you achieve more *Winter Interest in the Garden*. At **MSU Tollgate Farm Education Center**, on Meadowbrook Road just north of 12 Mile Road in **Novi, Michigan**. This class is supported by Michigan State University Extension. No advance registration required. Satisfaction guaranteed: Pay as you leave! \$20, cash or check payable to Steven Nikkila.

Thursday, November 4, 7:00 p.m. The Grand Valley Daylily Society hosts Janet as she describes great *Landscape Ideas: 50 Favorite Before-Afters*. At the Boy Scouts of America building, 3213 Walker Ave., **Grand Rapids** Free. No registration required. More at <http://grandvalleydaylily.org/mainpage.html>

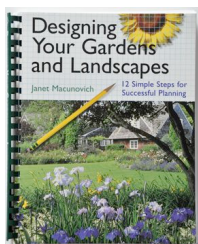
Thursday evening, November 11, 6:30 p.m. Steven is in Milford, Michigan, courtesy of the

Milford Garden Club. He'll discuss ways to improve the landscape in *Landscape Ideas: 50 Favorite Before-Afters*. At the Milford Presbyterian Church, 238 North Main Street in **Milford, Michigan**. Free. No advance registration required.

Saturday, November 13, Janet helps you put more *Winter Interest in the Garden*, at **Olbrich Botanical Gardens** in **Madison, Wisconsin**. For more information, contact the gardens' office at 608-246-4550 or copy this URL to your browser bar to read about classes and download a registration form: www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm#workshops



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