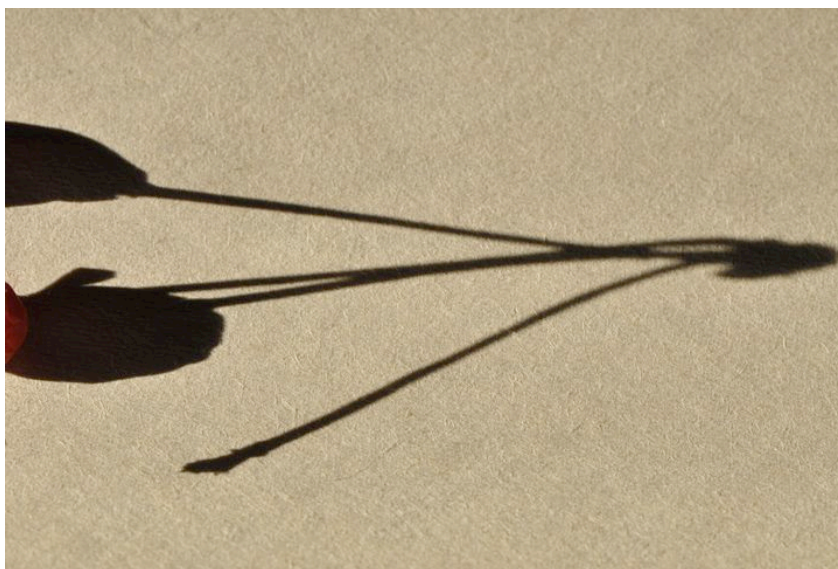


## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns  
Issue #167, December 14, 2011

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Above: Foreshadowing of *two* topics in this issue.  
Can you name that outline? See pages 8 and 9.

### Red twig clips might leave dead stubs

Can I prune red twig dogwood now? I'd like to if it won't hurt the plants. - J. -

You can. We do -- especially if we need the branches for decorations!

If they're growing wild or planted in the kind of always-moist place where they're native, the wet soil may have retained enough heat that the plant's stem bases are not yet hardened off. If you cut a woody plant when it is not hardened off, it's likely to die back beyond your cut, so you'll find a dieback stub next spring, with new growth coming from lower down. That stub can clutter the look and get in the way of your next pruning, plus it's a weak point where stem canker fungus can get started, weakening the new growth.

You can't tell by looking if a plant has hardened off, but if the ground is still quite soft, it's a possibility winter has not wrapped its arms around that shrub yet.



Keep a dogwood colorful: take out old canes.  
(Arrow; wood going gray, developing bark.)  
Cut them off annually at ground level.



If there's hard pruning on the docket, involving severe cuts, we usually schedule it in January and February thaws, when we know that all the hardy plants are at their hardiest. Or we wait until very late winter or the first days of spring.



Left: Here's a redtwig dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera* 'Cardinal') and a yellowtwig (*C. s.* 'Flaviramea'). We're pruning them to take out the oldest wood so there will be lots of the newest, most brightly colored canes again this year. We cut as low as we can, so the new canes come from way down and we avoid a stub-build up over years. We generally do this cutting in late winter or very early spring. (See Issue #34 for more. \*)

Below: After the cut, thicker, older canes are gone, and there's lots of room for new canes to grow.

### \*Looking for back issues?

If you've lost one, or weren't on board 'back when', you can:

- 1) Send us an email. We can re-send an issue or two. (Just be patient with us.) Or,
- 2) Ask a friend who reads *What's Up* to relay a copy. Or,
- 3) Order our CDs: see page 16 or the last page of any issue.
- 4) Many will be on our website. More on that soon!

### \*About our CDs

- Our first, *Asking about Asters*, presents 6 years of weekly Q&A articles, including issues 1-22 of *What's Coming Up*.
- The second CD, *Potting Up Perennials*, has issues #23 - 122 - that's more than 1,700 pages and 2,400 images.
- Each CD includes an index that covers everything on the disk and in our newsletters. It lets you search our whole collection for any detail.
- There's more. We added 70 of Steven's most beautiful images on *Potting Up Perennials*, in a ready to play screensaver. Order the CDs to have us all in one place, fully indexed.

**Your order also helps keep this free newsletter in production. To order, see page 16.**



## Christmas tree's been inside too long already

We wrote about live holiday trees in issue #166:

"...Bring the tree in for just a few days; a week, tops..."

We purchased an Alberta Dwarf Christmas tree to have inside and then plant outside since none of the kids are coming home this year and I need a little Christmas. Our problem is we

have had the tree in the house for exactly 1 week already and have been watering it. It sits by a door wall window. We want to plant it outdoors right after New Years but according to your good advice, we should have a hole ready for it and then surround it with soil. What do we need to do to make this tree survive this plan to transplant it after 3-4 weeks of indoor exposure? - M.C. -

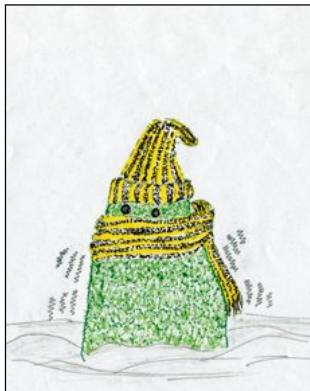
Tough question. After 3-4 weeks it may be so "awake" that it'll be budding out, and that's 'way past the stage when it can regain its hardiness. But who knows?! Nature's amazing, and you should enjoy your holiday decor.

So keep the tree as cold as you can and in good light. Then as soon as you're done with it, put it into an unheated garage or a shed, rather than outdoors. Check it every few weeks to put water, snow or ice on the soil surface if it's dry, which you'll know if the pot becomes very light. Plant it in spring.

Or, if you have a hole dug for it outdoors, go ahead and plant it. Then up-end a big plastic garbage can over it, one that's at least a few inches wider and taller than the tree. Set a cinder block or other significant weight on the can so it won't blow off.

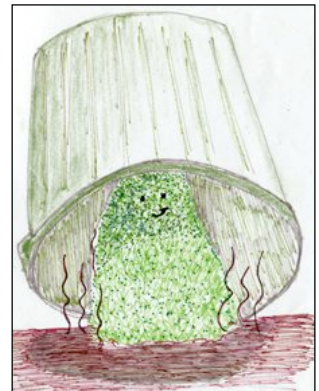
Or pound some stakes in all around the tree, ring those with chicken wire, and fill that with fluffy leaves or pine needles all around and right over the top of the tree.

Either way should trap ground-warmed air around the tree, and could be enough to bring it through. Leave the protection there until mid-April.



Plants are *not* like people. Wrapping alone is useless. A plant has no way to generate heat. No warm blood. No shivering reflex.

To keep a plant warm, cover it with room to spare. That traps a pocket of the warm air coming from the ground -- heat escapes from the Earth all year, rising readily through loose garden soil.



#### Did you know:

Many plants are more **vulnerable to cold in late winter and early spring**, than during winter's coldest days?

Plants gradually harden off during fall and early winter, and are unperturbed by cold, even sub-zero temperatures up to their species' hardiness limit. Once a plant begins to soften its tissues as days lengthen, however, it lacks cues and time to harden off. If a late winter Arctic blast comes through, that's when it may need extra protection.

### Aiming for Answers: Ouch, two misses in a row!

There are no sure bets in dealing with living things, but every situation we face helps us learn more possibilities -- especially when we share with each other what we've observed. So we're always glad to hear whether you used our suggestions, and what happened next.

First, a miss on jade winter care:



My crown of thorns, stapelias and the largest jade plant stayed out all summer, through all that rain, and prospered like never before. Never saw them looking so good. It's always going to be hard to convince me now that they can easily be overwatered except in winter.

(You wrote) about someone who **overwinters a jade in the root cellar**. I have maybe a dozen offspring, little jades with rosettes of leaves, as well as the mom plant. Can I really keep them in a cool, dark place for the next four or five months? Not as cool or dark, I bet, as where I store the elephant-ear bulbs. I'm very curious about this, mostly because it would ease my temptation to care for them too much in the cold months. What's the scoop on this root-cellar thing, especially light and temp? - B.C. -

We inadvertently **mis-led you** when we wrote of our jades in issue #165:

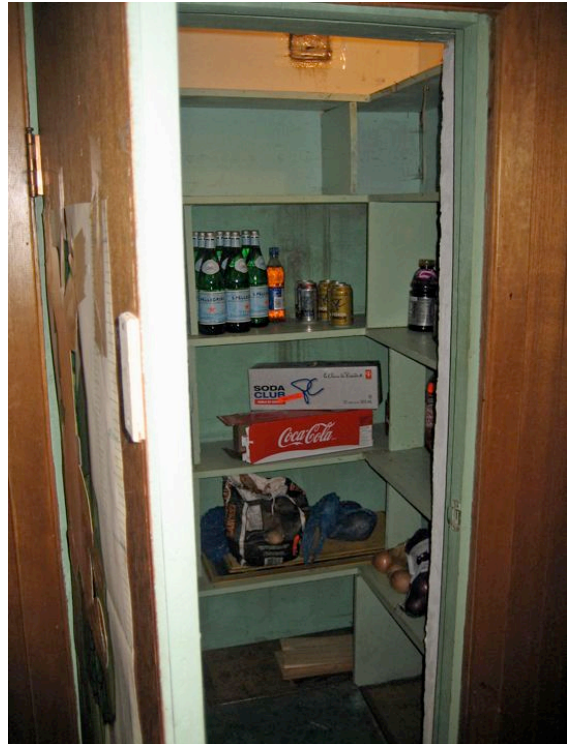
"Those wintering in a friend's dark, cool root cellar will probably go the whole winter without water." Sorry! And thank you for calling it to our attention.

Those jade trees are **in the cellar**, left to their own devices all winter, but regarding light: Our friend does **leave one fluorescent fixture on** down there, 24-7. With that one light for the whole cellar, it's darker than outdoors or a bright room but not pitch dark. It stays about 50-55F. The plants get no water until about March when they seem to be waking up and beginning to grow again.

The **temperature's the key**, and the reason we think most modern basements won't work. Insulated basements that are included in the home heating system are too darned warm. **What works is the old fashioned root cellar** where Aunt Mel or granny would stash bare root geraniums in a box or bag, right next to the onions and carrots.

Right: The root cellar may be a room under a hill, independent of the house. Such storage rooms were common and important before the age of modern refrigeration. Here, the door to such a room in the hill behind an 1800's farm house, Ann Arbor, Michigan. In issue #119 we saw\* the winter storage routine for 3,000 clumps of *Dahlia*. There, at

Dahlia Hill in Midland, Michigan, the root cellar that holds all those beauties is a newer version of this plan. We dream of doing this in our own yard but improvise for now, as in issues #7 and #160 where we dig a deep pit to stash tender things.\*



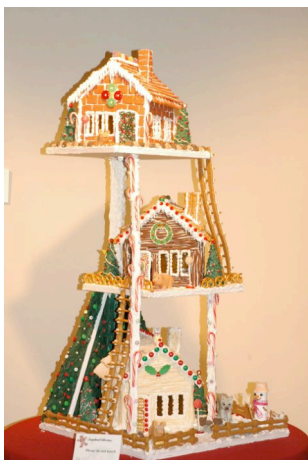
Above: A root cellar: Room or closet you enter through a thick door in the basement wall, which is not heated nor is it under a heated room. This cellar is the basement of the front porch. It's posh, with a concrete floor and shelving. Some are dirt floored. What they all have in common is being cool all year, and relatively moist. Keep your soft drinks and beer there, as if in a spare refrigerator. Root crops, like potatoes and carrots -- or dahlias and cannas -- keep well there along with bunches of herbs, bare root dormant geraniums, and so much more. If you have a root cellar, consider renting shelf space to less fortunate gardeners.

\*Obtaining back issues on page 2.

**In a root cellar** where it's cool and moist -- around 50°F and 50% humidity -- cold forces plants to rest, without dehydrating them. Growth stops, and the plants use little energy. What they need to get by they draw from internal reserves, like an animal in hibernation. With spring warm up, the need for light and water returns.

We're almost certain that someone we knew did indeed simply put the jade in his unheated, dirt floor cellar and close the door until spring. His **geraniums and Brugmansia stayed there, too.** However, he's long gone so we can't verify whether he made any special concession for the jade, like putting it near the one window.

So, we've asked help from C.F., a root cellar owner who turns on the light in that room only when stocking or retrieving canned goods or 'taters. **He'll test a jade** plant in the cellar -- or maybe just a jade branch, since we all know that *Crassula* branches can be revived even after months of lying around on the ground -- close the door, and let us know what's left in March. **Stay tuned.**



## Second, aiming, still missing: What we-all do in December

In a recent email update to those who've supported our website work, we signed off with, "Hoping you're **enjoying a winter respite!**" Two quick replies told us **this was a big miss!**

From someone just checking in to his Southland winter quarters after closing his northern garden:

In the last two weeks having generated about 5 cu yards of pruning yard waste and moving 3 pallets of mulch it doesn't seem that winter respite is a term I can associate with right now. Thank God for the Fiskars pro model pole pruner! - D. -



Does the gardener's focus and energy turn to this in December? (Top, from a Cleveland Botanical Garden show. Snowpeople, Farmington, MI.) Is it the stifled Northern gardener syndrome?

And from a professional gardener and Master Garden volunteer:

I've learned quickly that **'winter' is really not a down time** at all for gardeners! I never realized how much stuff you had to do when you couldn't work the soil. Great time for pruning, plucking, and planning! AND cleaning and sharpening! Thank you both for teaching me... - B.M. -

So here's to all that gardening energy, pent up in the North -- spend it wisely!



## Big mistake, big lesson: Yews don't like wet feet

Since **mistakes are learning experiences**, our biggest blunders could be viewed as great treasures. If only we didn't have to pay the price!

Can we avoid the cost and advance as a group by pooling our bloopers? Let's try. Here's a **worst mistake from one-who-will-remain-anonymous**:

I built a raised bed to make a good garden where the soil was hard packed and poorly drained. By the time I was done planting I was so excited about how many neat things I could grow there, that I kind of forgot why I'd made the raised bed to begin with. When I looked at the finished product I thought, "Now all it needs is a nice border."

I know yew makes a great low hedge, so that's what I planted to outline my masterpiece.

Within a few weeks I saw my mistake. The yews yellowed and failed. They weren't *on* the bed above the wet but right in a gutter, where the water would drain off the berm and pool on top of the poorly drained original soil. I *know yews don't like wet* so why did I plant them in a space bound to be soggy?!

If you have a mistake to share that might spare others some grief, let us know. We won't reveal your identity, just the worthy facts!



Yew (*Taxus* species) are quick to tell of poor drainage. See the yellowing here? It's a classic flag and Poor drainage is the cause.

Like a canary in the coal mine they'll be the first ones to keel over and die when the environment changes. Just as miners can't see the gas that might kill them, we can't see that excess water in the eighteen inch depth where most roots grow. So test for it and plant to suit existing drainage. For more about drainage and how to test for it, check *What's Coming Up* #15.\*

*You don't know the plant until you've killed it. Then you've learned something.*  
- Janet -

\*Need back issues? See page 2.



## This week in our garden

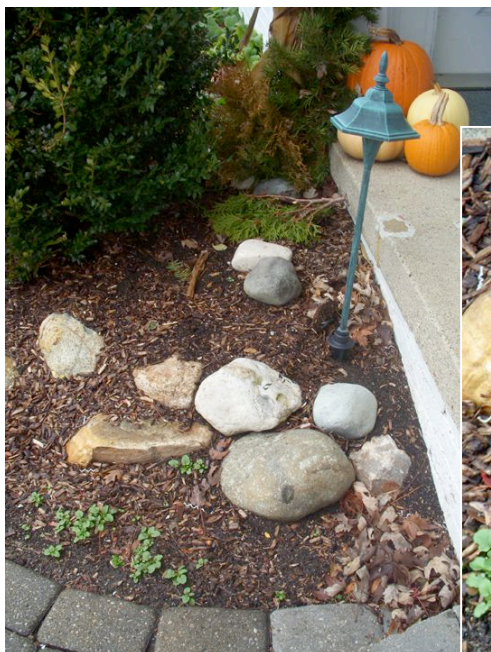
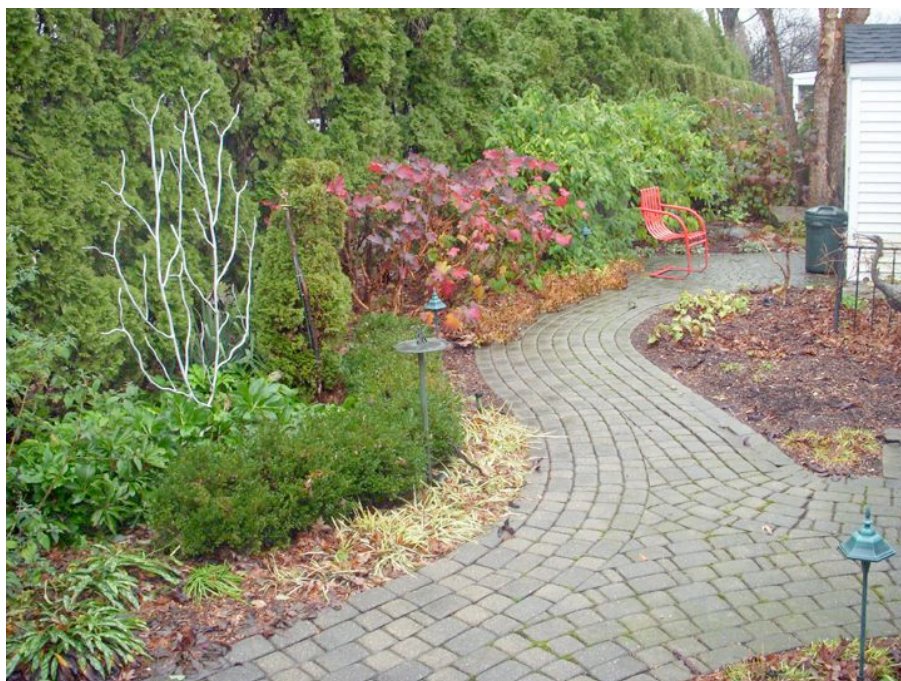
### Grow with us! This week:

Try to **walk and look a little every day**, even when it's gloomy out.

You might think we'd once and for all get over it, yet it's always a revelation to see that there is no hard line between this year and next. Plants keep growing when they can.

We can just admire the garden from the window...

...but just two steps out the door, we can see fresh green worth checking into.



Pansy seedlings! Probably Johnny jump-ups, which may be blooming during a February thaw. Now we know where to look for that sight, which will be so welcome then.



We might even drop an old milk crate over them to protect them from the rabbits, who may graze here before we can see any bloom.



\*\*\*\*\*

**Do a little pruning**, indoors and out. It's so easy now to see what to cut.

There's **a crabapple to be shaped and reduced**. We missed it last week, but there will be time. Time's right on days when temperatures are above freezing, with cloud cover to keep the mercury from diving drastically at dusk.





Indoors, one of our **jade trees** keeps catching our eye. It **has crossing branches** that clutter its form. The clutter also means poor air circulation in its interior. That can allow pests like mealybugs to gain a foothold on a tree already low on defensive energy in winter's dim light. (Of course, we have the ulterior motive of wanting a branch to match C.F.'s in the root cellar trial - page #5.)

*There are three main trunks here (1, 2, 3). Each is growing out and up to fill its own third of the canopy. Except one piece (c) that stems from the forward trunk to cut back across the center. The clipper's jaws are on it. That's unproductive wood, called a crossing branch.*



Crossing wood is **unproductive** because it's zero or a drain in the whole plant's energy production equation. For most of its length it's in the shade of other parts of the tree. It grows no leaves there -- leaves, the fuel producers of a plant. Once out to the other side the sugars created in those leaves will probably all be used up meeting the living needs of the leafless section. The roots and the rest of the plant don't benefit.

As if adding injury to insult, **crossing wood usually causes damage**. In an outdoor environment that branch moves in wind, with the weight of rain and its own increasing foliage. It would rub or tear more important trunks.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Enjoy the low sunlight** whenever it graces us with its presence.

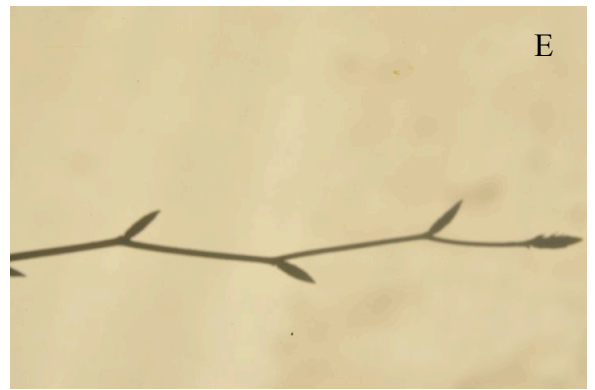
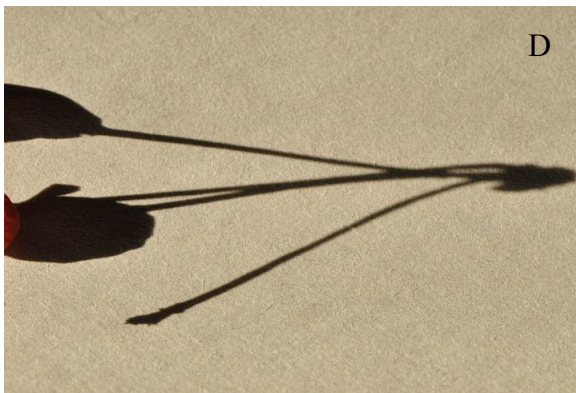
A trembling shadow on the wall caught the cat's attention, and then ours. Rustled up childhood memories, so old they had only images and no words. Perhaps from a time of being put down for a nap under protest, or sent to bed oh-so-early on a summer day. Then, it was entertaining to watch sunbeams, or light from passing headlights come through the trees to play across the bedroom wall.

*"...it is not enough merely to exist," said he, "I need freedom, sunshine, and a little flower for a companion."*

*- From **The Butterfly** by Hans Christian Andersen -*



Plenty of fantastic stories can be woven around **Nature's shadow shapes**. Perhaps you know what cast these shadows. How about what *might* have cast them, in a child's imagination?  
 Answers on page 14



Below, right: We wonder about weeping beeches, especially in winter. "How many little kids have been terrified by those creepy shadows?"

Below, left: So, thinking about what we might say to assure a child frightened by such a shadow, we imagine we may show him how to make his own shadows as a counter-menace.



Gardeners, I think,  
 dream bigger dreams  
 than emperors.  
 - Mary Cantwell -



## The 45mph garden: Feeling crabby as you drive?

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.

Color really pops on December's gray days. Plant breeding during the last 30-some years has given us many new disease resistant **crabapples that hold colorful fruit** long into the fall. Some hold the fruit right through winter. Gardeners embraced the plants for this additional season of interest, and the fruit's attraction to birds. So chances are that you drive past far more of them than those who were on the road in the 1960's.

We think the birds have adapted their habits to the presence of so many feeding stations. Thus we city folk are seeing far more fruit eaters such as cedar waxwings than ever before.

Below: 'Ormiston Roy' crabapple is the 45 mph tree that started this show. Perhaps the color's more subtle in a photo than on the road. Right: 'Prairifire' showing off against the backdrop of a willow, comes closer to conveying the allure.







We love the wide range of crabapple fruit color. This year we've made our best attempt so far to capture it, although it still falls short of conveying the full gold to purple sweep of color, and the luminosity of some. Given hundreds of crabapple varieties, dozens of those with persistent fruit, we may be a long time completing this collage.

A - 'Silver Drift' B - 'Candy Mint' C - 'Prairifire' D - 'Hallsiana Spontanea' E - 'Red Jewel' F - 'Morning Sun' G - 'Sugar Tyme' H - 'Excalibur' I - 'Adams' J - 'Golden Harvest' K - 'Sargent' L - 'Dorothea' M - 'Zumi Winter Gem' N - 'Ormiston Roy' O - 'Prairie Maid' P - 'Tina'



## About the trees that bore that fruit:

### A - 'Silver Drift'

rather persistent in winter; white flowers; good fall color; 20' tall and wide

### B - 'Candy Mint'

fruit very persistent, red; rose flower buds open pink-white, fragrant; 10' tall up to twice as wide (irregular shape, a Sargent seedling); very good disease resistance

### C - 'Prairifire'

fruit somewhat persistent, maroon; rosy-pink flowers; 20' tall, 15' wide; foliage emerges reddish; disease resistant

### D - 'Halliana Spontanea'

fruit somewhat persistent; white flowers; 15' tall and wide; yellow to red or purple fall color;

### E - 'Red Jewel'

very persistent red fruit; white flowers; 18' tall x 12' wide; good disease resistance

### F - 'Morning Sun'

persistent fruit is yellow aging to red-brown; white flowers; 15' tall and wide; disease resistant

### G - 'Sugar Tyme'

prolific and persistent fruit; white flowers; 20' tall x 15' wide

### H - 'Excalibur'

persistent gold-green fruit; red buds open to white flowers; 10' tall x 8' wide; some disease resistance

### I - 'Adams'

very persistent red fruit; pink flowers; good fall color; 20' x 20'; very good disease resistance

### J - 'Golden Harvest'

persistent gold fruit; white flowers; 20' tall x 15' wide; some disease resistance

### K - 'Sargent'

very persistent fruit; irregular spreading form 10' tall and twice as wide; pink buds open to white fragrant flowers; very good disease resistance

### L - 'Dorothea'

persistent gold fruit; red buds open pink; 12' tall x 18' wide; some disease resistance

### M - 'Zumi Winter Gem'

red buds open to white fragrant flowers; disease resistant

### N - 'Ormiston Roy'

fruit orange, sometimes persistent; white flowers; 20' tall and wide; disease resistant

### O - 'Prairie Maid'

persistent red fruit; deep pink flower; purplish foliage; 15' tall and wide

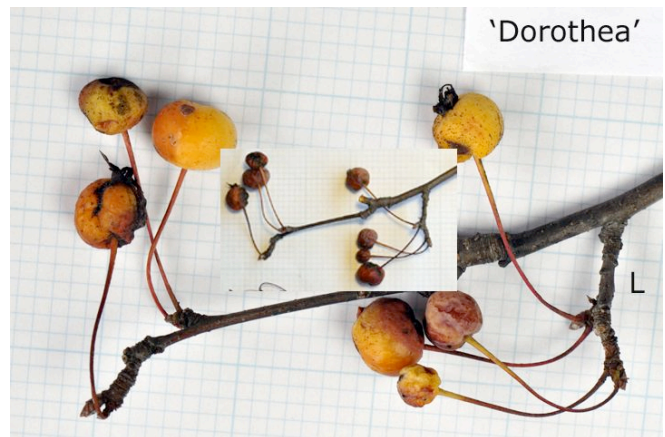
### P - 'Tina'

very persistent fruit; 5' tall and somewhat wider (irregular, a Sargent seedling); pink buds open to white fragrant flowers; very good disease resistance

## Gardener, Photog...

## ...Preservation specialist, too!

Our quest may also require lessons in fruit preservation, in order to compare fairly when days must pass between collecting from one type of tree and tracking down the next. Look at the difference in staying power of the fruit. Several days went by between when we collected and catalogued the fruit, then made the collage; the fruit was refrigerated in the meanwhile, as if it was outdoors. Compare how 'Dorothea' fruits held up, as compared to 'Zumi Winter Gem.'



(Insets: That same fruit, aged the collage on page 11.)



We'll look again in January, when perhaps the only trees in this group still hanging onto their fruit will be 'Adams', and the Sargents ('Candy Mint', 'Sargent' and 'Tina').





'Red Jewel' in the foreground with 'Sugar Tyme' behind to the left, and to the right a Japanese crabapple (*Malus floribunda*). (We've advised you who want privacy to plant *M. floribunda* for its dense twigginess even in winter, but maybe after seeing the real trees you'll choose winter color over privacy.

If you might plant a crabapple in the near future, go now to look at the collection in a local arboretum or botanical garden. IF you like it in early winter, it's a keeper of a crab! Better to choose for fruit, rather than flower color, since bloom is such a brief asset compared to the tree's fruit display.

The trees you see here are in Hidden Lake Gardens, one of Michigan State University's off-campus facilities. Many other parks have fine collections, including: the Arnold Arb in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts; Cornell Plantations in Ithaca, New York; Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, Ohio; Dawes Arboretum in Newark, Ohio; Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois; University of Wisconsin Arboretum in Madison, Wisconsin; Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen, Minnesota; the Bicklehaupt Arboretum in Clinton, Iowa. There are many more - tell us your favorite place to see and compare trees.

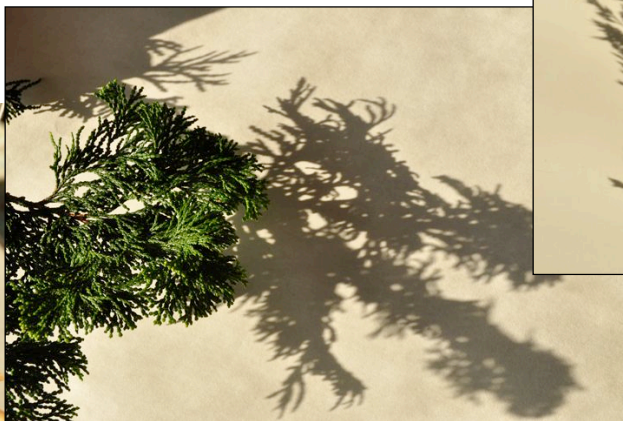
**Green thumbs up** to seeing as the first snow comes like an artist tracing every tree branch, that **the tree you planted this year is in the absolute perfect spot** for year round interest.

**Green thumbs down** to only then seeing that you planted it with a bit of **a lean to the right**.



## Answers: Shadowplay

- A - Korean feather reed grass, *Calamagrostis brachytricha*  
B - Red oak twig (*Quercus rubra*) holding marcescent leaves  
C - Hinoki falsecypress frond, *Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Gracilis'  
D - Crabapple fruit (Argh, don't ask us which variety!)  
E - American beech twig, *Fagus grandifolia*  
F - Fiskars rotating handle Powergear pruners (see page 8!)  
G - Weeping European beech, *Fagus sylvatica pendula*



## 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 a great 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.

Janet's dreaming garden gifts and the mail indicates many of you are, too. Here, with the sculpture turtle she's always wanted.

**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.

Hey, it's Santa's helper Steven, who relays wish lists to Santa from The Village mall of Rochester Hills, Michigan. He also distributes gifts and reads stories to children of all ages at holiday gatherings. He loves this important work as much as gardening. To engage him for your event, call or email 248-681-7850 JMaxGarden@aol.com

**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

**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.



#### **See Santa Steven:**

**At the Rochester Village Mall, Adams Road at University, Rochester Hills, Michigan**

**Sunday, Dec. 18, 2:30 - 6 p.m.**

**Monday, Dec. 19, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

**Tuesday, Dec. 20, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

**Wednesday, Dec. 21, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

**Thursday, Dec. 22, 3 - 7 p.m.**

**Friday, Dec. 23, 10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.**

**Christmas Eve, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.**

If you would like to have Santa Steven make an appearance at your holiday get-together, call or email 248-681-7850 or JMaxGarden@aol.com

**To book us for a talk: 248-681-7850 or JMaxGarden@aol.com**



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