

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns  
Issue 89, April 17, 2010

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Being slow in our garden work gave us this beauty. We should remove wood from our elderberry as it gets thicker than about an inch, since elderberry borer will get into anything larger, weakening and killing the canes. When we fell behind on pruning last year a main trunk died. Still behind this year, we'll wait a while longer to remove that dead piece because a robin's nesting there. This is a perfect example of why neglected gardens attract more wildlife.

### Quick coverage today!

**'Tis a strange Forest that has no rotten Wood in it...**

Benjamin Franklin,  
Poor Richard's Almanack, 1747

This has been a beautiful spring so far but it came so early that we started out behind and are not catching up. Lately, when Steven and I say, "we could use some rain" we don't mean just for the plants' sake. We'd love a chance to catch our breath!

"Short takes" are the order of the day. Photos and notes on the hot topics -- email us if you need more of the why and wherefore of any of the items in this issue.

### **Cool, cruel gardening term of the day: Coming up blind**

Describes a daffodil, tulip or iris that sent up a flower stalk but the bud in that stem failed to develop and open. Often this is related to weather conditions, such as a winter too warm or spring too early. Both can result in a bulb with too little root to complete flower development.

## Many names for good mulch

You or Steven mentioned a bark mulch you like to use. Where can I find it? - A.S. -



When we buy mulch in bulk we generally buy a finely shredded, partially composted bark. Mulch names are not standardized -- a company that processes lumber mill by-products may sell a given product to 50 or 100 different landscape supply companies, each of which might re-name it to fit an established slot on their price list.

The mulch we like for its fine particle size and dark color is called triple shredded hardwood at one of the suppliers we use, premium shredded hardwood at a second, composted woody fines at another, and pine fines at the fourth place. So when we are out of our normal area and need mulch we go look at what's available, ignore the name and choose the one that looks right for the particular job.

These eight mulches are all acceptable to us. Although some are so similar we suspect they come from the same producer, they have different names at the landscape supply yards we frequent.

In the center is our first choice mulch. It's sold as pine bark mulch at one of our suppliers and composted woody fines at another. (We can also find it in bags as "soil conditioner" or "shredded pine bark.") Clockwise around the circle from 1 o'clock are red pine fines blend, hardwood mulch, premium hardwood, processed bark, wood fines, triple shredded bark and double shredded bark.



We avoid mulch with mostly large particles, those consisting primarily of woody chunks, and those made from shredded wooden pallets dyed red, yellow or black. Compare shredded, dyed pallet wood to our preferred mulch that's at bottom right in this picture, above. Our reasons for choosing that mulch over the others are both horticultural and aesthetic. We want mulch to decompose and replenish what a soil loses as we snip, rake and dig during a season. Returning to the soil is something fine bark does more quickly than large, woody particles. In addition, coarse particles and bright colors might be visually pleasing beneath shrubs but can be overpowering in perennial gardens.



### Why mulch makes sense

Mulch suppresses weeds by blocking light that would allow weed seeds to sprout. It also renews the earth as soil organisms break it down and mix it in as lignin and humus. It saves water by keeping rain from running off before it can soak in and also slows the rate of evaporation on hot days. It also moderates soil temperature, which encourages root growth.

### Light, quick draining soil for raised bed

I've decided to put in a raised bed to grow tomatoes and peppers... what kind of soil should I put in the bed? - W.R. -

We use what suppliers call "50-50 mix", which they make by mixing screened top soil (the screening removes rocks) and peat or compost in roughly equal amounts. Where compost is available in bulk, some suppliers are mixing it with soil and calling it "planting mix."

As with mulch, we never buy soil by name but go look at it. It should be dark, crumbly and free of rocks and large hard chunks.

If the bed or planter we need to raise or fill is not large, we do sometimes make our own mix with half compost and half sharp sand. Also called coarse sand or builder's sand, it provides anchorage and good drainage and is quarried from such a depth that it is usually seed-free.

### Front row perennials that can take the heat

We have a bed at the zoo that needs better plants for the front edge. Only problem is that the edge is hot pavement. This is a sunny area and we need plants that will look good for a long time because space is too limited for an assortment. - D. -



Catmint (*Nepeta mussinii*) manages heat quite well, even right at the edge of an asphalt road in our front garden. It's about a foot tall in bloom.

Catmint (*Nepeta mussinii*, above), pinks (*Dianthus* species) and big betony (*Stachys micrantha*) come to mind. All are low enough for the front edge, and have attractive foliage. Their flowers



don't rise far above the foliage and so do not scream so loudly for deadheading as flowers with tall stems. The catmint and big betony will bloom a second time if deadheaded after their first, late spring bloom.



One problem you don't mention that plants in that position must handle is foot traffic. No matter how careful people are, a few in every crowd will miss-step. When there are thousands of passersby, that adds up to a heavy pummeling. No plants we know will take that and still look good.

We edge at at-risk beds in public places with something to keep feet from straying. Landscape timbers set in as a short curb can accomplish this if they are set in so that the



top surface is inclined toward the walkway. Those who do step on top of the timber are thus tipped back toward the walk. Short fences work, too. We often weave decorative but very practical wattle fences for this purpose. (You can learn how at the April 24 Garden By Janet on page 8.)

Above: Pinks (*Dianthus* species) are great performers in hot spots, with attractive grassy foliage. Some, such as *D. gratianopolitanus*, are just a few inches high and evergreen. Others, including the long-blooming hybrid *D. allwoodii*, are taller but still generally under 12 inches in bloom.

Big betony (*Stachys micrantha*) forms a neat 8" mound of foliage and produces a heavy crop of lilac, rosy or white flower spikes in June. It will produce additional flowers in less concentrated show throughout summer if kept deadheaded.





## Make more of your favorite *Clematis*

Can clematis be divided? What's the best way to propagate? Thanks! - Ann -

You can divide it but you pretty much have to dig it up to do it. That's simplest to do before it begins growing in spring. Cut it back to nubs, then dig away at least enough soil from around the crown to see where roots begin and how to cut between two canes. If there are multiple canes, that is. Usually over time the plant does develop them, and then they can be cut apart and each come away with their own roots.

Or, sometimes part of a vine will clamber along the ground and develop roots where that stem has been laying on moist soil. In that case that part can be cut loose with its own roots.

Or you can bury a stem to stimulate rooting. Bend it as if it's an arm coming from the main plant. Scrape the outside of its "elbow" and then bury that joint but leave the "hand" out in the sun. Do that in spring and by the second half of summer it'll be rooted.



## The courageous gardener

In tribute to those who are cutting without fear.

Vicki Dursch realized her boxwood had been bullying her, creeping in size each year until they blocked both view and path. This spring she bravely took up hand pruners and loppers, then turned those waist-high bushes (arrow behind Vicki) into knee high stubs (left-side arrow). The bare branches will sprout new growth in a few weeks and be able to produce a deep layer of greenery before reaching their new, lower limit in height and width.

**Green thumbs up** to allowing a young tree to sway in the wind. Movement builds strength. Stake a tree only when it's absolutely necessary to keep it from falling. Then, allow for some movement and remove the stakes as soon as the tree has been in place a year.

**Green thumbs down** to nurseries that still have not come into the new age of planting! We've learned that burlap and wire baskets impede root growth right away and can kill a

tree or shrub years later. It's insidious and its cruel because it can set you back to "go" just when a tree finally has enough size to give you a bit of shade or a shrub has grown to become a significant presence. If you buy a balled-and-burlapped tree or shrub and you're told to leave that wrapping in place when you plant, pay no attention. If someone comes to plant for you, make sure they remove the wire and cut away the burlap as pictured on page 6.





## Plant roots, not burlap

Credible studies and our own experience show that leaving burlap or a wire basket around a root ball is a bad idea. The burlap slows root growth in the critical first year and often remains to block roots for several years. The wire basket does not rust away but remains to girdle roots and, eventually, strangle the trunk. Diehards who refuse to re-examine old directives or even ask questions about current technique simply dig in their heels and predict that removing burlap or wire will cause the root ball to crumble, endangering the roots. Ignore them. Safeguard

your new trees and shrubs by following the lead of thinking gardeners like us who heed the scientific evidence and have been stripping away these encumbrances for well over 20 years with nothing but good results. Simply dig a wide hole, set the plant into it and then remove the wrappings.



Above: Janet's cutting the wire with bolt cutters. To do this you will need to dig a wider planting hole -- which is also a boon to the plant to have that much more loose soil to grow into.

Left: We're removing most of the wire basket. Its bottom can remain in place under the root ball. Very little root growth occurs from the bottom of a ball. the most important roots grow from the sides of the ball near the top.

Right: Cut away the burlap or strip it away from the shoulders of the ball and push it to the bottom of the hole.





## Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

**A gardener who got carried away.** Janet Macunovich has been known to two generations of neighborhood children as "the lady at the flower house, the one with no lawn." Her lifelong interest in plants grew to a passion after she spent the summer of 1973 working in England, where she had the privilege of apprenticing to tenth-generation gardeners in a 300 year old garden. By 1981 the last of the lawn disappeared from her yard just as her hobby -- helping others in their gardens -- grew beyond its bounds into a gardening business. Eventually her talent as a writer and speaker crossed with her experience in the garden to grow on as books (such as "Designing Your Gardens and Landscape" and "Caring for Perennials"), a weekly newspaper column, a radio talk show and a gardening school.



**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 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](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) or call 248-681-7850.

## Where to catch Janet and Steven in-person:

Tuesday, **April 20**: Steven's in **West Branch, MI** at the Forward Conference Center. In this *A Garden Affair: Four Seasons of Gardening* sponsored by the Ogemaw County Master Gardeners, Steven's part is to help you have **Winter Interest in the Garden**. \$45 (\$55 after April 1). For more information contact Lora at [freerl@msu.edu](mailto:freerl@msu.edu) or 989-345-0692 or copy this URL to your browser [msue.msu.edu/portal/default.cfm?pageset\\_id=28398&page\\_id=117780&msue\\_portal\\_id=25643](http://msue.msu.edu/portal/default.cfm?pageset_id=28398&page_id=117780&msue_portal_id=25643)

**Correction:** April 20: The previous listing for **Hartland, Michigan** for this date was our calendar error. Sorry!

Thursday, **April 22, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**, Janet's in **Gladwin, Michigan** where Michigan's middle finger meets the palm. It's time to celebrate Earth Day by explaining **Garden Insights**, that will help you design and renovate gardens. At **Gladwin High School**, 1400 N. Spring Street. Free,

courtesy of Gladwin Area Master Gardeners. For more information call the Gladwin County MSU Extension at 989-426-7741 or 989-246-1450.

Saturday, **April 24, 9:00 a.m. - noon**, *Garden by Janet - Featuring Steven! Bring your gloves and tools.* At the **Detroit Zoo**, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for Steven's hands-on instruction in mulching, weeding, pruning and wattle fence weaving (actually, Steven hands his coach's cap at this session to fellow Adopt-a-Garden volunteer and gifted weaver Phyllis Benner). Doubtless there will be time to shoot some photos, too! To reserve a place in this limited-space session and learn how to join Steven at the zoo, email [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com) by April 20 with the subject line "Help at the zoo."

Saturday, **April 24, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**, Janet's guiding the current candidates for Macomb County **Master Gardener** through *Flower Gardening*. This is everything that can be crammed into a half day about designing, planting and tending a flower garden! In the far northeast corner of the Detroit area at the **Macomb County Extension**. Active Master Gardeners are welcome to join this spring's students if they first contact the Macomb Master Gardener Coordinator to reserve a seat.

Saturday, **April 24**, join Janet or Steven or both in **Macomb, Michigan**. At **2:00 p.m.**, Janet describes quick and magical makeovers in *Cheating in the Garden*. At **3:00 p.m.**, look and learn as Steven describes his favorite *Trees and Shrubs for Small Spaces*. At Ray Wiegand's Nursery, Romeo Plank Road north of 21 Mile Road, in the far northeast part of the Detroit area. Free. Note: This date and these times are correct. Unfortunately, some of Wiegand's Nursery's promotional materials were in error. We will be at Wiegand's only on April 24.

Sunday, **April 25, 1:00 p.m.** in **Plymouth, Michigan**: Janet helps the Plymouth Nursery staff usher in the growing season. On Plymouth Road at Gotfredson Road midway between Detroit and Ann Arbor. Janet's topic, *Plants for Tough Places*, is just one part of an all-day festival of plants and learning. Free.

Monday, **April 26, 6:00 - 9:00 p.m.**

*Shade Gardens*: Plant selection, design, maintenance, being smart as you plant among tree roots, and treating the soil in ways to serve both new plantings and established trees or shrubs. \$40. To register: 937-434-9005 or copy this URL to your browser <http://bit.ly/bde6Zq>

Saturday, **May 1**: Janet's in **Saginaw, Michigan** at Abele Greenhouses to explain her strategy for *Eight Months of Color, Even in Small Spaces* (**10:00 a.m.**) and *Shade Gardening* (**1:00 p.m.**). 3500 Wadsworth Road in the crook of the I-75 / I-675 elbow. \$5 per session or \$8 for both. To register and for more information, call 989-752-5625.

Monday, **May 10, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**, *Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!*. Spring work in this garden in **Wakefield, Massachusetts**, 30 minutes north of Boston, includes training a young wisteria and recalcitrant climbing hydrangea, dividing ornamental grasses, and continuing the development of an alternative lawn. Want to come watch and learn, or learn by doing? Email or call Janet ([JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) or 248-681-7850) to reserve a spot and learn the location. Include your phone number in any message so we can stay in close touch in case of weather-related changes. This is a limited-space workshop.



Friday, May 14, 8:00 - 10:00 a.m., *Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools.* At the **Detroit Zoo**, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for hands-on instruction in garden design, planning and problem diagnosis. To reserve a place in this limited-space session and learn how to join Janet at the zoo, email JMaxGarden@aol.com by May 10 with the subject line "Help at the zoo."

Saturday, May 15, 8:00 a.m. - noon, *Garden by Janet - Featuring Steven! Bring your gloves and tools.* At the **Detroit Zoo**, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for Steven's hands-on instruction in planting, mulching and trouble-shooting. Steven always makes time to shoot some photos, too. To reserve a place in this limited-space session and learn how to join Steven at the zoo, email mstgarden@yahoo.com by May 11 with the subject line "Help at the zoo."

Saturday, May 15, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m., in **Northville, Michigan**, Janet helps **Gardenviews** store celebrate its new "digs." Those are a new address (117 E. Main Street) *plus* new offerings -- the unique, forged spades and forks that Janet's been using for decades and never before been able to buy locally. Janet's topic for the day is *Design Ideas: Favorite Before-After*s. This is a walk through time as well as beautiful spaces to give you ideas, laughs, hopes and consolation in your own gardening efforts Free, but call Gardenviews to reserve a seat, 248-380-8881.

*Another reason to stop in at Gardenview:*



We're pleased to help Gardenviews store in Northville get the word out about some of our favorite tools, the fork and spade Janet's holding. We've been using and recommending these Clarington Forge tools for 30 years because they are well made, beautifully balanced and extremely strong. They may not be for everyone, but they're golden for serious gardeners who treasure ease in digging in hard soil and a fork's utility for weeding and dividing among established perennials. They have not been available locally before.

Gardenviews owners Laurie Jermont and Lou Mascolo (here with Janet) are now arranging to

add the shears and weeding tools we use to their inventory. They already carry Janet's choice in gloves by Women's Work.

We are not representatives of Gardenviews, Clarington Forge, Women's Work or any other company, nor were we paid or enticed to write this. It is simply our message as pleased tool users selfishly trying to be sure a new, local outlet can keep up a good thing.

### Other dates and events coming up:

**May 19:** Janet's in **Detroit, MI** at the Indian Village Men's Garden Club meeting.

**May 22:** Janet's in **Oak Park, MI** at Four Seasons Garden Center along with Pam Palechek

**May 29:** Steven's in **Oak Park, MI** at Four Seasons Garden Center

**June 2:** Janet's in **Birmingham, MI** for a *Garden By Janet* workshop

**June 5:** Janet's at the **Detroit Zoo, MI** for a *Garden by Janet* workshop

**June 26:** Janet & Steven at **Marquette, MI**'s annual Beautification Extravaganza

**And even more**, throughout summer. Details will be posted here soon. If you need information, email JMaxGarden@aol.com.

### About attending *Garden by Janet* sessions:

We're let-me-see, hands-on people. That's how we learn best. From time to time we can offer you that kind of chance to grow -- you visit us where we're working. Generally, there is no charge and we're in one of two kinds of locations:

1) At the **gardens we tend through our business, Perennial Favorites:** Our clients understand our enthusiasm for teaching and some open their gardens to small groups for "how to" sessions.



When the work we're scheduled to do may be of interest to you, we invite you in.

2) In the **Detroit Zoo, Adopt-A-Garden** program where we're 22-year veterans. You can check out this program by coming in as my student on a temporary pass. **To join Janet at the Zoo**, email mstgarden@yahoo.com with the subject line of your email "Help at zoo."

Black swallowtail butterfly caterpillar.

***...there are some notable differences between those of us who started gardening when we were children and our brothers and sisters of the spade who came to the pursuit later in life -- the late bloomers, so to speak. ...They are serious gardeners... as for the rest of us, we started out as children and something of the child remains in us. Gardening may be work but it begins as play -- something spontaneous, with no restrictive rules.***

- Allen Lacy - *The Gardener's Eye and Other Essays*



## Invite Janet or Steven or their expert friends to your 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.



So, we're game for anything from

- 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 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 educational events 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.

## Time to garden your walls...

Steven's decorated many walls with great garden images. He can help you do the same with photos that capture garden beauty and stories you love.

Any of Steven's images from *What's Coming Up*, such as these pumpkins and mums, can be made just for your wall. Or you can describe a flower or type of scene you'd like.

If you have an image in mind, you can describe it, then Steven will assemble a customized photo sampler for you. Email us at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) for details, to request a sampler or to place an order.



There is so much clear detail in these images that they can be enlarged to several feet square and still be crystal clear. So prices depend on your choices in format and size. For example:

An 8 x 10" image matted in an 11 x 14.5" frame  
A 36 x 48' image on museum-grade cloth\*

\$48.00  
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\*Janet's favorite: "I can change our display by just rolling up one photo tapestry and unrolling another."

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### ***Designing Your Gardens and Landscape***

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. 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 this one file.

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### ***Potting Up Perennials CD. New for 2010***

A digital collection of 2009's *What's Coming Up*: 52 issues, over 750 pages with more than 150 articles, 500 images and 250 quick-look lists and reports. Includes a comprehensive index of this collection plus Janet's previously-released digital library, *Asking About Asters*. If you own both *Potting Up Perennials* and *Asking about Asters* you can search all the *What's Coming Up* newsletters plus six years of *Growing Concerns* columns and books from this new index.

Bonus on this CD: Steven Nikkila's Daydream Screen Saver, 74 of his most vivid works from gardens and nature.

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### ***Janet's complete digital library New for 2010***

Set of two CDs: *Asking About Asters* and *Potting Up Perennials*. \$30.00



### ***Janet and Steven give you: Trees. New for 2010\****

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

### ***New for 2010\* 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 2010. Now they're collected in this set for your design library.

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



### ***Janet and Steven give you: Garden Care. New for 2010\****

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 New for 2010\****

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

**\*For a look inside, email [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) with the subject line "Magazine peek."**



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