

**GardenAtoZ.com** presents:

## *What's Up* garden news

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila help you grow  
Issue #179, May 3, 2012

### Warm, friendly site with frosty, pesty news: GardenAtoZ.com

The buzz is all about frost damage, with an increasing hum and whine of insect related questions. There's so much beauty in the gardens during this awesome season. Yet that can be hard to see until we get past the looming concerns. So, with apologies for being heavy on bugs and light on beauty, here's What's Up on GardenAtoZ.com

**About daily news:** Join us any day, any way to share your gardening joys and woes.

*Our computer hosting change is being completed this weekend. The site has been and will continue to be available to you during the work. When we're settled into our new virtual digs next week, we will resume posting new articles on GardenAtoZ.com's What's Up.*

*Meanwhile, the Forum continues unaffected. A wealth of new information and pictures appears there every day. Come see!*

*Plus -- woo hoo! -- our email is back in order so we're back to fielding email questions.*

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/ensemble-weekly-editions/the-latest!/>

### Go to GardenAtoZ.com for

#### Who are Janet & Steven?

Click *About Us* for entertaining answers.

#### Support our efforts

Help the gardening community grow by Sponsoring us, ordering our books and photos, and other good stuff. Click *Market*

#### Where we're appearing

A calendar and details, so you can join us for garden

work and talks. Just click *upcoming schedule* from the Home page, then *for a calendar*

Next: 5/19 Detroit Zoo; 6/12 Hale, MI; 6/14 Belleville, MI;  
6/16 Chicago Botanic Garden



#### In this issue

Touched by frost! What to do now: Pages 2 - 6\*

Staying on top of insects & disease: Pages 7 - 8\*

Safeguarding vegetable beds: Page 9\*


Spots before our eyes: Leaf trouble: Pages 9 - 10\*

From the Forum: Clip an arb: Page 11

Water, wander, willow: Pp. 11 - 12

\*These articles have not yet been posted to GardenAtoZ.com, so read them in this pdf. They will be posted soon on the website.)



 Please try out this link.  
It will be your Master  
Key to our current What's Up  
stories. Today the link leads you  
to Issue 177 stories but beginning  
next week it will take you to  
different news each week -- to the  
most current issue.

## What's coming up this week Top stories of plants and procedures.

### Cold cuts: On the menu all over the continent's east side

My hostas look like frozen lettuce... many of the plants' leaves are brown and damaged. The hydrangeas still have some green, but many of the leaves are brown. Did the buds die in all this and will there be no flowers this year?



Please explain the difference between a 'frost warning' and a 'freeze warning.' This spring just hasn't been a happy time for the gardens. It started so wonderfully so early and last Saturday night the freeze about did everything in.

How do we save what we had? If I cut the hostas back to the ground will they 'reboot?' - D.D. -

I am quite worried about my Japanese Maple - Lace Leaf variety. Last Saturday night we got another frost and it is now very heavily damaged. Compare to my son's prom picture in May '09. Do these trees recover from such damage, will the leaves fall off but continue to live with the entire summer and fall still ahead of us? I have taken such good care of it I would hate to lose it, is there anything I can do? - C.W. -

...bleeding heart and Japanese painted ferns got hit. Cut them back? - M. W. -

Overheard: Garden center staffer on a call

"Yes, it's going to be very cold tonight."

"You can cover them..."

"Now, don't use plastic. That won't help."

"Well, I use old bed sheets."

"No old sheets? Well, I'd take the sheets off my beds. I mean, what are you going to do, these are special plants we're talking about!"

We all knew from the get-go such an early leaf-out meant trouble. We could not expect to go so many weeks without frost. (Leaves have been exposed to cold as much as *six weeks* longer than usual.) We threw blankets over precious plants on cold nights but knew we couldn't protect an entire garden.

Now, after a number of frosty nights (moisture in the air turns into frost on exposed surfaces) and at least two freezes (invasion of a very large, very cold air mass), special plants and commoners alike are showing the effects.



## The face of Jack Frost

We notice and exclaim when our treasures are damaged. This Japanese maple photo says it all: Some plants appear in so many important photos, they become family.



*Above: This photo was taken one May 28. Right: This year, the tree had already hit its May 28 stride on May 1. That was four weeks ahead of schedule and just in time to have all its leaves frozen. They'll drop off over the next few weeks and the tree will push out new shoots from the wood. Photos ©2012 Cathy Warnick*



*Above: Mulberry trunk pushes new growth a month after a freeze killed its buds. It's showing Japanese maples the road to recovery.*

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/the-45mph-garden/45mph-spring-tour/magnolia-plus-frost/>

From the National Weather Service at [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov):

**Frost advisory:** Issued during the growing season when widespread frost formation is expected over an extensive area. Surface temperatures are usually in the mid 30s Fahrenheit.

**Freeze warning:** Issued during the growing season when surface temperatures are expected to drop below freezing over a large area for an extended time, regardless whether or not frost develops.

We act in either case but know damage is more likely from a freeze: more hours at lower temperatures.



Ordinary plants are less often mourned and even overlooked as we assess cold damage. For instance, local mulberries took it on the chin five weeks ago when cold claimed all their flowers and just-budding leaves. Who noticed? All eyes were on the brown-out of the showier magnolias. (See the URL below.)



*Golden barberry is a tough customer but when it was too leafy, too early, cold marred it.*

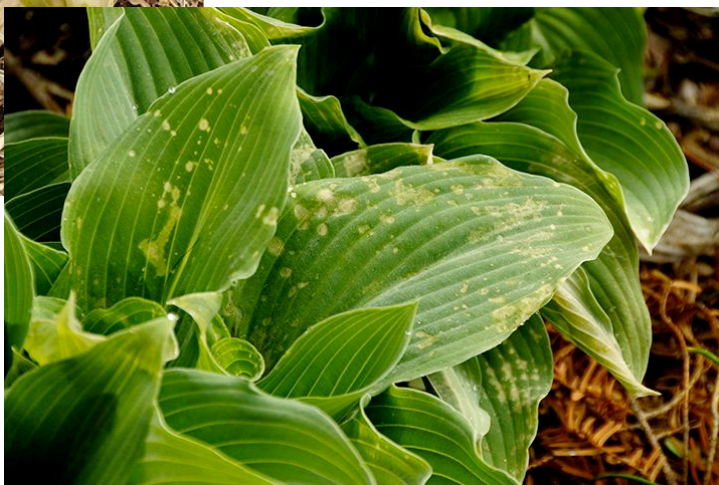


*Below: D.D. described cold-marred hosta as "frozen lettuce." That's spot on. However, there's a sliding scale of cold damage in any plant group or garden. One hosta may lose all above ground foliage (below, the fragrant Hosta plantaginea) while others survive with a few scars (below, right).*



*Dead or damaged foliage can simply be cut away.*

*New growth will come from eyes on the hosta's crown -- unless the freeze penetrated to the crown. Then new growth is also malformed and weak, so we lift the plant, divide to remove damaged portions, and re-set the plant.*







It may seem mystifying when cold touches one plant but not another. Yet there are always explanations when the site and the plants' condition is considered. Overhanging branches can slow the loss of ground warmth and stave off frost formation. Growing in better drained soil can give a plant an edge -- healthier plants tend to be more cold hardy. Enjoy puzzles? Just look around in any garden.

*This bleeding heart lost about 25% of its foliage while another of the same variety just yards away escaped almost unscathed.*

## So, what to do?

Most established plants will recover. The frozen leaves will be shed. New shoots will emerge from the underground crown (perennials) or push out from under the bark. When the new growth appears on affected trees and shrubs, we may see that some woody parts died -- those that had too little stored starch to form new shoots from dormant growing points.

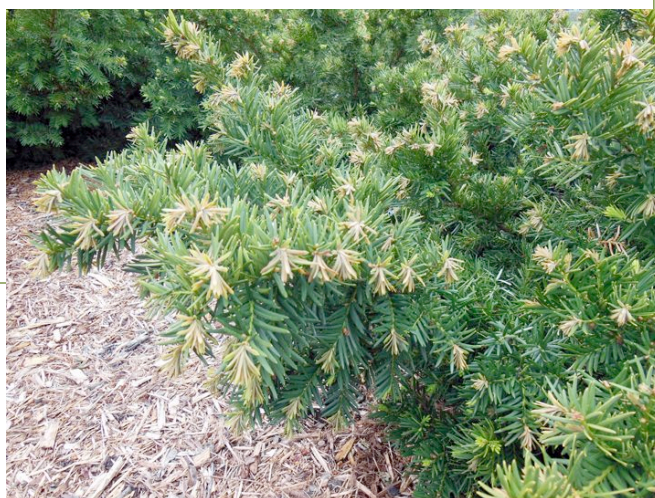
You can cut back herbaceous perennials, and woody plants that we commonly treat like herbaceous perennials -- those such as roses, butterfly bush, etc., that we regularly ask to grow back from nubs. New growth will emerge.

Wait to prune trees and shrubs. When they push out new growth in a few weeks it will be clear what remains live, what's dead, and what's growing weakly or more vigorously. The dead leaves and shoots won't fall off, not like fall leaves do. But they will dry, shrivel and be gone in time. Don't pull off dead parts, which can damage the remainder.

Some recovering plants will be smaller, or thinner this year than usual. Slower-growing species such as hostas may bloom less fully, because they will have to fuel the growth of flower stems from smaller leaves grown from secondary buds, which means less energy.

Mophead and lacecap hydrangeas (*H. macrophylla*, *H. serrata* and their hybrids including 'Nikko Blue' and 'Endless Summer') which bloom primarily from shoots formed last year held inside tip buds through winter, will probably not bloom at all, or bloom very late and without much show.

*Even one of our most adaptable landscape plants lost its most exposed new shoots to the cold: The yew (*Taxus baccata* and its hybrids *T. x media* as well as *T. cuspidata*).*





## A silver lining?

Look for patterns and compare, to take your lessons from what fared well in a bad year.

**Genetics** can play a part in reaction to cold. Make notes this year to help you in future plant selection. For instance, our Forum Moderator, conifer guru and fall color expert Dennis Groh, noticed that most damage in his Japanese-maple-rich garden was to its *Acer palmatum* trees, while there was little to no damage to the fullmoon maples (*A. shirasawanum* and *A. japonicum* cultivars).

*Right: A. palmatum* (orange arrow) and an *A. japonicum* (blue arrow) grow side by side but are worlds apart in their response to spring freeze.



*Left: A long-term Acer palmatum, and one just two years in place. Both have cold damage but the more established plant has more layers of leaves, so inner foliage survived.*



**Established plants can be tougher.** Be careful for the first two or three years after you plant a new tree or shrub. Water regularly and well, consider winter wind barriers, etc. You can rest more easily once the plant has spread its roots wide, resumed the rate of growth it had in its nursery days, and layered the exposed faces of its trunk with extra, denser wood.

**GardenAtoZ.com** presents *What's Up* 179 page 6

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## Beauty persists: Tardiness as a virtue

In a week full of one sad plant loss after another, Steven looked for the bright side. Some of his brightest finds are posted in the Forum in the Photography and Wildlife folders:

<http://forum.gardenatoz.com/index.php?/topic/197-a-loved-garden/>  
and

<http://forum.gardenatoz.com/index.php?/topic/205-wildlife-in-a-garden/>

Here is a star from among those stars: A wooded area in a county park where selective cutting and burning have recently been used to eliminate invasive non-native species. Trillium and mayapple appeared from suppression and dormancy to cover the forest floor. Trillium has also been a model of restraint in this spring filled with precocious growth -- it ignored the warmth and came up on schedule.



## What's going on in Janet & Steven's gardens

### Insect crush follows plant boom, but Ma Nature's got our back

We've heard warnings about insect populations -- that we should prepare to be inundated because a mild winter favors their survival in greater numbers. In addition, we hear, we should throw out any calendar date pest prediction tool in this year when plants are 4 weeks ahead, since insects "read" plant development, not calendars.



*Aphids eating burning bush. Ugh. But read on to see what's eating them!*



Certainly we're **seeing insects appear earlier** than usual: European **pine sawfly** is out on the mugo pines and other pines, three weeks early.

Rose **budworms** have already appeared.

Eastern **tent caterpillars**, camping in fruit tree crotches.

Black bean **aphids** are deforming burning bush and *Viburnum* branch tips.

Black **vine weevil** grubs were ready to pupate by mid-April.

Apple **leaf tiers** are tying away.

Yet we're **seeing more predators**, earlier than usual, too: **Dragonflies** are flying already.

**Hover flies** are apparent in every garden we work.

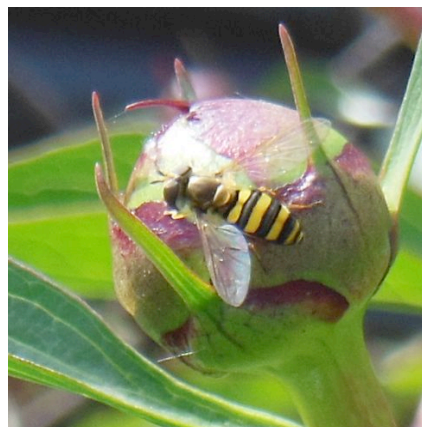
So we're asking you to look closely before you spray insecticides, saying it even more fervently than we usually do. Let the creatures work for you that patrol a garden 24-7.

Look for predators, don't look only for pests. If you see one predator, be assured that there are 29 you don't see, and they're all on the hunt. Don't kill them.

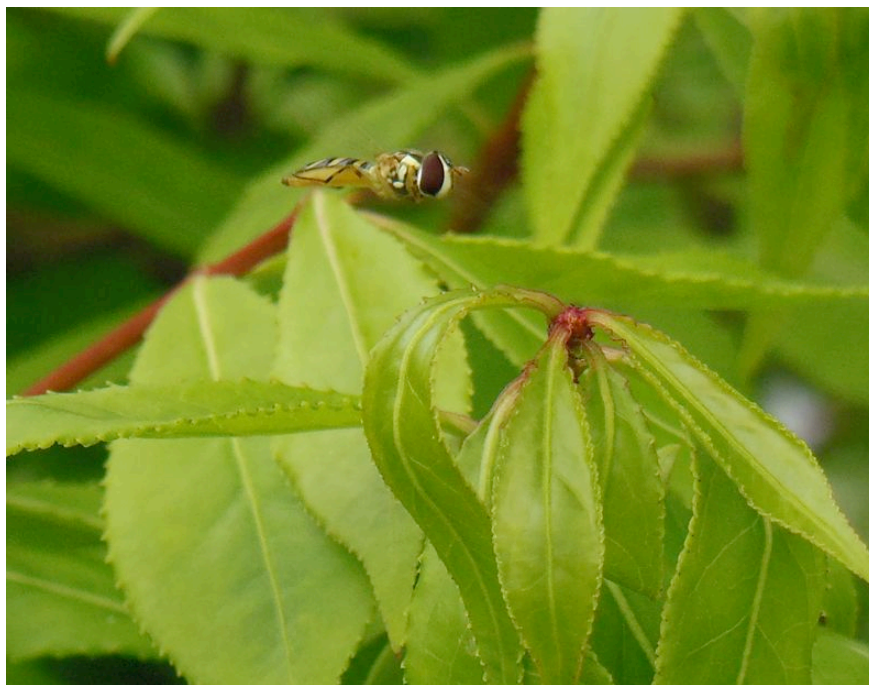
We watched the hover fly below, for instance, laying eggs among the aphids on this burning bush. Eggs that will turn into tiny, slug like, ravenous hoverfly larvae, each of which will consume about 400 aphids over a couple weeks before it pupates.

We're here to tell you, with lots of examples, that there are effective **ways to protect your favorite plants without involving chemical killers**. Please post on the Forum or send us an email to tell us which pests worry you.

*This hover fly might be (stand still a minute, so we can see you more clearly, you wee beastie!) the species called yellow jacket hoverfly, for its resemblance to the aggravating wasp. But in some places in the South it's called the good news bee because it will often hover in front of a person's face to "bring the news." Usually we don't see many of these guys until high summer but they're everywhere already.*



*This bee-pattern insect is a hover fly. There are many hover fly species, all helpful in controlling aphids. They don't bite, they're fun to watch... what more can we ask?*





## Still choosing seed

What fun, but we'd better get it done quick so we can start tomato seed. But there are so many cool kinds of tomato. We're using the Seed Savers Exchange catalog this year.

## Revisiting the cost of a homegrown tomato

Bunnies and groundhogs and bears, oh my! Add in quack grass, because we're trying to safeguard the garden from that, too (*blue arrow*). At this rate we need a truly great harvest, worth an extra several hundred dollars...

*Hardware cloth fencing, small enough mesh to ban the bunnies, with its foot bent outward (white arrow) and buried to dissuade diggers.*

## Spotting sick plants

Not only insects but fungi and bacteria seem to have pulled through winter in force. D's problem below is typical of things we're looking into this week:



Years ago my neighbor gave me some English Ivy that he didn't want any more. I put it under a Skyline Locus and it had been doing very well. However, I have been cutting it back at the garden edge so it doesn't grow into the lawn. This spring the area from the garden edge for about 4 feet into the garden is mostly vine with a few old leaves with brown spots on them. I have been cutting it out and pulling it up. Of course it is wound around Myrtle and Hosta and is not an easy job.

Are the brown spots some kind of disease or just old dead growth? I was planning to transplant some of the Ivy that is growing under the deck and into the bushes on the side of the house in the area where I've pulled it up.

However, if it has a disease I don't want to do that. - D. -



Sounds like leaf spot aggravated by growing conditions that have weakened the plants, compounded by a winter just warm enough to allow some pathogens to keep developing for more of the year.

Ivy's prone to fungal leaf spots and bacterial leaf spots. They're ugly spots with ugly names: *Xanthomonas* bacteria, *Alternaria* or *Colletotrichum* or *Glomerella* fungi. You can plug any of those names followed by the word ivy into an Internet search engine with "images" button clicked and probably be able to give your ivy's affliction a specific name.

Don't jump too quickly to conclusions but there's a for-instance with the very common bacterial leaf spot of ivy at <http://plantpath.caes.uga.edu/extension/plants/woodyornamentals/ivybacterialleafspot.html>

These diseases have their different looks and sites, yet causes and control are similar enough to group them. On the leaves, spots can be just ugly but not killers. It's much more trouble if the fungi or bacteria infect the wood, which they can do by seizing on weather that allows infection and "blighting" of the tender young wood -- branches that as yet have no bark, are still soft and expanding. There the disease stays and grows as the branch becomes hard and woody. Eventually it kills the branch from point of infection out to the tip.

Stem infection may be less noticeable at first but in time can be more trouble than leaf infection, since branches die back. What should be long-lived parts die early at a net loss to the plant. Leaves, on the other hand, are meant to fall and be replaced regularly. So if a leaf has enough spot then the vine figures, "Okay, we'll do away with that one, we can replace it in a matter of days..."

Like the rose black spot we have already seen this year (*right: May 3!*), this leaf spot's early.

You're doing right to prune off the dead parts -- cut back far enough to be sure you leave *healthy* wood. Remove bad leaves. Infected leaves and wood are contagious so taking them away reduces new infection during stressful times. Sterilize your pruners between cuts to avoid leaving spores on every cut surface... That means wiping the blades often with a rag dipped in alcohol or peroxide, or bleach water.



Keep the plants growing well so they are more resistant to infection. Thin them out so they are not so crowded (you've probably read our articles warning against continually shearing shrubs, without thinning them, and how that weakens them... many people don't realize that's what



they've been doing to ivy, euonymus, even myrtle groundcover.) Water when it's dry (thank goodness for the rain!). Fertilize. Avoid pesticide use and other chemicals that can damage leaves, especially when it's very warm.

## Bushwacker reclaims home

An arborvitae. They were too big. The options were to take them out and plant something else or cut and see if they might be cut back and still pass muster.



There was a too-big juniper there, too... More about this kind of pruning:  
<http://forum.gardenatoz.com/index.php?/topic/202-reducing-the-size-of-an-arborvitae/>

## Our Mentors say...

We are never alone in the garden, for the gardening advice that came to us from a parent, neighbor or other veteran gardener grows on.

## Willow talk

My Italian grandfather wove willow baskets for use in his home and gardens. After he was done soaking the willow branches in water he always used that water in his garden. He said it was good for the plant roots. He also always put a cut willow twig in water when starting cuttings from plants. - Karen Skandalaris -

The gardeners of ancient times may not have known the name and chemical nature of auxin but they paid attention, and saw what worked. Willow is loaded with plant auxin, a chemical we synthesize and look for in root stimulators such as Rootone!

Please come to the Forum and share what you learned at the feet of a Master.

<http://forum.gardenatoz.com/index.php?/topic/79-looking-for-how-to-folklore/>

"Before we start,  
let's all take just one  
minute to remember  
our garden mentors."

- Dave Michener -



**Stumper** Laughing together to solve problems that have no solution.

## Rain dance

Been there done this?

Have you ever worked out a way to get water to a far corner or specially needy plant, burning up both brain cells and calories in figuring a way and getting it done? Then you've looked to the heavens and asked, as we have, "So *now* you rain?!"

Now *that's* a gardener who tells it like it is!

I just spent three hours watering ...with two five gallon pails (now I must admit that almost two of those three hours was spent being distracted by other plants and interesting stuff in the woods...) - Anne -