

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich & Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns  
Issue 20, December 20, 2008

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### So what about the boots?

I notice that you always **wear heavy boots while gardening**. I usually wear sandals or light tennis shoes to keep cool. However, after recent foot surgery I now have to wear more supportive shoes when I garden. Do you have a favorite brand or type that you would recommend?

Thanks for your newsletter! - Ruth -

Hi Ruth,

So sorry if foot surgery kept you from your garden at all this season. That can make a year so frustrating! On the other hand we're very glad if our newsletters help fill the time until you're back out there. We sure love writing them. We compile what we learn from all over this network we have formed, put it out there and then receive it back, enriched.

We've been **wearing boots from almost the get-go in our gardening**, after one particularly wearing day when Janet removed sod for hours. Her tennis-shod feet were so sore she felt crippled. Then, she simply began wearing in the garden the boots she was required to wear on her "day job." She'd chosen the particular type because they were the only work boots that fit the job's criteria and were also available in a wide size. Even so, they were men's boots. Back in the 1970's work boots in women's sizes were rare. Steven liked and bought into the same brand.

Those boots were Red Wings and we've stuck with them. Seems like in the late 80's we tried some from... Sears?... but they didn't wear as well. We'd come to **expect 2 years from a pair** at a full-time gardener pace and maybe a third year if fate arranged less wear than usual on the sole where it joins the heel. (Where boot meets spade tread as we kick on the spade. That impact gouges even the best sole over time).



We also like **Red Wing shoes salespeople**. They **know their line**. We don't think the service we've gotten is a function of who we are. In fact, the salesman we most often see strikes us as the kind of guy who doesn't give two shakes if he's serving the queen or the ditch digger as long as that person respects the boots! All the Red Wings people we've dealt with seem to **honestly care** when e stop in for new boot oil or laces or to check prices. We've been doing that every now and then lately as Janet's current pair wears. Perhaps "her" \$150 boot will go on sale.

One of the things we wanted and found in Red Wing boots was **a steel shank and arch support**, necessary for the day job Janet had before making her part-time garden business full time in 1988. It turned out that reinforcement was **great for digging-force** impact on the sole and the related extra thickness of leather around the ankle **saved her foot from many wayward thrusts** of fork and spade. She says "I can dig like Superwoman with boots. Without boots I would've been slower and also sidelined at least a few times with serious cuts or scrapes.



The more casual gardener may not need all that protection at the ankle and strength of sole that counts so high on our scorecard. We don't think even the most serious gardener needs the steel toe that some (not our) work boots have. We do think every gardener can benefit from having sturdy **boots laced around their ankles**. It's made the difference hundreds of times when without it we would have sprained something while moving a heavy wheelbarrow or other potentially **limb-twisting burden across uneven ground**.



These boots speak volumes.  
Every gardener should have  
a pair just like them.  
Photos ©2008 Steven Nikkila

## When annual impatiens are perennially troubled, switch species

I don't know if you remember, but last year I asked about healthy impatiens **wilting and dying in mid-summer**.

*(We do remember, Wendy. You wrote, "I love impatiens. and most of the plants thrive. However, every year, a few of them seem to shrivel and die. The leaves get smaller and the stems seem to shrivel.")*

You did some research and found some information about a blight that is in the plants before we get them. And I thought that was it! So, this summer, all seemed to be going well until July when the odd plant here and there started in with the dying. And one plant spread to the next plant so I started pulling the dying and replanting. Those **replacement plants did well** here into September.

Two things I've noticed:

- 1) **Impatiens** in front of the house (west facing and primarily **shaded by a tree**) have had no sign of this blight and **are doing well**.
- 2) The bed with the blight is east facing and the **impatiens that die** seem to be **in more sun** at the end of the bed rather than in the more shaded end of the bed. BUT - not all the plants in the sunnier end die.

So, do you **think it's in the soil? Or is it the sun?** If it's in the soil, should I remove some of the soil and replace with new? Can I treat the soil with something? I did spray with some lime sulphur in the early spring thinking that would kill whatever blight might be lingering from last year.

Thanks for any thoughts  
- Wendy -

### Doing well, then suddenly kaput!

We often see impatiens and other **plants collapse in midsummer**, once it gets good and hot. High on our list of things to look into is whether the plants doing that are the ones that were injured early in the year:

- Their stems may have been nicked. Two possibilities: Cutworms can injure a stem as can a person who jerks too hard in depotting.
- Their roots or crown may have been injured and opened to infection by being placed into cold soil. That can happen to some plants in a bed and not others
- Whole plant stress, when a plant may have had to put up with just a bit more than others around it, perhaps because it had been planted above compacted subsoil.

These plants show us their injuries only when they can no longer limp along. When the maximum strain is placed on its vascular system, such as when it needs more water than ever before on a hot windy day, a plant that's been on the edge simply shuts down.

Dropping of leaves and then shriveling, and stem by stem progression sounds like stems infected at their bases. That would fit stem rot or stem canker problems that can show up in midsummer although they began at planting-out time or even greenhouse-growing time as small injuries from mechanical damage or pin-point dead spots from cold soil or frost.

If all the failing plants are on the outside edge of the bed, nearest the lawn, we know that set of plants may have been colder at planting time. Lawn-covered ground does not radiate as much heat as bare ground, thus on a cold spring night the plants near turf aren't so well protected from light frosts.

But where failing plants are here and there in a bed, mechanical injury is more likely -- a nick here and there at planting time.



We're glad you wrote again, Wendy. "What happens next" is vital info. We apologize that our last exchange created the impression that the problem was plants starting out blighted. We commend you for putting yourself onto **the right track** which is **looking at the bigger picture**. When it comes to recurring- and whole-bed problems, that's where answers lie. In this case, we see a whole species painting out a pattern that says, "We **impatiens don't want to be here**."

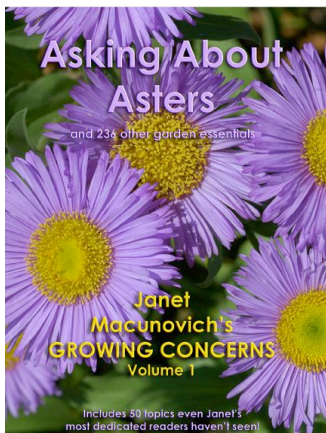
(To keep others up to speed in this conversation, we've repeated what we wrote just to you last year, in the box on page 3, "Doing well, then suddenly kaput!")

What we should have emphasized is that agents like fungi that enter through wounded or cold-injured stems are not **the real killers**. **Stresses** that makes a plant too weak to grow past or fight off such agents are the problem. When a problem persists after you eliminate all stress factors under your control -- by handling plants gently, loosening subsoil along bed edges pressed by wayward feet and tires in winter, not planting until the soil is warm, etc. -- then it's time to give that plant species a break.

Sometimes just one step back, and one brief period of early winter rest and mid-winter wonder time, lets the patterns we see in the garden speak to us.

**Impatiens love cool, partial shade**. That individual plants manage to keep going in your garden or anyone else's even after their kin succumb to heat doesn't change that overall preference. That replacements planted after July survive seem an additional proof that midsummer **heat was the last straw**.

So, Wendy, **look into other species** this winter. Grow plants there that are **more heat-tolerant**. One to consider is **Catharanthus** (called annual periwinkle).



What are:

*Asking About Asters*  
*Bunches of Bushes*  
*Clipping a Crabapple*  
*Dividing the Daisies*  
*Evergreen Entries*  
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### What's that? Janet & Steven write but don't publish?

We do **write to many of you**, answering questions as they come in and keeping copies with the intention of using those exchanges in future newsletters. Questions just always outnumber the spaces in newsletters. So we wait and look for **any opening for sharing**.

Such opportunities presented themselves as Janet compiled her 1995 - 1998 articles and re-published our "lost" columns from the first half of 2008.

### On our Special Edition CD

**Asking About Asters** there are many such questions and answers, updates and asides. We hope you will **buy the CD** and benefit from its 1,300+ Q&A chats.

## A Gardener Afield: Report from Alexandria, Egypt

The world is full of great gardens and even the widest ranging traveler can't see them all. Here's a **peek through another gardener's eyes** at a place you may have overlooked or not yet reached.

Dear Janet,

When I went to Egypt with my dad I saw some gardens I thought were really nice. I hope you like them, too.



Here I am with my Aunt Alia and cousin Jannah at a palace

in Alexandria. It was built by a king of Egypt more than 100 years ago as a place to go in summer that wasn't as hot as Cairo. That king's family was the last to rule in Egypt. They have a president now. The palace has like 360 rooms and it was just for the king and his wife! I thought its garden was

the coolest.

You can see more about this palace and gardens if you look up Montazah Palace Gardens. It's supposed to be one of the most beautiful places in the world.

This picture is the yard of a house where we stayed on the Mediterranean near Alexandria. I couldn't swim at the Mediterranean beach. The sand is beautiful and white but you're not allowed to swim because there are so many rocks and the waves are so violent. I think this is an awesome picture, I took it because the sunset was so pretty but then I saw it also has landscape and garden stuff like you and my mom like so much.



I have lots more pictures that I'll show you when I see you.

love, Aria

**Aria Sergany has gardened with me** and with her mom since she first learned to walk. She's now a middle school student in Wakefield, Massachusetts. I'm tickled to hear, as she begins to travel the world, that a lifetime of greenery has given her Gardener's Eyes.





An image so beautiful I had to pull it out of Aria's letter and look at it in more detail. Just look at those aloes! And what *are* those ?pines? with whorled limbs so beautifully, symmetrically arrayed? Yet the best part of this picture is that when I look at it I hear my niece's simple, spot-on summary of the difference she recognized between gardeners at home and in Egypt. She said, "I know you'll ask if I saw anyone gardening, and there were. And you'll ask about their tools and stuff... they used pretty much the same things we do. But mostly all they did was water the gardens because of the sun." Photo ©2008 Aria Sergany

Traveling? Know someone who is? Email me and let's share your discoveries!

### **This week in our garden** **Grow with us! This week we will:**

Toss out, or advise someone to toss, **yet another failing Poinsettia**. So many fail so quickly because they're carried from store to car, or car to home, unprotected. A closed paper bag (not plastic!) can trap enough warm air around the plant to keep its cells from dying from cold during that trip. If the cold reaches it, tips die, leaves die but remain attached and the plant dies a very unattractive, gardener-esteem-busting, leaf-dropping, yellowing death.

The **same fate befalls many gift plants, and houseplants** moved to new homes in the winter. Most of them are tropical species, so bundle them against anything colder than 40°F. Even a very brief exposure can kill them.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heed our local squirrels, who inform us that **the ground's not frozen yet** but we'd better get a move on if we've got anything to stash. We'll dig some quick holes and **dump in the last bulbs**.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Wash and sort gloves.** Once those bulbs are in we're pretty much done with the dirty stuff for the year. We still have pruning to do but for that we can wear our warmest gloves. Most of these gloves we're readying for next year are great for garden work but not so "hot" when it comes to insulating.

## Wrap-up with Green Thumbs Up- and Down

**Green thumbs up:** To kids who grow up around a gardener and find themselves turning into gardeners themselves whether they meant to or not. We've heard people wonder how they can get their kids interested in gardening and we always think, "You've already done it. The seed may simply take time to sprout." It's hard to deny one's roots, to shake from the subconscious the fact that every family get together photo has a garden in the background. Wait for it -- they won't be able to live long in places devoid of greenery when it's what they've known since day one!

**Green thumbs down:** To wise acre kids who come home to visit, take in your garden in a glance, then tell you what you should be doing --- especially when they're right.

## Who are Janet and Steven?

**The gardener's trainers.** For over twenty years Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila have been helping gardeners grow through their classes, books and other publications. They share what they've learned and learn new in attending classes at educational institutions all over the country, reading, participating in professional symposia, and applying it all in their own and client's gardens.

To learn more, go to About Us on [GardenAtoZ.com](http://GardenAtoZ.com). Post your questions to Janet & Steven at [forum.gardenatoz.com](http://forum.gardenatoz.com).