

What's Coming Up

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns
#2, August 16, 2008

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Can I recommend knee pads? You bet!

Carol asks: Can you recommend knee pads that will fit a woman, stay in place without falling down, and not have connecting straps that bind in back of the knees? I am up and down so much on my knees that a foam kneeling pad would not work for me. I need a good pair of knee pads that will last. I borrowed a pair of Mechanix Wear knee pads from one of my sons. Their quality is excellent, but 'one size fits all' kept them down around my ankles and not on my knees!



I love the padded-knee pants once sold as GreenKnees by Denman Company. I patch them and keep wearing them to garden, but I've learned to love other pants, too. Here, our lab, (Yippee)Kiyo, wants to know why daughter Sonja is wearing my pants. Cat Fraxi(nus) approves of my Carhartt's any time I've crawled through the catmint.

Photo copyright 2008 Steven Nikkila

Carol, I switched to work pants with padding inside a pocket at each knee because I had those same difficulties with strap-on knee pads. My knees have been happy with this solution for twenty years.

I've tried a number of padded knee pants, and like Carhartt's solution, their Double Front Work Pants, Dungaree/Washed Duck, style # B136 in dark brown*. I buy the knee pad inserts as a separate item. For these pants, Carhartt carries an insert pad called Soft Knees, which I find works best at double strength. That is, I put two pads in each

knee pocket. That padding remains in place, even during laundering.

*Copy and paste this URL to your browser bar to learn more AND SEE PAGE 7 FOR MORE SOURCES:
<http://www.carhartt.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?catalogId=10101&storeId=10051&productId=32068&langId=-1>

It's not an inexpensive solution but our knees are worth it. The pants are about \$50 and the pads are \$13 a pair. You can order them on-line at www.carhartt.com. However, the pants come only in men's sizes (expressed in waist- and inseam inches such as 30-30). If you're a lady who needs to try on men's jeans to make that translation, check around for a work clothes store or hardware/farm supply outlet near you that carries Carhartt.



The SoftKnees pads in my Carhartt's (dark pad, on left) are thinner than those that came to me with my GreenKnees (white pad, on right) -- now manufacturer discontinued.

Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila!

I like the Carhartt pants' durability. I get many years of hard use from a pair. However, it's such heavy fabric that it takes time and lots of dirt-crusted wearings to break in. (I've learned to wear them a lot and wash them little to speed the process!) A lighter weight alternative is Carhartt's Double Front Work Dungaree Style #UB04. However, it comes only in the off-white color called "natural" while I prefer dark brown to hide ever-present soil- and leaf stains.

I hope these padded-knee pants work as well for you as they have for me. However, choosing clothing involves many personal preferences. For me, correct position of the pad at my bent knee, fabric durability and a loose fit around the middle are important. In my search for what suited me best I've also worn padded knee pants from Skillers* and Lee Valley* as well as various "tactical wear" pants for law enforcement personnel

who must kneel or crawl on hard surfaces. I also found a kit for adding knee pad pockets to one's own favorite pants, from the manufacturer of the Soft Knees* pads.

*Copy and paste these URLs to your browser bar to learn more AND SEE PAGE 7 FOR UPDATES:

<http://www.skillers.com/cgi-bin/store/store.cgi?&shop=skillers&L=eng&Category=polycotton>

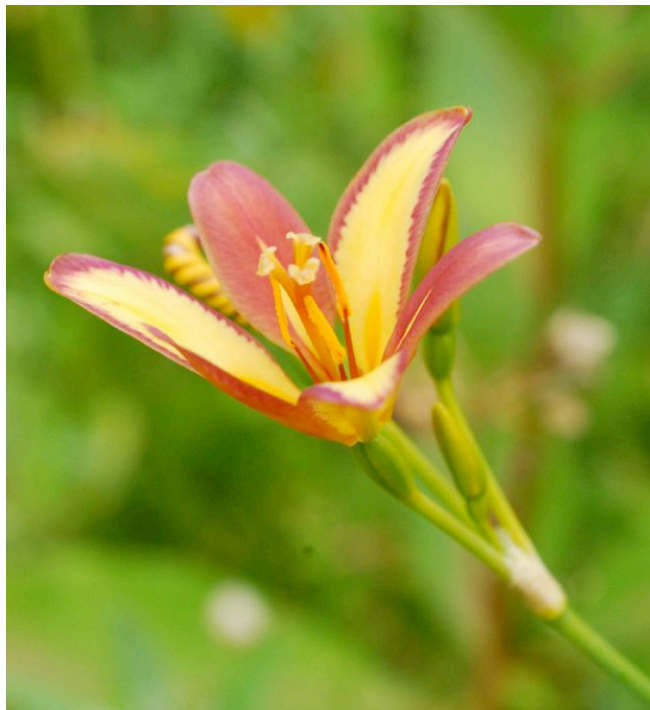
<http://www.leevalley.com/garden/page.aspx?c=&cat=2,42407&p=55646>

www.softknees.com, (or phone 888-4kneepad for a catalog)

Don't worry about blackberry lily's pleated leaves

F.K. reports: I have a *Belamcanda* (blackberry lily?) with a fair number of tightly pleated leaves. They are horizontally pleated like a window shade. There is disagreement among friends and neighbors whether this is a bug, a disease or drought. Do you have any idea?

No worries, F.K.! Blackberry lily (*Belamcanda chinensis*) with its spotted orange flowers is sometimes called orange leopard lily. Sometimes it's confused with its intergeneric offspring, candy lily (*xPardancanda norrisii*) which is the result of crossing *Belamcanda chinensis* with another member of the iris family, *Pardanthopsis dichotoma*. Candy lily is distinguished by its flowers which may be spotted or solid in cream, mauve, yellow, pink, orange or bicolors.



Blackberry lily flowers are orange with dark spots. This intergeneric cross called candy lily comes in a wider range of colors: solid and bi-color cream, mauve, raspberry and yellow. Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Blackberry lily, candy lily and other plants in the iris family do sometimes develop pleated leaves. The cause may be cold temperatures and water shortage -- from uneven watering, sudden root loss or a drought. I've heard the term "pineapplling" for this effect on foliage but your term -- pleating -- conjures a more apt image.

I can't find any hard data that describes what degree of cold or dryness may trigger pleating or whether plants are prone to it at particular stages of development. I can tell you that what

you see on the mature leaf may have been initiated by conditions that held sway while that leaf was still in bud. Since weather is involved and you can't see what's going on until after the fact, there's little you can do.

Fortunately, there is little reason to take action over occasional pleating. A plant may have some pleated leaves one year but none the next. Also, the condition's not known to lead to escalating problems or any loss of vigor.

More about pleated and wrinkled leaves

The "up" side of wrinkles and pleats

Some plants' leaves are naturally puckered, pleated or wrinkled.

If it's a plant's natural disposition and attractive to the human eye, we may choose and propagate wrinkled varieties. Ornamental kale is an example, which could as easily have been named "wrinkled cabbage."

Puckers and folds may help plants survive in wind and drought. When a leaf's air-exchange pores are recessed the plant doesn't lose so much water vapor. For instance, rugosa roses, named for their rugose or wrinkled foliage, thrive on windy sea shores where smooth-leaf tea roses fail.

When wrinkles or pleats mean trouble

Abnormal leaves can signify trouble, especially if the abnormal foliage eventually browns and dies. When you see wrinkled or pleated leaves, consider whether any of the following negative influences may be at work.

- **Pesticide damage.** Distorted leaves may be the result of weed killer* gone astray.

*http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/library/crpsl2/sections/S54_b.pdf
<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1365-3059.1961.tb00003.x>

- **Mite feeding.** Pests such as cyclamen mite feeding on just-forming leaves of African violet-, dahlia*- or coleus can make the foliage puckered and small.

Pleats and tucks that allow a plant's "skin" to bulge when it's full of water can be survival adaptations for life in desert climates where rain is rare but intense. The plant stores that water in its stems and leaves for later use.

Some naturally wrinkled leaves resist diseases or insect attack.* Look again at that rugosa rose. It's puckered leaves are resistant to the black spot fungus that plagues hybrid tea roses.

*<http://waynesword.palomar.edu/term1f2.htm>

When wrinkling is a genetic matter, a plant doesn't do it now and then but consistently and regardless of temperature or moisture.

Other mites can create the same effect on strawberries*, citrus trees and other plants.

*<http://www.ct.gov/caes/cwp/view.asp?a=2823&q=377662>
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/new/s/allontario/ao1003a2.htm>

- **Virus infection** can promote puckered leaf symptoms in potatoes, tomatoes, geraniums* and other plants.

*<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG033>

- Leaves that are hosting **fungal infection** such as phytophthora* of peony may pucker or wrinkle before discoloring.

*<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/A2563.pdf>

- **Cold damage.** Developing foliage can be distorted by sudden cold snaps.

I real-eyes: Wheelbarrow-ers and tractor operators view soil very differently!

Some garden tales seem to convey nothing but aggravation, except for the alternate reality they can reveal. Stand in the other guy's shoes to think about this situation, and hope one day you'll recall it to avoid such trouble in your own garden:

Deb G. had a builder working in her yard to put in a swimming pool. At the same time she had a low rock wall made and soil delivered to fill behind it. The idea was to have the grade behind the wall slope up to meet the wall, and then plant behind the rock wall.

The eye-opener began when one of the people working for the builder asked, "While I'm here, do you want me to fill that bed with your soil?"

Deb thought, "Wonderful! He has that little tractor with a scoop. It would take me hours to wheelbarrow that soil." So Deb said yes, move that soil.

What a mistake, says Deb! "He put the soil behind the wall just fine but then he ran over it and over it, packing it down until it's like rock! When I demanded to know what the idea was, he couldn't understand why I was upset. It turns out he thinks soil is bad if it's loose, that for building purposes it has to be packed down so will hold weight without shifting. Of course that's just what I *don't* need. Now I have to take out this ruined stuff and start all over!"

This week in Janet's garden

Grow with me! This week I will:

Spend time with my reference books and on-line, looking into problems I see in my garden that are new to me. I'll be looking to learn their names, how much damage they can do, and how they can be prevented. I do this *before* I think about what I might spray, clip or add to remedy the situation.

It's simply the way things are, that my first year with a problem is a learning year in which I accept a plant's disfigurement or failure. The spots, wilts, diebacks, nibbles and discolorations that I get to know by name this way -- crab apple scab, peony botrytis, aster yellows, etc. -- become so familiar and expected that they catch my eye when they are in their early, treatable stages. Those I see in plenty of time to do the most good, preventing their spread or nipping them in bud. Those that are new problems usually escape my notice until they are too far developed to be effectively dealt with this year.

If learning a problem's identity, potential damage and ways to manage it are all I manage to accomplish in a week, that's enough!

The 45 mph garden

You can put a gardener behind the wheel but you can't take the flowers out of his eyes. Look at what's catching drivers' eyes and raising questions this week.

Hardy mimosa tree or silk tree (*Albizia julibrissin*) caught my eye. It's only marginally hardy in zone 5, so I don't see many in my area. I stopped and talked to gardener Marian Hunt of Livonia, Michigan about her tree.

"Yeah, they're everywhere and even weedy in Kentucky where I'm from," says Hunt, "but no one here knows what it is!"

This small tree is good for late summer color but, as Marian puts it, "It looks dead until June 1. Not a leaf on it. People are always telling me 'cut it down, it musta died!'"



Photos copyright 2008 Steven Nikkila

Silk tree (top left) attracted my eye in August. Its pale pink tassel flowers (bottom left) appear earlier in zones 7 and 8, where it can also be invasive by seed.

Wrap up with Grins and Grow-ans

Grins: to sitting down, having a barbecue and enjoying our gardens as others do. We often fail to do this and so we fail to either enjoy or improve on what our guests see from patio chairs and gathering places.

Grow-ans: to that one plant in a mass planting that turns out to be a rogue, declaring as it matures that it was only masquerading as a match to its fellows, back at planting time. To make matters worse, these plants we could not know would be a different height or color always seem to end up in the middle of the bed. They leave a gap or make themselves very hard to reach to replace.

Who's Janet?

A professional gardener and educator since 1984, Janet Macunovich designs, plants and tends gardens through her business, Perennial Favorites. She teaches and writes about gardening at schools, conferences, in her books, this weekly column, the monthly Michigan Gardener and other publications. To learn more, email and ask for What's Coming Up, Issue #1. Email requests and questions to JMaxGarden@aol.com.

Places to catch Janet in-person:

Thursday, August 28, 2:00 - 6:00 p.m., " Working With Janet - Bring Your Gloves and Tools!" A chance for hands-on pruning lessons. Janet's reducing the size of both a blue spruce and a crabapple tree, at a residence in Livonia, Michigan on West Chicago road. Limited space. No fee. To attend, email Janet at JMaxGarden@aol.com for directions.

Saturday, September 13, 8:00 a.m. - noon, "Working With 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 Janet's hands-on instruction in fall perennial garden

maintenance. For instructions, send an email to mstgarden@yahoo.com with subject line "I'll volunteer at the Zoo with Janet."

Thursday, September 18, 7 p.m., "The Art of Fall Garden Clean-up" An illustrated lecture at the Waterford Township, Michigan Library. Free. To attend, call 248-618-7694 to reserve a seat.

Saturday, September 27, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., "Holiday Decorations from Your Garden" A hands-on workshop sponsored by the Master Gardeners of the Gaylord, Michigan area. Fee payable to Gaylord area Master Gardeners association. For more information, email Janet at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

About Working-to-learn with me:

At the Detroit Zoo: I've tended gardens as a volunteer at the Detroit Zoo's **Adopt-a-Garden program** for 20 years. Over those years a hundred or more people have worked with me, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish a lot. The program requires that you complete an interview and orientation to become a regular garden volunteer, but allows me to bring students in under temporary passes. **If you'd like to help**, email mstgarden@yahoo.com, and put in the subject line "I'll volunteer at the Zoo with Janet" for our upcoming work dates and instructions to join us. That email will put you in touch with my good friend Deb Tosch, who keeps the zoo schedule straight while I plan and lead the work.

February 2013 Update: Sources for padded-knee pants

Janet's first and still favorite padded knee pants were discontinued (Denman company).

What was once Steven's first choice is also gone since Skillers.com closed.

We've worn and like these alternates:

Duluth Trading Company (we both order men's size; no big deal since Janet prefers suspenders to belt)

Men's DTPRO work pants with built in knee pads

www.duluthtrading.com/store/product/mens-dtpro-work-pants-85322.aspx?ev3=recommended_products

Lee Valley gardener's pants

<http://www.leevalley.com/us/garden/page.aspx?c=&cat=2,42407&p=55646>

Also, we plan to try these:

511 Tactical Co., Women's EMS pants

<http://www.511tactical.com/All-Products/Pants/Wm-Stryke-Pant.html>

(pants have double material over knee, inside opening accepts foam pad such as Soft Knees)

Blackhawk co. slip-in tactical knee pad, and women's pants that accept a knee pad

www.blackhawk.com/catalog/Knee-Elbow-Pads,9.htm

<http://www.blackhawk.com/product/Womens-Lightweight-Tactical-Pants,1802,1551.htm>

Carhartt (Janet wears men's size). These require SoftKnees pads*

Men's Washed Drill Work Bib overall with Double knee (painter's bib overalls with pockets for SoftKnees pads)

<http://www.carhartt.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?catalogId=10101&storeId=10051&productId=32175&langId=-1>

Men's Double-Front Work Dungaree

www.carhartt.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?catalogId=10101&storeId=10051&productId=32068&langId=-1

*Soft Knees: pads (Page 1) and kits to retrofit regular pants (What's Coming Up issue #30). We use two pads per pocket as we're accustomed to more cushion.

www.safeworker.com/softknees.html