

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns

Issue 4, August 30, 2008

Here you'll find:

Colorless leaves tell tale of azalea lace bug, page 1
Rose growing is all about saying good-bye, page 3
Early fall color reveals a tree or shrub in trouble, page 5
Marking and storing cannas, dahlias, page 6
45mph half-green Japanese maple, page 6
Dogfight in the butterfly garden, page 7
Pretty severe pruning! Crabapple, spruce and Japanese maple, page 10

Leaves pale when they're home to azalea lacebug

Betty wonders about **discolored azaleas**: My neighbor's azaleas, about 6 of them, have turned brown. The leaves are tan rather than green and they are heavy with what I think might be spider mites or lace mites.

My one little azalea bush has not turned brown, but when I look on the underside of the leaves I see it does have the same mites or whatever they are.

Should these bushes be sprayed?



Strong, healthy azalea foliage is deep green. These pale leaves are far from that ideal. This evergreen bush develops its foliage as a two- to three year investment but those in the photo have lost so much vigor that they will probably fall off after just one year. If all of the plant is this pale, that loss will be considerable. One cause of this discoloration can be successive generations of azalea lacebugs feeding on the foliage from May to September. These bugs feed on the leaf underside, producing pale yellow or white splotches on top that may claim the whole leaf.



The leaf underside provides proof of lacebug infestation. Black dots are lacebug frass -- excrement. Close examination with a hand lens will show you that the brown flakes are skins (exoskeletons) shed by the bugs as they moved through their various life stages.

Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Azalea lacebug is probably the culprit, Betty. This insect feeds on the sap of azaleas, sucking the life out of the leaves.

It's too late to correct the situation this year. By September in Michigan, lacebugs stop feeding, lay eggs and die. You can't kill what's already dead, you can't turn back the clock to arrest damage already done to the leaf, and pesticides can't touch a quiescent embryo inside the egg. On the other hand a pesticide would kill predator insects, putting an end to the 24-7 help you're receiving now from ladybugs, assassin bugs and green lacewings -- they may be the critical control staving off other pests.

There are lacebugs of all kinds, none of them deadly in normal circumstances. An otherwise healthy plant can support itself plus the bugs. If it's a deciduous plant, in fall it simply sheds its leaves with their load of insect eggs. The next spring affords a fresh start. A gardener can help quash an infestation by condemning the buggy fallen leaves to a hot compost.

When it comes to evergreens such as azaleas, control is trickier. An evergreen should keep leaves for two or more years, so we don't like to see complete annual defoliation -- it can put a big dent in its energy reserves. Eggs stay on the plant with the leaves. To kill the next generation as it emerges from the egg the gardener must apply a dormant oil just before the azalea breaks bud in spring, and /or insecticide at intervals from early

May to early June. If not, an azalea supporting a heavy lacebug load may struggle, flower poorly and branches may die back.

Environmental changes can play a part in a lacebug uprising. Stressed plants, such as azaleas in full sun or dry soil, are unable to produce the natural chemicals that can suppress an infestation. Correct any stressful situations and your plants may take care of the problem on their own.

Next spring as April turns into May, check the foliage for lacebug activity and act if it seems heavy -- otherwise that first generation will give rise to one or two more. Rinse the leaf undersides repeatedly with a forceful spray of water to dislodge nymphs and eggs, or apply an insecticide, being sure to coat the leaf undersides and repeat it at intervals to catch late-hatching nymphs.

So many lacebugs, so little time

The formula for lacebug success

Lacebugs are common pests with a common strategy: Congregate on the bottom side of a leaf, stick a straw-like mouth into the plant and suck out the sap. Shed your skin four times before reaching adulthood, leaving each vacated skin where it falls until the foliage where you live becomes a trash heap. Mate, then start the process over again by laying eggs along a vein on the foliage underside. If it becomes cold when you're still developing inside an egg, wait out winter in the protection of your shell.

Lacebug populations tend to cycle from high to low over years and concentrate on weak plants. If a number of unrelated shrubs have lacebug damage, look for and rectify overall poor growing conditions.

Bugs on strict diets

There are many species of lacebugs, such as andromeda-, basswood-, hackberry-, hawthorn-, oak-, rhododendron- and sycamore lacebug. Some, such as the azalea lacebug, can eat only azalea. Others can feed on certain relatives of their primary plant. For instance, the rhododendron lacebug can eat mountain laurel. The lacebug that feeds on basswood (American linden) can eat littleleaf linden trees, too. The hawthorn lacebug can feed on hawthorn relatives, including *Cotoneaster*, crabapple, *Pyracantha*, mountain ash, quince and serviceberry.

So an infestation of azalea lacebugs may move between azaleas but not to nearby shrubs of other types. A hawthorn, however, may share its pests with a groundcover cotoneaster at its feet.

Tea time's not a happy time in this rose garden

Nan looks for help with rose troubles: Hi, Janet. The tea roses in several beds at Meadow Brook Hall (a 1920's estate that is now an historic home museum and park) were slow to grow this season, and generally were spindly and under nourished looking. Shrub roses in other beds looked very healthy.

We submitted a soil sample for analysis and there were no issues. We had two rose

experts look at the shrubs and they could not figure out the problem, at least through observation. Our regimen included watering and feeding (Holly Care, green sand, fish emulsion) and treating with a rotation of fungicides every two weeks as well as spraying for Japanese Beetles (basically the same regimen we have been using for the last 4 years). We mostly use a water spray to attack the spider mites, if any.

Several bushes were dead or dying by the middle of the summer so we dug one up and took it to the Michigan State University extension service for further analysis.

The analysis returned to us was that the plant was infected with *Phytophthora* root and crown rot... The strategy for control as outlined in that report included steps that will be difficult if not impossible for us to follow.

I would like to know more about the practical treatment, identification, and avoidance of this pathogen. How long does it take for it to cause these problems? Is there any way we could have known it was there and treated it before all this damage? Do we seriously need to disinfect all our tools and watering cans? With what? How often? We want to know more about how it was introduced into these beds so we can attack the root cause. Any information you could add would be helpful.

Focus on the conditions that caused the roses to be weak, Nan. Diseases like *phytophthora* aren't usually able to get the upper hand in a vigorous plant. A healthy rose can stave off infection. It's possible these roses were weakened last winter when a late, warm fall turned overnight into a severely cold December. This caused cambium- and crown damage on many roses, especially tea roses. Thus weakened, it's understandable that they would succumb to infection.

It's also possible that drainage conditions have changed in the rose bed. Poor drainage can develop when construction projects change groundwater flow, traffic packs down soil or existing drains become blocked. Roots become weak from being in wet, airless soil. They become open to infection by ever-present disease organisms.

Do replace the failing roses. Before you replant anything, do a drainage test and install tiles or raise the existing beds to correct the drainage if an 18-inch deep hole does not drain completely in twelve hours or less.

It's important to understand that Extension plant pathology labs are most often geared toward professional growers and in-pot production. That's understandable if you recognize such growers tend to be the biggest users of such labs. And that the lab pathologists focus on the disease rather than on why a disease suddenly prevails is understandable, too. Plants grown in pots and greenhouses tend to be more delicate than in-ground plants and more susceptible to epidemics in their close quarters and uniform conditions. At greenhouses or production facilities that do not grow plants in the field, it is feasible to implement disease control strategies as drastic as complete soil replacement and sterilization of work surfaces and all tools (which are steam sterilized and/or bleached).

You can take advantage of an upcoming annual event to talk to the rose expert Nancy Lindley about the best replacement roses. Owner of Great Lakes Roses and author of

Roses for Michigan, Lindley is one of the keynote speakers at the Growing With Master Gardeners* 2008 conference on Saturday, September 13 from 8 to 5 p.m. at the University of Michigan Dearborn campus.

If you go, for just \$45 you will hear Nancy, have a chance to talk with her throughout the day and also attend your choice of talks on other topics ranging from bonsai to bulbs, delphiniums, invasive plants, native plants, rain gardens, seed starting, tomatoes and tree planting. This event is one of the perks of belonging to a strong gardening community where dozens of volunteers contribute hundreds of hours to make a learning experience really special.

* Copy and paste this URL to your browser bar to learn more: http://www.mgawc.org/prog_gwmgconf_2008.htm

Stumper

Some problems have no solution. All we can do is to share the pain and commiserate. For instance:

I **bought a new pair of pruners the day before the lost pair surfaced.** It happens too often to be simple coincidence. Are there imps assigned to absent-minded gardeners, anti-angels who wait until we replace a lost item and then whisper the first item's location into our unconscious mind?

This week in Janet's garden



Grow with me! this week I will:

Pay attention to what the trees and shrubs in my care are trying to tell me. Now as the season winds down some plants speak very clearly by developing their fall color early. Although it can mean other things, it does often translate as, "I'm in trouble!"

When I see early fall color, I look for environmental changes that may be affecting the plant. That means considering everything from soil compaction to irrigation system leaks and groundwater backups, alterations in traffic patterns over the plant's roots and abrupt changes in exposure, such as when sheltering trees are removed. Once I identify changes that have occurred in recent years it often tells me where to look for more specific evidence of damage -- especially to roots and main trunks.

Few trees color as nicely as a red maple (*Acer rubrum*), or a red-silver maple hybrid tree. Yet when one portion of the tree reddens ahead of the rest, it can signify trouble. Trunk or root damage are often involved. This early fall color is probably a consequence of trunk damage. Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

The damage that's probably behind the early fall color is pretty obvious in this case. Here's the trunk of the tree you saw on the previous page. Sometimes causes are hidden, as when part of a tree begins turning early years after a portion of its roots were crushed and damaged by construction traffic or grading. Note the sucker that's erupted from this trunk below the damage. Trunk suckers are another clear communication from a tree, "Something is wrong!"
Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

This week, too, I'll tag the special dahlias and cannas that will no longer be blooming when it comes time to dig and store tender roots. Each year I'm certain I will remember which was the frilly pink we liked so well, which the brightest red, so I can save only those. Each year in fall I am reminded that my memory is only as good as the twist ties and tags I placed earlier in the season!

Buy the slow release fertilizers I will add to gardens later this fall. When the time is right to apply them, most garden centers have warehoused the fertilizers to make room for holiday decorations.

The 45mph 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 driver's eyes and raising questions this week.



This week, attention caught on a **Japanese maple partly red, partly green**. It has red leaves on one section of its crown, green leaves elsewhere. It shows what can go wrong when a gardener does not realize a tree on the property was produced by grafting and allows suckers to develop from below the tree's graft union.



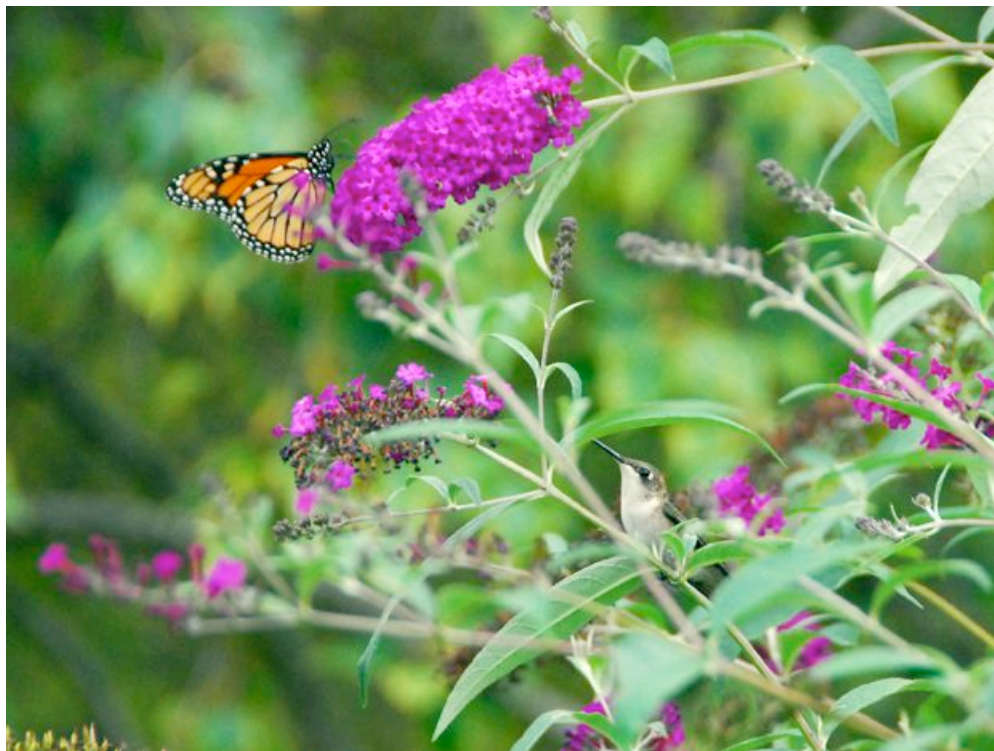
Here's off color not attributable to stress. This tree, like most trees sold today at garden centers, is the product of grafting -- joining a bud or twig of a tree with desirable traits to a strong-rooting tree of that same or a closely related species. Suckers may erupt from below a graft, from that portion called understock which was meant to contribute only roots to the union. If they escape our notice, they may become major or even dominant parts of the tree. Here, the understock is a green-leaf Japanese maple, out-growing the red-leaf section. Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Other trees that fit in this section of the 45 mph garden are: pink weeping cherry trees that develop upright, white-blooming sections; crabapples with trunks that are mismatched in flower color and fruit size; Harry Lauder's walking stick shrubs that transform themselves into multi-trunk American hazelnut trees.

If you're a smart gardener you'll **recognize a grafted tree** by the abrupt change in bark color or the swelling that can be seen on the trunk at a graft union, **trace questionable growth** on that plant to its origin and **cut off sprouts that come from below the graft**.

Wrap-up with Grins and Grow-ans that turn our green thumbs up or down

Grins: To simply sitting and watching the wildlife in your garden. The occasional sighting of a hummingbird, waxwing, preying mantis or big, bold butterfly is certainly fun but patterns that become apparent over time reveal these creatures' most interesting and entertaining habits. Barb A. reports that she's really enjoyed this aspect of her first summer of retirement. "One thing I'm amazed to see is that the **monarch butterflies** have claimed my yard. They **chase away all other butterflies**. I've seen them run off commas, black swallowtails and yellow swallowtails. They're very aggressive! Who would suspect that of a butterfly?!"



Those who recognize both monarch butterfly and hummingbird as aggressive defenders of territory will see tension as well as beauty in this portrait of the two. It captures a lull in a duel -- in which the monarch was holding its own. Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

Grow-ans: To planting a floral display along the walk in front of your home and finding that it attracts not only the human eye but the canine's urge to mark territory. Urine burns like a fertilizer overdose. Daily flushing can dilute but not eliminate the effect. Try deploying a decoy -- a tall boulder, post or concrete statue placed in the bed a dog leg's distance from the walk. It can work because dogs tend to choose the tallest, most lasting items as personal boundary markers.

Who's Janet?

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 -- escaped its bounds to become a gardening business. Eventually her talent as a writer and speaker crossed with her garden experience and grew on as books (such as "Designing Your Gardens and Landscapes" and "Caring for Perennials"), a weekly newspaper column now available by email at JMaxGarden@aol.com, a radio talk show and a gardening school. Email questions to her at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

Places to catch Janet in-person:

Saturday, September 13, 8:00 a.m. - noon, "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 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 main library, Waterford Township, Michigan. Free. To attend, call 248-618-7694 to reserve a seat.

Saturday, September 20, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m., "Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!" At a Macomb Township garden we're evaluating and continuing a years-long program of improving the lot of various trees on the property. In this one spot are great examples of what may go wrong with new trees plus all that can go right when the gardener recognizes and acts to correct problems. Although this session is geared to talking, looking and planning, it's impossible to rule out some digging and trimming -- so leave those dress whites at home! Free. Email or call Janet (JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850) for details and to reserve a spot in this limited-space workshop.

Saturday, September 27, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., "Holiday Decorations from Your Garden." A hands-on workshop sponsored by the Alpine Master Gardeners and the Michigan State University Extension. At the Livingston Township Hall in Gaylord, Michigan. \$30. For more information, contact Amanda at 989-983-4401, spiderwebranch@peoplepc.com.

Saturday, October 4, 2008, "Ohio State University Extension Master Gardener Conference." A whole day and a great line-up of topics, including Janet's descriptions of "Cutting back the rambunctious garden," "Doubling Up Perennials" and "The Collector: Engaging harmony from intriguing diversity," and "Mixed Borders." In Warren, Ohio at Kent State University, Trumbull campus. Open to Ohio State Master Gardeners and friends. For a description of the conference and registration information, check the website* or call Steve Hudkins at the OSU Extension (330-637-3530).

*Paste www.ohiomastergardener.com to your browser bar.

Thursday, October 9, 4:00 - 7:00 p.m., "Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!"
At a Farmington Hills garden, we're dividing perennials. Come learn a thing or two, try your hand at splitting the species you've hesitated to tackle, and bring your own divisions to share if you like. Free to my newsletter readers. Email or call Janet (JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850) for details and to reserve a spot in this limited-space workshop.

Saturday, October 18, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., "Cutting Back the Rambunctious Garden."
A hands-on workshop sponsored by the Detroit Garden Center. Learn to prune shrubs, trees and perennials that want to outgrow your garden. At the Nature Zoo on Belle Isle in Detroit, Michigan. \$35. For more information, call the Detroit Garden Center at 313-259-6363 or email detroitgardenctr@yahoo.com.

About attending Garden by Janet sessions:

We gardeners are let-me-see, hands-on people and that's how we learn best. In these sessions, I offer you that kind of chance to grow. You can visit me where I'm working and either watch or work with me side by side. I hope you'll bring your gloves and join in so you realize the most value for the time.

Janet prunes and explains as "Garden by Janet" participants Paul Needle, Margot McCormack, Priscilla Needle, David Randall and Nancy Randall watch, take their turns with the clippers, and exclaim over the spruce's transformation.
Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila



At the **gardens I tend through my business, Perennial Favorites:** I've worked for many years with some of my clients, who not only trust me with their landscapes but also understand my enthusiasm for teaching. They open their gardens to small groups who want to see and practice "how to." When the work I'm scheduled to do may be of interest to you and the situation allows on-lookers or apprentices, I invite you in.

I've volunteered in the **Detroit Zoo Adopt-A-Garden** program for 20 years. During that time more than 100 people have worked with me, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish much. The program requires that regular garden volunteers complete an interview and orientation process but you can try it for a time or two on a temporary pass as my student. **If you'd like to join me at the Detroit Zoo,** email mstgarden@yahoo.com. Make the subject line of your email "I'll help at the zoo with Janet." That email will put you in touch with my good friend Deb Tosch who keeps

my group's schedule straight while I plan and lead the work. You'll receive upcoming work dates and instructions for getting to the zoo and meeting up with my group.

Watch this space to join me in other non-profit gardening events and in gardens I design and tend.



Can you find at least five things that are different between these pictures? These tell the same-day before and after story of a landscape where a "Garden By Janet" session was held. Janet and her professional crew removed or transplanted overgrown and unnecessary plants -- dwarf Alberta spruce, redbud dogwood and juniper. Then, Janet and five "What's Up" readers pruned three trees to reduce their size. The crabapple and Colorado spruce each lost five feet in height and width. The weeping fernleaf Japanese maple gave up its hold on the walkway and in the process shed its sheepdog look to become a pretty little tree.

Photos ©2008 Steven Nikkila