What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns
Issue 67, November 14, 2009

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Right: After this week, holidays trump gardens. How about helping me to recap this past year and toast the new? See pages 3 and 9-11 for an explanation and more examples like the one at right: "After an overly wet spring, the weather was the best of what came up for us. So many fine days when we could walk in the woods, or take the dogs out to play Frisbee!"

Below: This *Ginkgo biloba*'s still a baby at 25. Even though it was purchased as a fruitless male variety, we'll still hold our breath until it's still fruit-free at 30 and beyond. Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Ginkgo goes for fall gold, sometimes ends its race quietly

Georgia writes: I have a **ginkgo** tree which **dropped most of its leaves** about 10 days ago **without turning color** yet another tree in the subdivision still has its leaves and they are about half way through turning yellow. Are there different varieties of *Ginkgo*? Seems as if last year my tree did change color and then dropped all of its leaves in one day.

Ginkgos do tend to drop all their leaves at once, Georgia -- whenever they drop them. Mine, this year, dropped all its leaves while still green. Yet some ginkgos in yards I tend hung in there and turned gorgeous gold before shedding all their foliage one windy day.

Many things can affect fall leaf color, including the tree's health, soil fertility, whether the summer was unusually dry or moist, how much difference there is between day and night temperature, the confluence of all of these factors and the timing of frost or freeze. Temperature's involved all along the way and may well have the biggest influence on when leaves finally drop.

Cold certainly had a hand last year in my area when trees in some spots were caught by an early hard frost. My gingko tree -- my whole yard -- was involved because it's the lowest spot in the neighborhood. Cold air pools here, so plants in my beds may be killed back when divisions of those same plants in yards two or three lots uphill go on for weeks.

Changing color in fall is **a living process.** **Leaves can't complete** a color change **if they die prematurely**.

Genetic differences between trees can affect fall color, too. One maple may be more red than another, or one ginkgo more gold than its fellows. Reliability can reside in the genes, as well -- some trees (like a red maple Steven and I have watched for 30 years in a State park near here) can put on a show even when external influences throw other trees off.

It can be disappointing when trees with potential miss their mark in developing **fall color**, yet it's also part of the fun. Variability makes **every year a lottery**. Although we hope our trees will show, we never put big money on them. Thus it's all just a game we can win but never really lose. Plus we know there's always "next year!"

Even more than its overall gold, I love to see ginkgo leaves (above) as they change. The green seems to drain from each fan-shaped leaf blade, replaced by an arc of gold along the outer edge (right side leaves, above) which recedes like a wave's imprint on the shore. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

We can't do much about most variables that go into the fall show. We just choose a good tree, then plant and tend it so it's as healthy as can be.

This is making the most of those genetic differences. Either choose a tree during fall that's outstanding in its batch at the nursery, or seek a clone known for superior color. To go that latter route, we check to see if a plantsperson made such a selection for us and did the legwork to name and promote the variety, which makes it available in the trade. When it comes to **ginkgos, one called 'Autumn Gold'** fits this bill, with **reliable color**, **deeper yellow** than most.

Trees of a particular variety may not be simple to find so I like to be sure the extra searching is going to be worth it. I haven't watched any 'Autumn Gold' ginkgos to form a personal opinion, only heard and read about them. (My own ginkgo is a weeper; no selections are readily available with both that form and fall color.) If I consider marrying myself to a particular variety of a tree and am not in a big hurry, I'll consult more books and experts and perhaps locate a ginkgo of this type I can watch for a couple years and compare to others.

Need to cure the soil when cukes die?

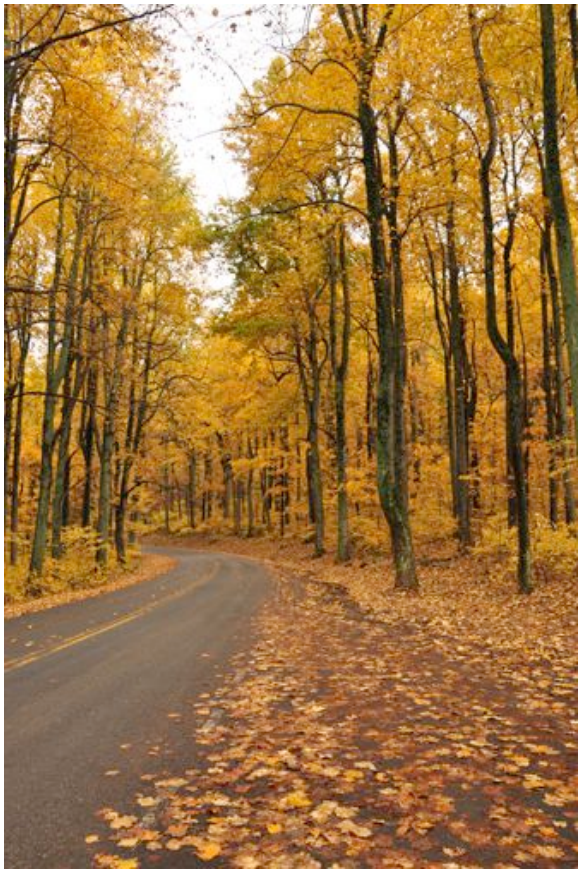
My **cucumbers** this year got **yellow spots** and **shrunk and wilted** before they matured. Not all of them, but toward the end of the summer, more so. My question is , is there something I should put in my soil to prevent this from occurring again next year? The same wilt type of thing happened to my friend's **tomatoes** in a different location. He got a lot of tomatoes, but the **leaves turned brown and wilted**. This might be from uneven watering because it is at a lake house location, but again, is there **something we should put in the soil?** - A.K. -

There is **nothing you can add** to the soil to deter that cucumber problem, A.K., but there is **something you can subtract**. Don't leave **debris** from any cucumber plant or fruit in the garden over winter, and don't plant cucumbers in the same place next year.

When disease is present, some infected debris always finds its way to the ground during the year despite our best efforts. So some spores probably remain there. **Rotation** keeps such infectious material from reaching epidemic levels by moving all host plants out of range until the spores expire.

The same advice applies when tomatoes have problems such as you describe. Most diseases that affect tomato don't cross over to cucumbers and vice versa, but standard remedies go a long way toward control of both sets of pathogens. Those remedies are **selection for resistance**, cleanliness, and rotation.

Enact those general controls, then **learn a problem's specific identity** so you will be able to time and tailor other preventive measures, such as avoiding fertilization when it may exacerbate an infection, or applying prophylactic fungicide. While your memory of the symptoms and sequence of events is fresh, read about bacterial blight* (*Pseudomonas syringae*) of cucurbits. It's a disease named for one of its hosts, the lilac (*Syringa*); it is also able to infect some other plants including cucumber and its relatives. Compare and consider fungal diseases such as anthracnose** of cucumbers, too.



This year hickories were as pretty as sugar maples. That's what came up best as I thought about fall. (Re: The BEST of What Came Up, pages 9-11) Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Next spring, choose cucumber and tomato varieties that resist diseases you've seen. The best seed company's catalog descriptions include this information.*** Avoid planting cucumber, squash or melon where you've grown other cucurbits in the past three years. Plant that space with other families -- tomato qualifies. Then, remove diseased plant matter any time you see it and end each year by removing or burying deeply all the remains of all host plants.

*To learn more, copy this URL to your browser: ipm.uconn.edu/IPM/veg/htms/lffrcuii.htm

**More at ipm.illinois.edu/diseases/series900/rpd920/index.html

***For example, copy to your browser: parkseed.com/gardening/PD/5526/

Disease in the soil: When sterility sounds good to a gardener

Gardeners faced with **plant problems** often wish for **"something to put in my soil."** If you find yourself wondering about this option, consider these facts:

To fumigate soil, some substance that can kill the problematic fungus, bacteria, insect or nematode must be applied so that it penetrates every pore throughout the root zone of susceptible plants. That requires a great volume of fumigant and high pressure.

Soil **fumigation with a liquid** would require huge amounts of pesticide-laced water, applied at just the right rate to penetrate thoroughly without run-off. This may take hours or days.

It's nearly impossible to achieve even penetration of liquid in soil that is not uniform in its condition. **If a gardener worked a bed** to get uniformity: 50% pore space, good drainage and adequate organic matter content throughout the top 18 inches of soil, the resulting improved rooting and vigor of plants would **probably reduce or eliminate plant disease** susceptibility.

Fumigating with steam or a gas under pressure, all contained under cover of plastic as is done in agricultural fields and in greenhouses, is not safe or practical for amateurs.*

Plant roots die from fumigating agents, too. Annual beds must be treated *between* growing seasons. Desirable perennials must be removed during fumigation. Woody plants' roots in a bed will be affected along with the shrubs and trees they serve.

Fumigants are not selective. They **kill both good and bad species** of the type of organism(s) they target. This is **not desirable** since the majority of fungi, bacteria and insect species in a soil are neutral or beneficial. These organisms' life processes promote soil crumb formation, release organic nutrients to roots and maintain aeration and drainage. Some species actively extend root systems. If a soil is sterilized, water soluble nutrients must be applied and measures taken to prevent soil compaction until soil life rebounds and regains balance.

Alternatives to fumigation with manufactured chemicals are:

- Heat via **solarization**. Soil is bared, smoothed, wetted, covered with clear plastic that is sealed along its outer edges, then left to absorb the sun's rays for at least one sunny summer month. The top several inches of the bed will reach 140°F, a temperature sufficient to kill most fungi, bacteria, seeds and insects/eggs.

- Addition of plant matter antagonistic to target diseases. Broccoli, for instance, is a deterrent to verticillium fungi so **broccoli residue** may be tilled into a field before it is planted with species that may be susceptible to verticillium wilt.

*It's not safe for pros, either and is no longer common practice since methyl bromide -- chief fumigant of modern times -- has been phased out. Read more by pasting this URL to your browser: epa.gov/Ozone/mbr/

There is more to life
than simply increasing its speed.

- Mahatma Ghandi -

To travel hopefully is
a better thing than to arrive.

- Robert Louis Stevenson -

Steven Speaks about stump rotters: Straight scoop from the short shovel

Sometimes I get so caught up in explanations why and how that I forget the power of a short, sweet, just-do-it approach. Until, that is, I overhear Steven Nikkila in conversations like this:

Ken: We **took down a tree**, a mulberry. The **stump's still there**. I figure we'll use some of that **stuff to dissolve it**. What do you think?

Steven: **Rent a stump grinder, work it out with an ax or shovel or just wait**. Otherwise you'll do some or all of that *plus* pay for the stuff you put on the stump.

Ken: Say what?

Steven: These products don't make the stump go poof. If it could really dissolve wood on its own, do you want to be pouring that around in your yard? No, these things say they speed up rotting... that's so you can break the stump up sooner. Plus, guess what? Nothing works to make something rot if it's dry so the stuff can't work unless *you* keep the stump wet. For years.

Ken: The one I got says I drill holes, put the stuff in and just keep adding water to those holes.

Steven: Oh, so read the whole label -- is it the one that starts with a dry stump and ends in you burning it out? Time to absorb the flammable stuff, and fire, that's what does the serious work.

Ken: I haven't opened it, I can exchange this.

Steven: So maybe then you get the one that says it can speed up rotting, like I said. Or maybe one I checked into once for new "live" stumps. That had a herbicide in it. Even if you don't mind what's listed on the herbicide's MSDS* about eye irritation, kidney trouble or fish dying, consider this: Herbicides in the soil kill fungi, but they're the main players in rotting. Where's that leave you? With an ax. Start chopping or grinding.

*Material Safety Data Sheet. The law requires the manufacturer make this information available on request. Most are posted on the Internet. Search on line for the active ingredient name and material safety data sheet

Big mistake, big lesson: Is that fruit I see on that ginkgo tree?

Since **mistakes are learning experiences**, our biggest blunders could be viewed as great treasures. If only we didn't have to pay the price!

Can we avoid the cost and advance as a group by pooling our bloopers? Let's try. Here's a **worst mistake made by a landscaper and/or city planner of 30 years ago**:

Someone in charge of tree selection looking for a tree other than American elm (a species recently wiped out by blight) chose ***Ginkgo biloba* to line residential avenues** in _____ (many city names might go here; Oak Park, MI and the Big Apple feature in emails I've received

recently). Ginkgo was at good choice, and also a bad one. Good because this species has few pests and grows well in cities. Bad because the **fruit that falls from this has a bad odor.**

Unfortunately, the person who made the mistake may never have realized the error. These trees don't mature and begin to bear fruit until they are about twenty years old.

Since ginkgo is a species that has separate male and female trees, the problem can be avoided by **planting only male (fruitless) varieties such as 'Princeton Sentry'.** Although the presence of so many pollen-only male trees would increase discomfort for hay fever sufferers in spring, many people feel that's preferable to putrid aroma build-up on windless days and residents' shoes smelling like vomit throughout late fall for having trod on fallen fruit.

One gardener's weed, another gardener's joy: Fruitful ginkgo trees

Ginkgo fruit ripens. When it drops it's sometimes called "stink bombs."
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

In North American landscapes where it stars on shade tree lists, **fruitless varieties of *Ginkgo biloba* are prized** because they spare people below the rotten smell of fallen ginkgo fruit. Yet in **Japan, Korea and China named female varieties abound** -- types selected by growers for the size, taste or reliability of the fruit. Those with low, spreading branches that make harvesting easier are also desirable.

That's because **the seed** inside the ginkgo fruit -- called a nut -- is both **edible and valued as a medicine**.

To use ginkgo fruit, harvest it from the tree or the ground, then **remove the skin and pulp**. Soaking in hot water for an hour or two can make pulp removal simpler. Be prepared to have some of the stink transfer to your skin if you work with bare hands, because that odor emanates from the pulp.

Avoiding contact with the pulp is a good idea for another reason. There is an oil in the fruit akin to poison ivy's toxin, which can cause an **allergic skin reaction**. So ginkgo collectors and processors should wear plastic gloves.

Dry the pistachio-sized seeds, **rinse** them once more then **roast, boil or fry** them until they turn green. Some people say they taste nutty, others call them sweet, and it's also said that they have no taste of their own but absorb flavors from other ingredients in the recipe.

Didja know? Cashew and poison ivy are cousins

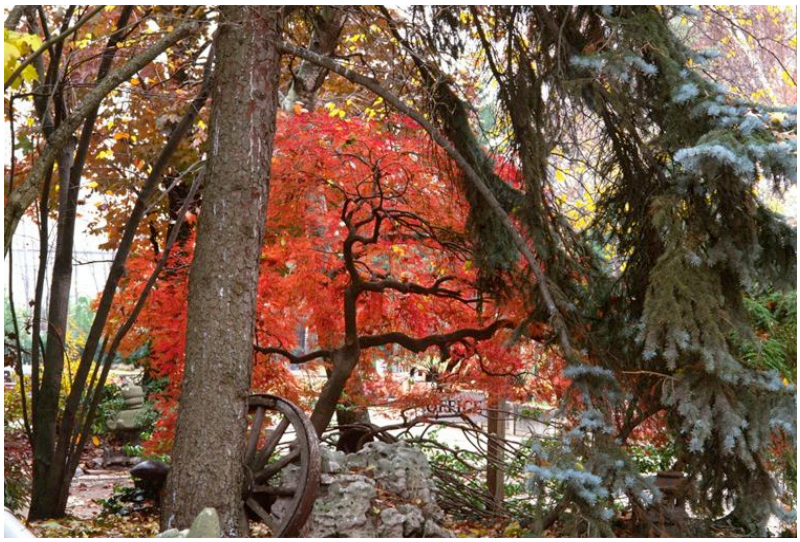
I type "allergic skin reaction" and "pistachio-sized" and I think of the **cashew family**, which includes the **pistachio** tree (*Pistacia vera*), **cashew** tree (*Anacardium occidentale*), **mango** tree (*Mangifera indica*), **smoketree**s (*Cotinus* spp.) and **sumac**s (*Rhus* spp.). More to the point currently in my mind, the family represents trouble to many people because some of its members contain toxic oil. The most well known of these are probably the poison ivy vine and **poison oak** shrub (*Toxicodendron* species), but cashew's a troublemaker, too.

The **leathery shell of a raw cashew nut contains the same oil that's in poison ivy**. Also, although that oil isn't in the nuts themselves, a good number of people are allergic to them. This colors my enjoyment of the nuts. When I eat them, I wonder whether someone in the tropics is scratching at a rash they have because they work in cashew processing. Most references advise that handlers wear gloves until after the roasting process causes the oil to be released from the shells into the air (where it's sometimes captured for use as a lacquer or a termite repellent).

Scrabbling in the garden, word play

Gardeners earn admiration when we display our produce in vases and on plates. Why not stir up more praise by tossing a nifty horticultural term or two on the table during the next Scrabble game? For instance:

Marcescent: mar SESS ent; adjective; describing plant **parts that remain on a plant after withering**, including leaves on juvenile (non-flowering) parts of oak, chestnut and hornbeam. These fade in color but then remain attached through winter to complete separation and drop to the ground in spring. This term can also be applied to a plant such as Japanese maple that doesn't normally hang onto leaves but which may be caught short in fall and retain leaves killed in place. Leaves must remain alive to fall away cleanly.
For **more on protecting Japanese maples**, join me in Livonia, Michigan on November 17 (**see page 14**) and/or stay tuned for issue #68.



If a hard freeze kills a Japanese maple's leaves before they finish producing a seal between their stalk and the twig, moisture can escape through the tiny hole left when wind or snow finally pulls that leaf free. This drying can, in turn, cause twig die-back during that winter. This understory maple is protected from sudden freezes -- something its species "expects." If such a tree is out in the open and can't complete its normal leaf drop, it's a candidate for treatment with anti-desiccant -- a.k.a. antitranspirant -- on a cold but not freezing day as winter nears. These spray-on products form a waxy protective layer over twigs and leaves that are at risk of drying out. Examples are Wilt-Pruf® and Moisturin®. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Traipse: verb; **to go about on foot**; also going about on foot without apparent plan.
This term has been made more specific by those who live with garden lovers and use it to in reference to traffic from garden into house, as in **"Stop traipsing all that dirt into my house!"**

This week in Janet's garden

Grow with me! This week I will:

Compile notes and drawings of the beds we just renovated, to **capture before we forget**:
- What we planted, where
- Where we expect to see and will need to address resurgence of specific weeds
- What plants we still need to obtain and where to plant them in spring

I've also drawn up notes about **how I renovate beds** that have slipped beyond simple re-making. I did it because just about everyone involved said one of these two things:
"Oh, so *that's* how you do that," or
"Now that I'm doing this I see what you mean."

As a special bonus, I'm giving you those notes are on **pages 17 - 20**.

See the tiny bulbs lodged in crevices of this peony crown? They are wild onions, a.k.a. ramps. "Look at that, they aren't even ashamed of themselves!" said Deb Hall, my right hand gardener in this bed renovation. (More about Deb on page 15.) Too true, Deb! Which is why even after we removed all we found as we dug over the beds we'll respect this weed's determination by expecting and planning to continue our anti-ramp campaign. Right now, that means smothering spaces where they may emerge because these cool season plants can double or triple in size by spring if their foliage reaches the sun. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

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Plant a new tree.
Protect a Japanese maple that can't stand up to winter without help.
See page 14 for Garden By Janet opportunities to join me for one or both.

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Keep an eye peeled for leftover holiday lights. Some people leave lights wrapped around trees for years. That can save decorating time but cost you the tree. I've seen limbs of all sizes and even main trunks girdled by electric wire. No matter how small the wire, it becomes an apt executioner when the tree runs out of room to expand in girth.

It happens quicker than even a gardener expects, that an expanding limb takes up the slack in its wire wrapping and girdles itself. We advised this tree's owner of what we saw, just in time. Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

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Get serious about the upcoming holidays. My plan involves:

The BEST of What Came Up

An idea for creating some merry holiday newsletters.

Seventeen times, I've **approached the winter holidays** with a bit of writer's **anxiety**. What to say about plants and gardens that anyone will want to hear about during that bustling time? (Keep in mind it must be *new* to meet my writing objectives. I don't care to re-hash.)

Should I simply take the second half of December as **vacation**? Not a smart move for she-who-maintains-the-pace-because-habit-reigns. So, should I **make predictions** about the upcoming year? Ha - as if anyone could!

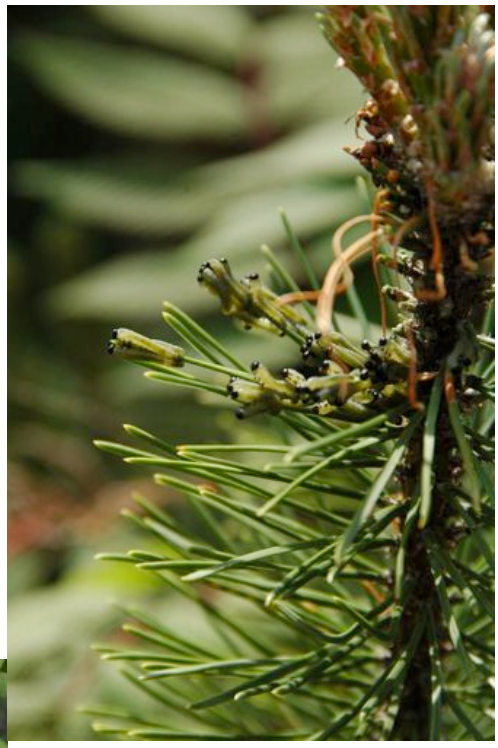
Most of the time I opt for a combination of **practicality and nostalgia** -- tips about gifts and decorations, for instance, plus a nod to past and expected beauty or fun.

This year **I'd like you to join me in summing up the season**. I think we can do a great job, given your intense and still increasing level of participation plus the fact that we've all become comfortable with technological wonders such as emailing photos.

If you're game, **email me your idea** and I'll compile them. Do this:

- Choose something great -- plant, situation or idea -- that came up in your garden this year.
- Describe it in **50 words** or less.
- Include **a photo** if you wish. Attach the photo to the email as a file in .jpg format.
- If you send a photo, include the **name of the photographer** we should credit. We must have the photographer's permission to use the photo.
- Include your postal address. Steven and I have some gifts for contributors.

Here are some of Steven's preliminary entries as examples. We're looking forward to hearing yours. Look for **our joint effort in issues 73 and 74**, December 26, 2009 and January 2, 2010.



Right: "I'll nominate a pest for "best" -- pine sawfly," says Steven. 'It qualifies because for once I remembered to get out there and knock all the sawflies off *before* they ate away all of last year's needles!" Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Left: Steven sees this photo, simply as a photo, as an example of the BEST of What Came Up. It's captivating, and makes me want to stay forever in that day when the creeping forget me not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) was blooming all around this statue's nose.
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Tollgate Farm (Meadowbrook at 12 Mile Road in Novi, Michigan) almost closed because of State budget cuts. It survived, last minute. How I would miss shooting in its peaceful, pretty places. Probably some people who bring their kids to its children's garden don't even know they nearly lost this gem!

I rank it with the year's best ideas, seeing the railroad set-up in Longwood Gardens (Kennett Square, Pennsylvania). Just as I was saying to myself, "I want a train in our garden!" a little redheaded boy who could've been me 50 years ago, ran up and said exactly that. Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

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

Grins: To an incredibly **warm, sunny November**. I'd love it any year but I'm especially happy with it this year when we had perennial beds to remake in a wet area. The last half of fall is the only time it's practical to work in a wet bed and we expect to tough that out in the cold. This year the work was just plain delightful.

Grow-ans: To **unearthing unsuspected or unexpectedly involved trouble** on the last divisions of the year. When the peony shows itself to be ravaged by fungus and the coral bell comes up with root weevils clinging, simple division exercises can turn into long story problems!

Pitted peony needs help!

Peonies are susceptible to leaf spots that can progress to become stem infections. Then they travel down to the crown and decay the root. When I lifted this peony it was with the intention of removing any weeds, dividing it to obtain the most vigorous piece, then re-setting it in a new spot within the garden. Seeing this extensive damage and realizing how many fungal spores must reside in those divots and hollows, I had to change my plan. To salvage it I chose the piece with the most plump buds, cut away the infected material, then cleaned it with a bleach-water solution (peroxide would have worked, too). In the end I was left with smaller starts than anticipated. It may have been better to hot compost the infected plant and start fresh.

Sometimes the peony with this kind of problem is very special. If it's Aunt Mel's grandma's treasure, the best course is to think small. Here's the best segment I could find (right).

Is it any wonder so many peony transplants fail to bloom the next year? Think how many spores are ready to transfer from infected spots here to new shoots, come spring, killing any bud before it even begins to swell!

Then, I cut away bad tissue and cleaned what remained with bleach and water on cotton tipped swabs. The resulting division is quite small (below) but it's willing -- see the new roots it's already developing? It's also a good idea to relocate this plant to a bed where peonies have not been grown, in the full sun and great drainage peonies need to be at their best.

Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

When evil weevils crop your coral bells' roots

If in fall you dig up a coral bell (*Heuchera*) or any of the 100+ species that are prey to root weevils you may notice notched foliage or that they lack new white roots. Check for black vine weevil grubs in the crown and in the soil next to the plant. They are now about the size of cooked barley grains, yet a perennial may die if it must continue to support even a few of these grubs from November to May. Think of weevil grubs as ravenous adolescents, able to eat huge amounts and do twice as much damage in this stage as in their infancy. Clean the perennials' roots to be sure they are rid of all weevils, squashing every grub you find. Then, move the host plants to a bed that's free of weevil symptoms. Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Who's Janet?

A trowel and notebook gardener. Janet gardens professionally but cultivates learning as diligently as she does her clients' gardens. This is because she's so often benefited from what others have told her and from what she's learned in researching questions for other gardeners. She's written ten books, produced a Q&A column weekly since 1993, created and run a gardening school, speaks to groups and teaches classes every chance she gets. "What I know for certain after all this time are just two things. One, that I'm never going to know enough to be completely on top of a garden -- even if I could remember everything at the right times to keep every plant in line, Mother Nature always has something new for me to learn. Two, that even though there are always more things going right than wrong in a garden I must focus on the positive or I might miss it *all*. Every minute in a garden can be wonderful if I keep those two things in mind." Email questions to her at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

Where to catch Janet and friends* in-person:

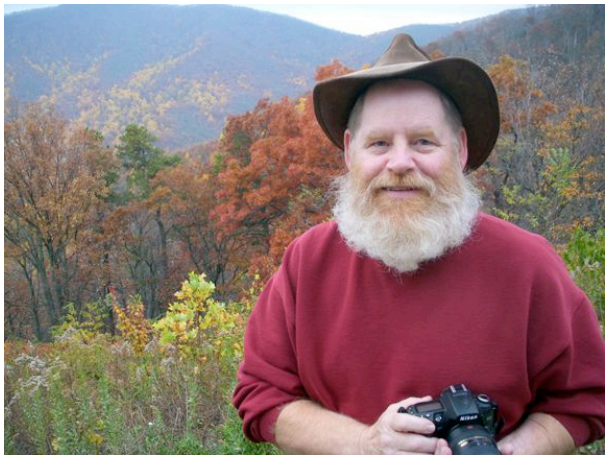
*See November 19, "Santa?!", January 30 and "Invite Janet or Steven" on page 15.

Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools! At the **Belle Isle Nature Zoo,** Detroit's beautiful Belle Isle Park, come **plant a tree** with Janet to learn about planting and the advantages of native trees. **November 16 at 2 p.m..** Interested? Come on down to the Nature Zoo . For directions to the Belle Isle and the Nature Zoo on the island, copy this URL to your browser detroitzoo.org/Visitors/Nature_Center/Directions/ Once you're at the Nature Zoo, look for me on the deer trail -- my planting party will be visible from the road on the side of the building opposite the parking lot.

Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools! On site in **Livonia, Michigan,** come see why and how to **protect an at-risk Japanese maple from winter's worst.** **November 17 at 2 p.m.** Interested? Send an email to JMaxGarden@aol.com for the details.

Thursday, November 19, 7:30 p.m., **Indoor and Outdoor Bulbs**. A talk by Deb Hall. (More about Deb on page 15.) Sponsored by the Men's Garden Club of Grosse Pointe. At Brownell Middle School in **Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan.** No reservations necessary.

Santa?! Many dates and places around Southeast Michigan. That's right folks, the resemblance is no accident. **Steven Nikkila is a Santa's Helper.** He's pretty sure that Santa is one of his Finnish kin, so he does his best to assist that jolly old elf by collecting wish lists from kids and gardeners each holiday season. Look for him at the Village of Rochester shopping mall in Rochester, Michigan, and other locations. You can send him your gardening wish list -- we'll publish them here before the holiday. Then you can leave a print-out of this newsletter where your special someone can find it as a hint! Or to invite Santa Steve to your holiday gathering, contact him at hortphoto@gmail.com or 248-681-7850.



Some of you have noticed the resemblance...

Stay tuned here for:
December, January and February. Garden and landscape design classes, in and around the Detroit area. Multi-session, hands-on workshops -- Janet's long-time specialty.

Tuesday, January 12, 2010. "What's Coming Up for professional gardeners." Join Janet at the **Association of Professional Gardeners meeting.** Details will be available here and at www.associationofprofessionalgardeners.org

Thursday, January 14, 7:00 p.m. **"Saving Time and Money in the Garden."** Economize with Janet at **Cromaine District Library, Hartland, Michigan**.

Saturdays, January 23, January 30 and February 6, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. **"Garden Design, New Plants,** and **Janet & Steve's 50 Favorite Before-Afters."** These sessions featuring Janet Macunovich, Cheryl Bennerup and Steven Nikkila are sponsored by The Detroit Garden Center as part of its 19th annual winter seminar series. They'll be held at Historic Trinity Church auditorium, 1345 Gratiot near Easter Market in Detroit. Registration information will be available here and through The Detroit Garden Center at 313-259-6363, detroitgardenctr@yahoo.com or www.detroitgardencenter.org.

Invite Janet or Steven or their expert friends to your club or 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 or "hybridizing" from what we already have.

So, whether it's...
- 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're game!

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 (top) have been digging, shooting and teaching how-to for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the early '90s and then ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring instructors who knew their stuff in the garden as well as knowing how to get their messages across in front of a group. That line-up includes people like Deb Hall (above) and Cheryl Bennerup (left). Deb's a professional gardener who's dug many a planting hole and made artful additions to lots of gardens with Janet as well as impressing her with unmatched ingenuity, creativity and humor. Cheryl and Janet began their relationship 20 years ago when Cheryl grew perennials for Janet at her Milford, Michigan greenhouse and continues today as Janet taps into Cheryl's know-how as chief of propagation and troubleshooting at one of the country's largest perennial growers, Sunny Border Nursery in Connecticut. Janet and Steve are glad to help you themselves or refer you to others to meet your group's need. Contact them at JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850 when you want to set up a talk, workshop or class.

About attending Gardens 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 you can 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.

At the **gardens I tend through my business, Perennial Favorites:** My clients understand my enthusiasm for teaching. Some 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, I invite you in.

A complete library of Janet's gardening how-to on one CD... just $24.

Is this *What's Coming Up* newsletter useful to you? Imagine how a whole year of these weekly newsletters could help your garden grow.

Now imagine *SIX YEARS* of the same: 1,681 gardeners' questions answered, with no repeated topics! And picture that collection fully indexed and searchable by any key word you can type.

That's what you can have on my CD, *Asking About Asters*! It's six books plus one comprehensive index. Each book contains a full year of weekly Q&A.

Mac- and Windows compatible.

The price including shipping, is
just $24
(Michigan residents include tax,.
total $25.44. In Canada, $30).

To get a copy of my CD, send a check payable to Janet Macunovich,
to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328-3041.
Include your name and full mailing address.

My CD has everything from six of my books: How to prep soil, design, choose and de-bug plants, plus one A-Z index!

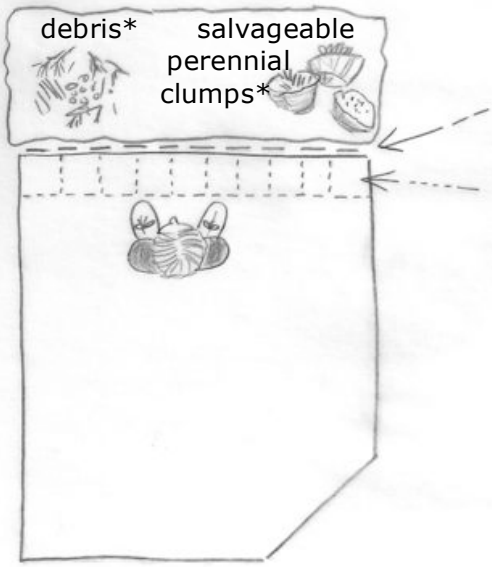
Packed with information that's easy to access. Type any key word into the index's "Search" field to receive a click-thru list of every place those "hydrangea" facts, winter interest tips, acidity explanations, etc. appear in this CD's 6 books.

Bonus pages: Renovating a perennial bed

This week I've been renovating perennial beds that had were **bogged down with weeds** and **crowded with aggressive perennials**. It's **a good time to redesign**, too. So I aimed to eliminate uncontrollable species, make adjustments to suit current growing conditions and add better behaved, clump forming perennials.
If you've never renovated a perennial bed that's crossed the line from mannerly to wild, or done it only to be disappointed with the results, try this approach. It's served me well for many years.

In brief, I **clear** the bed, **clean up** the salvageable, worthy perennials, and **replant**.
What I've written here **may sound obsessive**. I know because a trainee we once had asked, "Is this a cult?" Nope! **It's based on experience** recognizing our common mistakes, the resurgent power of established plants and our desire to do it once and have it last.

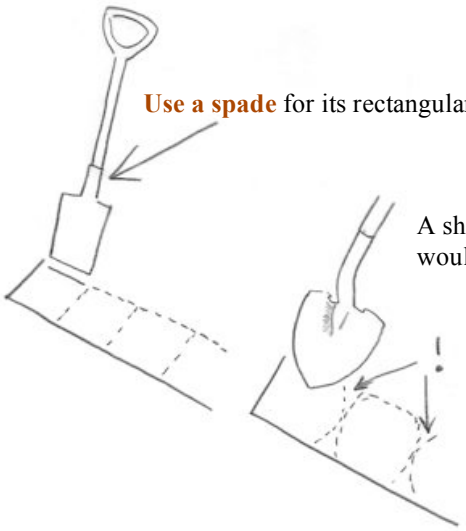
First, **cut back all perennial tops** except true evergreens. If you do renovations in fall you'll be able to level most of the work area and make it simpler to clear.



Then, slice all along one edge to **make a clean division between the bed and its surrounding**. If the bed already has in-ground edging, skip this step. That edge is the break.

Now, **cut, lift and clear** all running roots, bulbs and perennial crowns from **every square foot** of soil in the bed.
Begin in a six-inch deep row along a bed edge. Slice down into the soil parallel to the bed edge, and lean back on your spade handle to lever each portion out of the bed. Cut crosswise, too, if roots below prove too dense to break into a 6" x 6" chunk.

Break apart and **sift each chunk**. Do this work over the row you're currently digging, or on a tarp. Don't work above ground that's yet to be dug. If you do, the fall-out of loose soil will confuse the digging in that area. In addition, sliced bits of weed aggressive perennial root will fall there that are small enough to slip unnoticed -- replant themselves! -- into the soil as you dig over that spot.

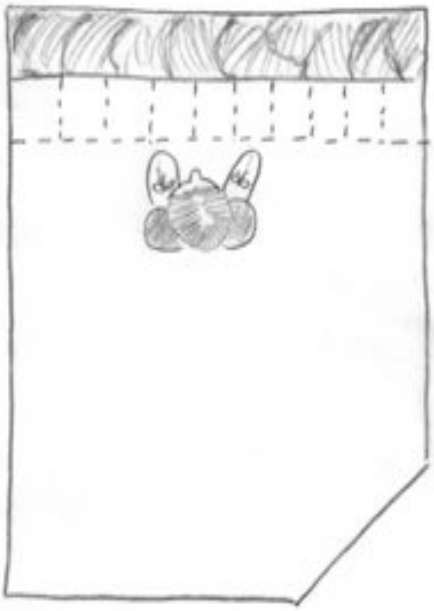


Use a spade for its rectangular blade, which is able to lift every bit of soil.

A shovel's cupped blade is not best for this job. Chunks (at the ! below) would escape attention along the scalloped row. In there, root fragments would grow with the gusto of a plant freed from competition.

*Position a **tarp or 2 wheelbarrows close by**.
Accumulate **debris** in one spot, **salvageable clumps** of desirable perennials in another.

When the first row of soil is all cut and cleaned, step back six inches and cut the next row.

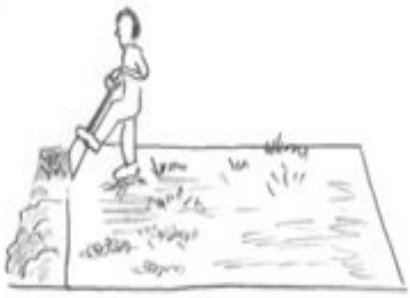


Always **stand on as-yet undug soil** in the bed.
Dig and work only in front of yourself.

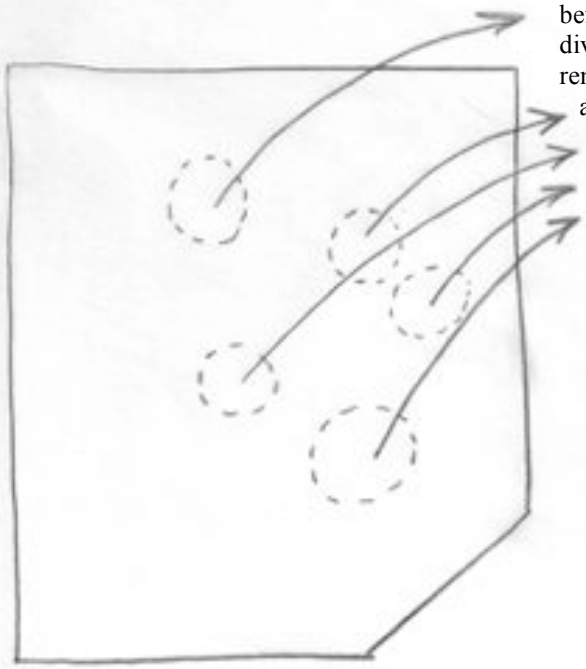
Split all perennials you save.
When you do, **clean them completely** of all weeds.
Plants that are aggressive by root or seed infiltrate the tiniest spaces and can regenerate quickly from small bits -- they may even reestablish with greater than normal speed once crowding is alleviated.

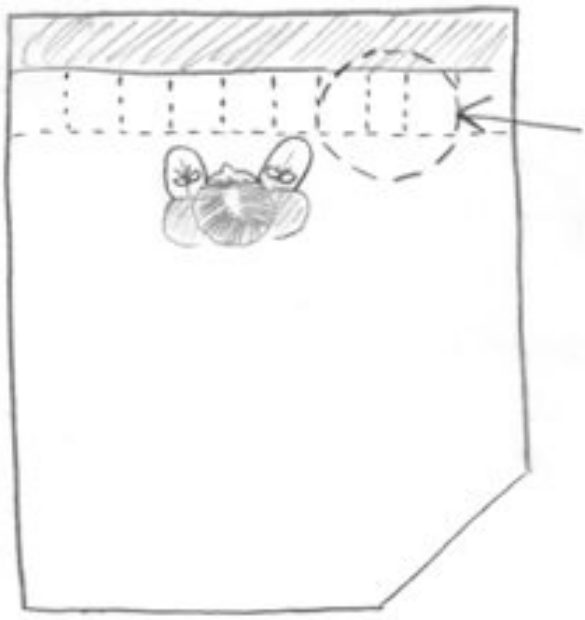
Throw away most of every colony.
Replant only healthy, vigorous pieces from the outer edges of existing clumps.

When a desirable perennial is completely bare root you know it's going to come back clean.



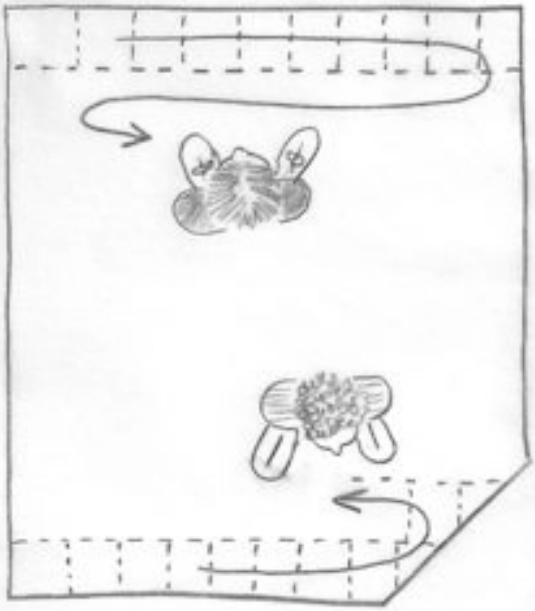
If you'd like, lift a clump of each desirable perennial before you dig over the whole bed. However, do all division of these first clumps outside the bed that you're renovating. Then, cut the bed into rows and clean the soil as I've already described.



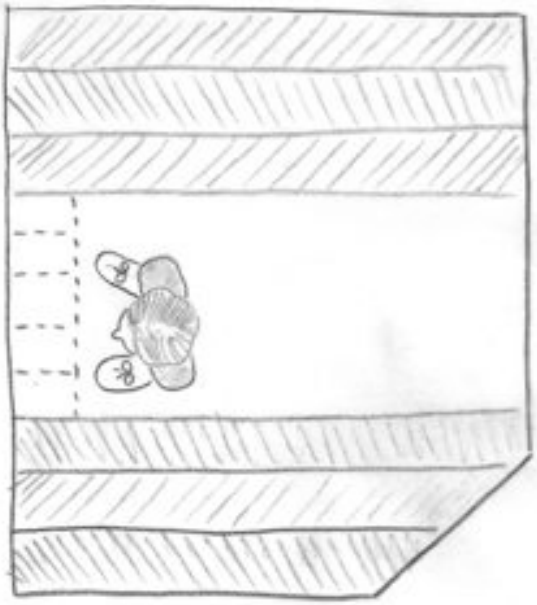


If a perennial clump is larger than six inches in diameter, cut through it (you'd be dividing it anyway!) or slice all around it as you come to it and lift it up and out of the bed for division.

Keep track of how many wheelbarrows or bags of debris you remove. Bring in an equal volume of compost or compost-soil mix, spread it and rake it level over the bed before replanting. If you don't, a bed that looks level right after clearing will settle to reveal craters. Growing conditions will be substandard in these low spots and plants there will suffer.



If two or more people are working in one bed, put distance between you so the loose soil and debris from one will not end up scattered in the other's space to be trampled back in or to mask skipped spaces.



When two people meet after working in from two edges toward the center, turn and work over the no-man's land at right angles to previous rows.

Correction: To Issue #66 fertilizer calculations

With many thanks to Eric Hofley (publisher of The Michigan Gardener magazine) for bringing it to my attention that I published the chart below with a wrong dimension for the circular bed of 100-square feet. I wrote "30' diameter" when it should be about 11 feet, as below.

I've corrected the original issue and will be re-sending that to everyone this week so that those who keep all the issues will not run up against that error at some critical juncture. If you do not need the revised issue simply delete my next email, "Special delivery of revised Issue #66."

Fertilizer for the math-challenged

We multiply, divide, add to beds, subtract lawn, but hate to figure fertilizer.

Here's help:

Using a slow-release organic fertilizer with a three-number label designation beginning in:	**Apply this much fertilizer per 100 sq. ft.** (A bed 10 x 10' or circular 11' diameter):
2-x-x, such as Milorganite 2-3-2	5 pounds
3-x-x, such as 3-2-3 Fertrell	3-1/3 pounds
4-x-x, such as 4-3-4 Holly-tone®	2-1/2 pounds
5-x-x, such as 5-3-2 poultry manure	2 pounds

Aim to apply nitrogen at the rate of one pound per 1,000 square feet and do this twice a year for a total of 2 pounds of nitrogen. Apply other nutrients at the same rate unless a soil test indicates a greater or lesser need for the others.

To calculate how much nitrogen is in a package of fertilizer, multiply the package weight by the first number in the package's analysis, then divide by 100. So a 20-pound bag of fertilizer labeled 5-5-5 contains one pound of nitrogen:
(20 x 5) / 100 = 1