

#### What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns Issue 119, November 17, 2010

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### Still digging those dahlias?

I wasn't going to save the dahlia we grew this year but now I'm remembering that every time I find one I really like, this year's for instance, I can't find the same kind next year. Is it too late to dig it up? The top's been dead for weeks. – M.W. –

The Dahlia Hill Society of Midland traces its roots to a single red and yellow *Dahlia* in sculptor Charles Breed's garden four decades ago. Now the group plants and lifts 3,000 *Dahlia* clumps every year. It's a good place to go to see *Dahlia* flowers during the season, hear how best to grow and learn how to store them over winter.



Late fall is not too late to lift *Dahlia*s. It usually takes weeks after the growing season ends for the soil to cool enough to damage those tubers. We dug them one year at Thanksgiving and they kept just fine.



Peggy Kernstock, Administrative Director (and head gardener) at Dahlia Hill Society of Midland\* gives Janet a demonstration of how the group's gardeners handle the 3,000 *Dahlia* plants they lift each fall.

Janet was surprised the clump would be split in fall, rather than just before replanting in spring. "Don't you lose tubers to rot in storage, then? Or do you use a fungicide to keep the cut surfaces from rotting?"

"No," and "no" were the answers. Kernstock explained, "We divide them now because they take less room in storage when they're in pieces. We washed all the soil off of them right where we dug them. Then we bag the clump and label it. They sit for a bit here in the workroom while we finish digging. They're still pretty moist when we put them in boxes."



So how many pieces do you get from each clump? Kernstock cut through the stalk so each set of tubers kept a bit of stalk. "This one will make maybe... three pieces," she said, snipping twice and then cutting off one bad toe. "Then we dip them in a weak bleach solution, maybe 50:1 water to bleach."

Wouldn't it be great to have a workroom like this for preparing tender perennials for a winter's rest? (Below, Dahlia Hill Society's work space.)

The Dahlia roots, all 250 varieties, go into boxes, are covered in vermiculite and the shelved in this root cellar (botom of page). The gardeners check them about once a month through winter to check for any gone bad and remove them before they can affect others. Says Kernstock, "We probably only lose 10% of the roots over winter."

"In the spring we check them for buds," says ernstock. "We throw out any that haven't budded."

The buds are like the eyes on a potato. They begin to develop toward winter's end.



The group replants what they need to fill their garden's eight impressive terraces, and sell the others to raise operating funds.

\*For more about this group that tends a dahlia- and sculpture garden in Midland, Michigan, check www.dahliahill.org



Love *Dahlia* or some other flower? "Grow" it on your wall! See page 13.

#### Lawn fertilizer's a go, fungicide no

Is it too late to put down slow release lawn fertilizer? I prefer an organic one.

Also, our lawn started showing many areas of rust-type fungus in late summer (September) -- not enough to kill the grass as we have seen in a few limited spots in years' past. But this is more widespread. Will it die off during the hard freeze? I have noticed that there is a fall fertilizer I can buy with a fungicide in it. Is that necessary or even beneficial at this point? - C.R. -

Late fall is **not too late to apply fertilizer**. It's called dormant feeding, although that's a misleading term since cool season lawn grasses such as bluegrass and fescue do quite a bit of growing in late fall and again in early spring while our attention is elsewhere. As roots grow, they absorb nutrients and can store them. The soil can also store nutrients if those elements are in "raw" form in carbon-based materials.

So apply a **slow release** organic product for best effect on the plants and the soil. Look for a fertilizer that is based on manure (Groganic, Driconure, etc.) or other agricultural by-products (mixtures of feather meal, bone meal, corn gluten, cottonseed meal, fish meal and so on; check Espoma and Ringer company labels as examples). Those organic, carbon-based products will be breaking down and being taken up by the grass whenever soil microorganisms have enough heat to work -- and some of those tiny creatures work in the cold, stopped only by freezing.

For fall dormant feeding, steer clear of granular products\* that are slow to release only because the granules themselves have been coated to prevent dissolving below a certain warm temperature. You may as well wait until spring if they are your choice. Keep in mind that they will not improve the soil by

The rusty lawn

Rust is a fungal disease that causes grass to look yellow and then break out with yellow, orange or red pustules -- often in parallel lines on the leaf or stem. Rust can disfigure and weaken a lawn. It's not seen as often as other lawn diseases but like most of them, it is more common when the grass is in tough shape to begin with.



Our photo library is shy of lawn photos. For pictures and more details about rust, copy this URL to your browser http://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/BP/

BP-110-W.pdf

adding carbon. Osmocote and Once are common representatives of this group.

Don't apply a fungicide. It isn't the right time in the disease cycle and it is at any timing a tactic less likely to produce results than others. We disdain those who sell such a product in the fall.\*

Most university turf production and management references as well as Extension bulletins on lawn care concur in this: Fungicide as treatment for lawn disease is generally a last resort. Taking steps to maintain and improve the lawn's health and vigor are the better answer.

Lawns stressed by drought, growing in compacted soil, being scalped, or suffering from nitrogen deficiency tend to be most susceptible to diseases, rust among them. If you have not fertilized regularly in the past, the simple act of doing so now may make a big difference. Take additional steps to treat the lawn to more regular watering, frequent light mowing rather than occasional severe cuts, overseeding with resistant grass varieties plus annual core aeration and you should have no need for fungicide.

If you see patches of rusty-looking lawn next year, bag your clippings to cut down on the amount of diseased tissue and spores in the area. Then, if rust continues to be a problem despite stepped up lawn care and cleanliness, fungicide might be worth trying.

\*It's difficult to be fair when we research and list specific products. We provide examples to save you time and be clear in explanation but will follow the lead taken in various Extension bulletins, which is to say that the products we list represent the best information available but the lists aren't exhaustive. We do not intend criticism of products not listed, nor do we endorse those listed. That said, we can also say that although we look into products routinely marketed at inappropriate times -- certain high-profile fungicides and insecticides chief among them -- we do that research for learning's sake but skip over them when we choose examples.



We turn lots of lawn area into garden, and deplore the commitment of millions of acres to grass monoculture... yet we recognize turf's worth. Thus these new beds are done but not the whole job -- not until that lawn's whipped back into shape as a suitable frame.



*Deutzia* shrubs are charming when they bloom in spring, but who would notice if the lawn was a mess?

### Think you're a good gardener? Hah! Bow to the master of the lawn!

Lawn questions make us wince, not for lack of answers but because the solutions to most involve fundamental changes over large areas. Soil is only very rarely prepared effectively before a lawn is planted. It's tough, but essential, to improve soil retroactively so plants can achieve the good health that makes a great lawn.

Even everyday lawn care on the average property is daunting. We must coax a million plants of a single species to grow well and evenly across sub-par and uneven conditions. Some plants are in shade, others in dry sun, soggy spots, hard packed soil, or exposed to heat and run-off from pavement. When something goes awry, it involves thousands of square feet and often cannot be corrected without at least a year of savvy, deliberate and unfailing action.

So can we be blamed for simply eliminating lawn that's not an essential foot path, playing field or uniform groundcover? We can even make the case that vast lawns are not a sound ecological choice. Thus lifting the sod -- that first step in repairing soil conditions -- may turn into the planting of a site-right combination of low care shrubs and groundcover.

Yet few frames make a garden look so good as a carpet of velvety, uniform green. So, all hail the undaunted lawn gardener!

# We keep lawn growing constantly. Any wonder that it needs vitamins?!

It wants to be eight inches tall. We cut it every time it tops four. The foliage it loses does not wane gradually and so cannot gradually give back to the plant the nutrients that went into its making. As it's sliced away it's simply removed from the lawn grass plant's internal equations, and its essence will be distributed across its whole ecosystem.

#### Fertilizer is not "food."

Plants make their own food from sun, air and water. Fertilizer is much more like vitamins, and as important to growing plants as vitamins are to children. So do fertilize your lawn to make up the loss to mowing. The average, minimal care residential lawn should probably be supplemented with between 1 and 2 pounds of actual nitrogen for every 1,000 square feet each year, preferably in early Fall. If you use a fertilizer with first number "5" (such as 5-3-3), that means 20- to 40 pounds spread on a lawn 50' wide and 20' deep.

For more, copy this URL to your browser http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg3338.html

#### Pick your battles to win the war: Fight rust and other fungi in their season.

Rust spores lay dormant over winter and begin infecting leaves once nights reach about 70°F. Then, the spores develop fungal threads that enter leaf pores. Once inside they grow further, sapping the leaf, and eventually returning to the open as new spores. Rust's development is most rapid when skies are cloudy and air temperature is above 80°F. Grass that remains wet for long periods of time during infectious periods is also primed for disease.

We can sometimes protect leaves from initial infection if we can coat them with a fungicide that has effect against the particular disease. It's a preventive, and must be kept on the leaf during infectious periods. While the fungus is resting as a spore, as when it's developing within the leaf, fungicides have little effect.

#### Now, two requests of *you*! Nominate a pesty fall leaf, submit a bird poem.

Want to **vent about fall leaf** chores? Which trees or situation do you nominate as the worst?



Can share with us a poem about a bird or a garden? It can be one you know or one have you written, from tiny ditty to epic work. We're making a collection of such poems in preparation for a fun event in the new year -- details here soon!

Email your leafy laments and avian verse to JMaxGarden@aol.com.



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#### This week in Janet's garden

#### Grow with me! This week:

We protect a few near-and-dear things that need help when we're off duty and it's most cold. On this page: Roses. For rabbit-magnets and grapeholly, read on.

## C.B. asks, "Is it too early to protect grafted roses?"

Not too early. Once there has been enough cold to kill the rose's foliage, you can safely mound over the graft union.

Then, when you plant your next hybrid tea — because losing and replacing is a constant for Northern gardeners even if conditions are as rose-right as possible — follow the cold leader. That's Morden Research Station in zone 3-4 Ontario, where roses are planted with the graft union several inches below ground so that critical juncture is *always* protected.

'Mr. Lincoln' is for many reasons our all-time favorite hybrid tea rose. Not the least is that he survives the winter without extra attention from us and is now celebrating his 20th

anniversary with us. His winter hardiness is probably boosted because we planted his graft union three inches below grade.



At Olbrich Botanical Gardens the roses are sleeping now. That's leaf compost in the wire cages, loose and airy so heat from the ground will linger around the rose's base.

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#### More protection:

L.S. exclaims, "I never thought the rabbits would eat every leaf of my new perennials!" Next year, a cage around such plants is a good bet, and/or repellent sprays starting at the crack of spring so new foliage tastes bad as it grows. However, rabbits and other herbivores almost always beat us to the plants in spring. So it's a better bet to start barring the bunnies now, placing cages or fencing that train them to go around those plants. And plan to use less tasty species in the future.



Left: At many public gardens such as Dawes Arboretum in Newark, Ohio, the staff doesn't kid themselves about animal damage to plants. The critters are out there 24-7, and hungry. They may favor some foods but will at least taste anything new, so cages around favored and new plants are a must, or a pest-proof fence all the way around the park.

Lower left: See the cages? IS this spruce weeping at the confinement? We think not -- rather it's able to relax behind its protective screen!

Below: Annual periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*) is a mighty plant. Yet we won't be surprised if one day we find some leaves chewed, since some food preferences must be learned and some young animals have better teachers than others. Plus there are always very hungry animals that will experiment -- taking a nibble that's not enough to kill, but enough to detect the poisons. When that happens, damage can add up as a whole community of animals each takes a taste.

Insects leave (Madagascar periwinkle)
Catharanthus roseus out of their diets.
So, for that matter, do deer. The reason
is that the plants are loaded with
alkaloids so potent that they are the
source of vincristine and vinblastine.
These are drugs important in routines of
chemotherapy for treating Hodgkin's
disease and certain forms of leukemia.



- Allen Lacy -The Gardener's Eye and Other Essays

#### More protection:

N.P. wonders whether heaping leaves up over the Oregon grapeholly (Mahonia aquifolium) will stop the plant from losing half its leaves as it does in her garden most winters. It probably will help, N.P., but it will take a heck of a big leaf pile. We think that situation begs



Even a *dwarf* grapeholly is 3-4 feet tall. (Above, it's on the right: *Mahonia aquifolium* 'Compactum' wearing its winter purple coloration). In exposed zone 5 and all zone 4 locations you might cover it with leaves so that warmth from the ground surrounds its foliage, but that calls for a *big* leaf pile. Also, we usually choose such a plant for the visual pleasure of seeing green in winter, so why hide it? We give up growing evergreens that need that kind of help in winter.

\*\*\*\*\*\*

Also in Janet's garden this week, we're going to:

**Imagine snow.** It's cruel, we know, but necessary to think about it in advance. We picture where we'll be piling the white stuff when we shovel. Then we can move things and prune or tie back branches rather than having to deal with that chore or see plants broken some snowy morning.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Sort our tools** according to what needs **cleaning**, **sharpening** and other work. We'll be cohosting tool repair parties all over Southeast Michigan this coming February -- and maybe elsewhere. (We're game -- invite us! See page 12.) Watch this newsletter for tool care party dates and places.

A little rust is no big deal, right? Wrong! Smoother surfaces and sharper edges mean much less effort for the gardener. We may not be able to return a rusty spade to new condition but with oil, wire brush, scouring pad and file we can go a long way.



Just a note to thank you again for giving me the opportunity to come to your tool cleaning party. What a difference it made - my clippers are downright dangerous now and knowing how to keep them that way makes me feel so powerful!

Right: Deb Hall, Celia Ryker, Kari Grady, Carol Ebner make their tools shine.



**Green thumbs up** to asking why it died, and sticking with the investigation until you know what went wrong. Kudos to G.M. who dissected several spruce trees that died and recognized a killer in soil heaped up against their trunks when a berm was raised around the trees 12 years ago. The story told by the tree's annual growth rings was incontrovertible -- growth slowed to near-stop 12 rings ago. So death began with the berm, although the dying only became clear to human observers in its last stages.

**Green thumbs down** to the moist, warm air that **fogs eyeglasses** as we work in cold weather, especially when it's our own warmth vented through the neck of a shirt. Drat that bellows effect when we bend, force the hot air out and then can't see!

#### Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

**Someone fascinated by the** *process* **of gardening.** Janet Macunovich began gardening for others when she ran out of places to make new gardens at her own home. " I've learned a lot of wonderful things over 25 years of gardening, writing and teaching but the flexibility of the process and its never-ending newness is the best fact of all. I was hooked from the first time I worked in someone else's yard. That's when I saw that what we do to make a garden has to be modified for *every place*. Now 'my' gardens grow in several States and each one is unique, even those that are full of the same plants. The plants behave differently in each place. All of this

makes it a delight and a privilege to work for others and

to help readers who ask for advice."

The voice behind the captions of many gardening books and articles. When publishers began asking him to not only supply photos for books, magazines, catalogs and calendars but suggest captions, Steven Nikkila's voice began to develop to match his talented and experienced eye. His visual perspectives have delighted readers and students of gardening for a quarter century. His captioned advice and observations go back about a dozen years. Both aspects are both fresh and enduring.





Steven loves to grow and to shoot pictures but he also enjoys serving as Santa's helper in our off-season. If you shop at Village of Rochester stores in Rochester, Michigan, look for him on the weekends in the gazebo!

Email him on the weekends in the gazebo! questions to Janet or Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850.

#### Where to catch Janet & Steven in-person:

**Friday, December 3**, 7:30 p.m. Janet is at the **Pleasant Ridge, Michigan, Community Center** (4 Ridge Road in Pleasant Ridge) courtesy of the Detroit Rose Society. She'll explain her approach to *Growing Roses in the Mixed Border*. Free, no advance registration required. For more information about the Detroit Rose Society, www.detroitrosesociety.org

CLOSED (full up!) Thursday, December 9
Garden By Janet: Winter Pruning and Planning, in
Orchard Lake, Michigan. Training the growth of
young trees and keeping older trees and shrubs small;
in a collector's garden. Free. (More about Garden By
Janet sessions on the next page.)

#### Save the dates:

January 23 in Royal Oak, MI: Wildlife and poetry in the garden; February Sundays all over SE Michigan: Tool cleaning; January 22, 29 and February 5: 3-part design seminar in Detroit

#### To attend Garden by Janet sessions:

We're let-me-see, hands-on people. That's how we learn best. From time to time there are *Garden by Janet* sessions listed here to afford you that kind of chance to grow. You visit us where we're working to either watch or work with Janet. Generally, there is no charge and we're in one of two kinds of locations:

- 1) At the gardens we tend through our business, Perennial Favorites: Our clients understand our enthusiasm for teaching. Some open their gardens to small groups who want to see and practice "how to." When the work we're scheduled to do may be of interest to you, we invite you in.
- 2) In the Detroit Zoo, Adopt-A-Garden program where we're 22-year veterans. Many people have worked with us there, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish much. You can check out this program by coming in as my student on a temporary pass. To join Janet at the Zoo, email mstgarden@gmail.com with the subject line of your email "Help at zoo."

#### Overheard at a *Garden By Janet* session:

- A: So what's *he* doing?
- B: Digging up that fig tree.
- A: What for?
- B: They're going to bury it over there for the winter.
- A: I've never heard of that!
- B: Every time I come to one of these I hear something I've never heard before!

#### Where we go to Garden by Janet

Sometimes we are asked "Can you come do one of your workshops in my garden?" Maybe! At these sessions:

- Someone pays for Janet's time, or she's on a site where she volunteers regularly. Although we love to share what we know, we need to eat and pay our bills.
- Our client knows our work well enough to allow us free rein, even to experiment.
- Our client allows strangers on site and trusts our supervision if they pitch in.
- We know the site and plant history enough to explain how that affects the work's "what" and "why."
- We've determined that the plants and site will serve as clear examples.
- We know from questions we've received that the work is of common interest.
- With rare exception, the site's visible from a public way so students can drive by to keep track of "what happens next."

#### Invite Janet or Steven or their expert friends to your club or community.

Janet and Steven have been gardening professionally since 1984, but love sharing how-to almost as much as planting and designing. They started producing educational events in 1991, ran a gardening school from 1995 through 2008 and have always taught where invited. This has taken them all over the country and then some over the past 20 years.

This dynamic pair address many topics, drawing from a list of 100+ talks. They also continue to meet groups' needs and expand their horizons by developing new material or "hybridizing" between existing presentations. (More on next page...)

So ask us about

- How-to lessons for a garden club
- Hands-on workshops at your site,
- Multi-part classes for small groups, and
- Entertaining, information packed talks.

Janet and Steven can also connect you to one or a whole line-up of other experts who know how to explain how-to. So give them a **call or send an email** to make a date, request a list of classes and talks or get a referral.

JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850. Their calendars fill about a year in advance for spring weekends, and six months ahead for most other weekends and evenings. Just give them some lead time, then they can meet you at *your* garden event.

Janet and Steven are a great addition to an educational or entertainment program, together, separately or with expert friends.



#### Time to garden your walls...

Steven's decorated many walls with great garden and Nature images. He can help you do the same with photos that capture the garden beauty you love, framed or on canvas to your specifications.

You can own any of Steven's images from *What's Coming Up*.\* Or if you have a flower, type of scene or hue in mind you can request your dream. His library includes tens of thousands of plants and natural images, so Steven can assemble a customized photo sampler for you. Email us at JMaxGarden@aol.com for details, to request a sampler or to place an order.

Prices for **Steven's garden art** vary with your wishes in format and size. Examples:

Matted, framed, overall 11 x 15", \$48

36 x 48' no-fade cloth tapestry, \$215

Describe your dream image or color to Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com. He'll send you a sampler and price list.



\*Images here in the newsletter are depicted in low- resolution to facilitate e-mail transmission. Steven's originals and art created from them are full resolution, with so much clear detail they are sharp even as wall-size cloth banners







Put images like this\* on your wall. Describe your dream image or color to Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

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#### You asked for our advice "on paper". We wrote and sell these books plus CDs:



#### Designing Your Gardens and Landscape

First published in 1990 as *Easy Garden Design*, a 150-page step-by-step recipe that's become a design classic. Janet developed, uses and has trained thousands of others to use this process. People say: "This is exactly the simple, clear approach I need!" This design process is applicable world-wide.

Soft cover, spiral bound. B&W illustrations by Janet. \$19.00



Janet's unique approach to perennial care how-to, the real-time story of one bed from early spring to season's end. The 180 engaging and fact-filled pages make you part of all Janet does and you might ever need to do in each task's appropriate season and sequence. Includes a chart of what to do, when

for 70 top perennials. Advice in this book is applicable in all of temperate U.S. and Canada. The perennial chart includes a key to adapt its timing for far southern or northern edges of that range.

Soft cover book. Text by Janet Macunovich. Color illustrations by Steven Nikkila. \$20.00





#### Asking About Asters CD.

A digital library of six years of Janet's work: weekly columns, newsletters and over 200 extra Q&A letters to individual gardeners. 1,681 questions answered about soil preparation, fertilizing, pruning, design, choosing plants, foiling bugs and much more. No repeated topics. Fully indexed; the entire collection can be searched from one index.

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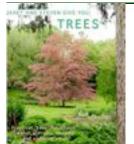
A digital collection of 2009 & 2010's *What's Coming Up*: 104 issues, over 1,200 pages with more than 300 articles, 1,500 images and 250 quick-look lists and reports. Includes a comprehensive index so you search all the *What's Coming Up* newsletters at once to find help on any topic quickly. Index includes our previously-released digital library, *Asking About Asters*, so you can search both CDs from one index.

Bonus on this CD: Steven Nikkila's Daydream Screen Saver, 74 of his most vivid works from gardens and nature.

1 CD in jewel case, Windows- and Mac compatible. \$20.00

Janet & Steven's complete digital library New for 2010

Set of two CDs: Asking About Asters and Potting Up Perennials. \$30.00



#### Janet and Steven give you: Trees. New for 2010\*

A choice collection of Janet and Steven's advice for tree selection, planting and care. Each article made its debut in *Michigan Gardener* magazine and has been on hold since, awaiting completion of its fellows until this comprehensive compilation became possible. Topics include: Selecting trees; fall color; what's happening to ash trees; replacing a big tree; descriptions, lists and photos of great trees; why starting small is a good idea when planting; planting how-to, why's and why not's; staking, watering and fertilizing; mulching; rescuing a tree from the lawn; preventing construction damage; pruning to keep trees and shrubs small; removing suckers; detecting girdling roots; and dealing with maple tar spot and lecanium scale.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pages. Color illustrations. \$12.00

#### New for 2010\* Janet and Steven give you: Landscape Ideas.

Janet and Steven's favorite articles on landscape design and renovation: Designing with foliage color; covering up after the bulb season; doubling up perennials for 3-season color; shady solutions; using usual plants in unusual ways; designing hypo-allergenic gardens; Murphy's Laws applied to gardens; renovation how-to; fragrant plants and designs; attracting wildlife; rockwork; invasive plants; discovering a site's hidden assets; using herbs in a landscape; and how to cheat to improve a garden quickly. These articles appeared first in *Michigan Gardener* magazine individually between 1999 and 2010. Now they're collected in this set for your design library.





10" x 13" magazine, 48 pages. Color illustrations. \$12.00

Janet and Steven give you: Trees, Landscape Ideas and Garden Care

New for 2010\*

Set of three 10" x 13" magazines, 48 pages each. \$30.00

all join your library in this more durable and comprehensive form.

\*For a look inside, email JMaxGarden@aol.com with the subject line "Magazine peek."

Michigan Gardener articles. Each made its debut in that magazine, waited for its companion pieces and now they

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