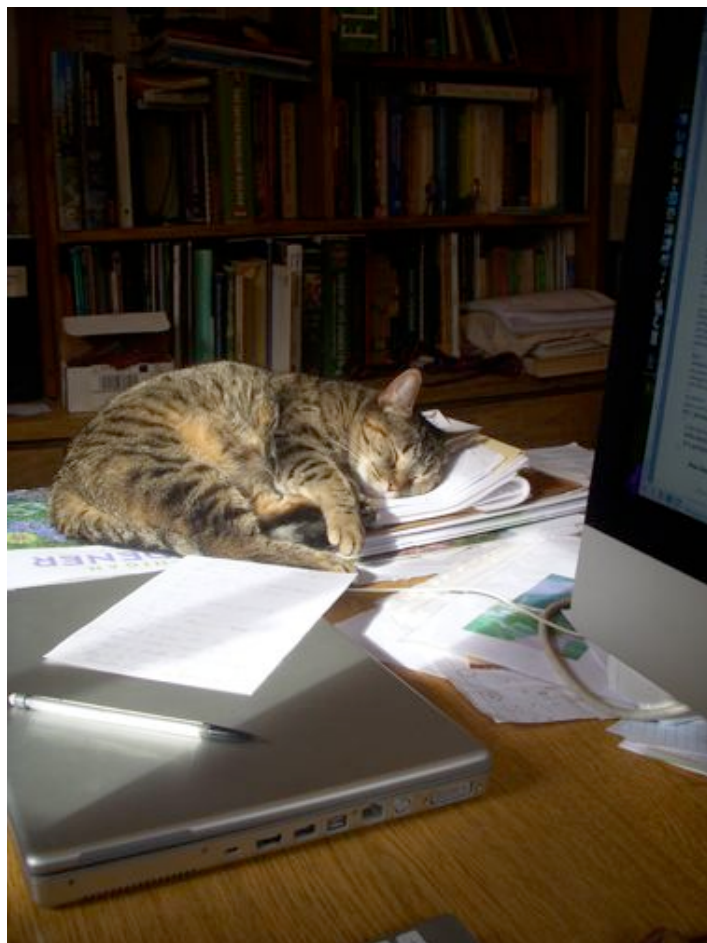


## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila  
answer your growing concerns  
Issue #160, October 19, 2011

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Right: Ah, it's that lovely time of year when one a nap in a warm sun beam feels wonderful and you can let the off-season drift past... Not! Maybe that applies if you're our cat Fraxy, who has no garden to tend. For us, it's still high time to clip, divide, weed and, okay, maybe we dream a bit, too!

## Hello neighbor, can we cut down your tree?

Dear friends: We've recently been discussing the following topic with several different people, all of whom wish to remain anonymous until they have established working relationships with new neighbors. Thus the following is a composite question.

We just bought a home. **Trees that are on the neighbor's property** seem like they may a problem for us.

One is a big maple of some kind, with an enormous limb that is **directly over our garage**. That whole side of the tree is leaning and if it falls, will probably crush our garage. Another is a big evergreen just a few feet over the property line and about 15 feet from our house, with



at least one root as big as an alligator that's aimed straight at our basement wall. Is that going to be a **problem for our foundation?** We know we can cut this root since it's on our property but don't know how much harm it will cause the tree. Then there are two others, a maple and an oak, along the lot line and only about 12 feet from our septic tank and probably **in the drain field** as well.

Should we be concerned about them, or just let them be? If there was damage to our house and the drain tiles, it probably already happened, right? Maybe we should have a professional take a look at them? We don't want to introduce ourselves to the neighbors and say, "Hi, we're your new neighbors. Let's cut down your tree."

We know that's a tough situation. Here are some thoughts, suggestions and possibilities.

**Hire an arborist to assess the trees**

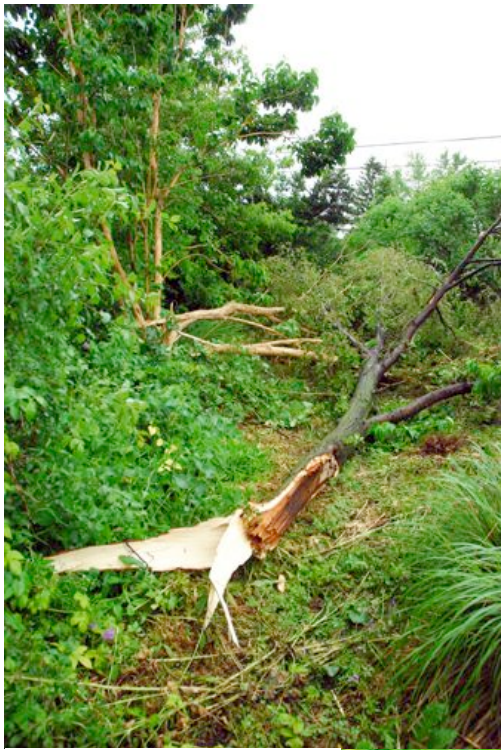
on your property. As part of saying hello to your new neighbors, let them know that you're a gardener and value the trees on and around the property. Later, tell them you have hired an arborist to evaluate the impact of possible septic field maintenance and landscape changes. Ask permission to include the lot line trees in that look. Don't make predictions about tree removal or pruning. Offer to share any report and recommendations.



No one wants to look outside and see a big tree laying across the yard, but it does happen. Sometimes the trained eye can predict this. It's worth the fee to hire an arborist to give you an opinion. Check [www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com) for a list of certified arborists in your area.

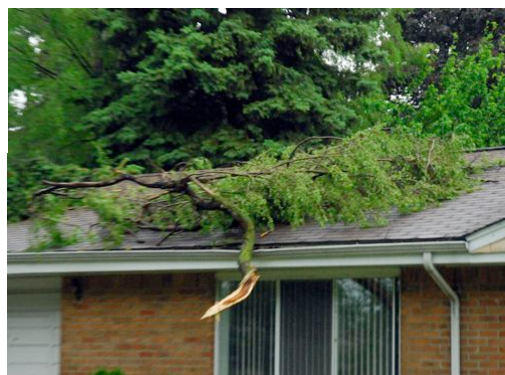
**Ask the former owners** of the house if they have any photo of it taken in 2000 or earlier, and if you can borrow it to make a copy. Look for snapshots that includes the trees. Both summer and winter views are useful. Give such records to the arborist, because there's a world of difference between a leaning tree that has been stable for a long time and one that has recently changed position. Also, only comparison over time can reveal clues such as a thinning canopy. A tree which shows a thinning crown rates more attention than one that's been consistently full.





This big limb dropped 50 feet from the crown of a neighbor's Siberian elm and fell down into our yard, smashing two trunks of our seven son shrub (horizontal light colored limbs in the background). The significant thing to see here is the discoloration inside the fallen limb. That's decay -- weak wood -- that developed after the limb snapped and regrew years ago. An arborist inspecting the tree could have seen that snag, understood the potential for breakage, and removed the limb before Nature could.

Once you know to look, you can see the same interior decay in this limb that fell from a tree onto a neighbor's roof. So, too, does an arborist learn to detect that weakness while the limb's still on the tree. There is no way to say for certain such a limb will fall, but good pruning can reduce the risk.



the tree without the other's consent, and both owners have an obligation to maintain the tree.\*

\*From the book *Arboriculture and the Law*; Victor D. Merullo and Michael J. Valentine, International Society of Arboriculture

A building inspector can **look at your basement for signs of foundation cracks**. There is evidence that tree roots do not damage a sound foundation, but will grow along any crack or flaw that accumulates moisture, eventually enlarging that gap. If there's any seepage along the foundation closest to the evergreen's root, dig a trench about 18 inches deep a few feet out from that wall and cut the roots you find heading for the wall.

**Septic fields** certainly can be affected by **adjacent trees** but we know many tree-surrounded fields that are 20, 30 and even 40 years old and **still working well**. Trouble there is related to type of tree, the trees' growth rate and the soil type. Check with the company that has been servicing the septic system on your property to see if there has been any change in the frequency or amount pumped out of the tank. That can indicate blockage slowing the field's operation.

### Re: Cutting roots.

Consider two things. One, when a tree is on or very near a property line, it's best to discuss your plan with neighbors ahead of time. A property owner does have a right to cut limbs or roots that cross a lot line from a tree planted on adjoining property. However, courts have sometimes found the cutting neighbor liable for damages when the cuts caused significant harm to

a tree growing so close to a property line as to be considered joint property of neighbors.

**The legal view** is that adjoining landowners share ownership and responsibility for a tree growing on the boundary line or so close to it in terms of its overall size as to have equal presence in both yards. The law holds that when it's jointly owned, neither owner can act on



Two, **think ahead about tree stability**. Cutting a major root -- one of the flare roots -- can destabilize a tree. Don't cut closer to the trunk than one foot for every one inch of trunk diameter. This means that if an evergreen's trunk is 15 inches in diameter and you cut a main root within 15 feet of the trunk, then the tree may become a toppling risk.

An arborist can often recognize instability before a tree falls. Arborists who learn to evaluate trees and certify with the International Society of Arboriculture consider the effects of inadequate root space or damage to flare roots, and read warning signs in the trunk and limbs such as increased lean or compression "wrinkles" in a trunk or limb.



The limb growing at 90 degrees from the trunk of this tree is not a falling hazard but rather the strongest limb on the tree. In contrast, danger develops when a limb grows at a tight angle to the trunk, especially if bark folds into and becomes "included" in the crotch. The limb's own annual increase in girth acts like a wedge between it and the trunk, increasing the pressure between the two until they split apart.

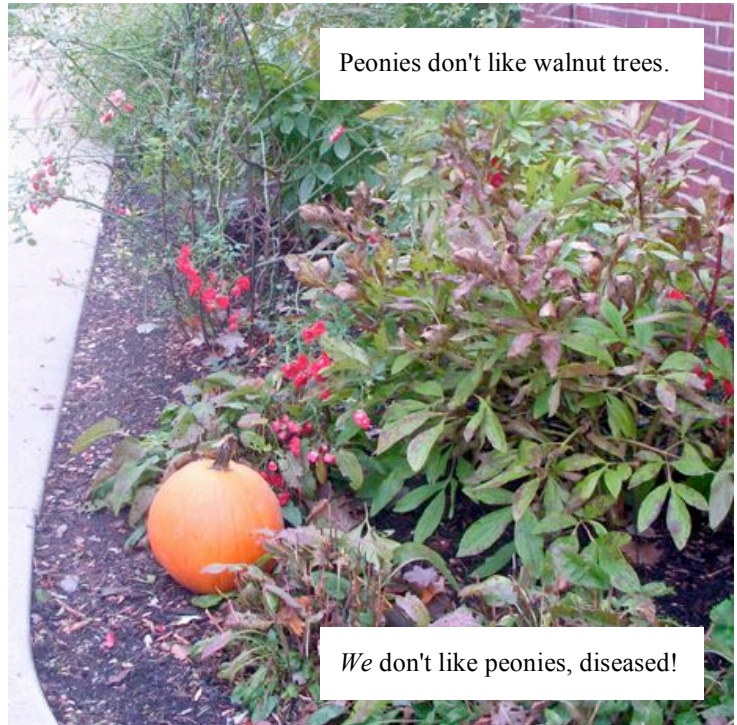


## Life with a black walnut: What grows beneath it can be mulched with its leaves

You recommend **spreading shredded leaves as mulch** in the garden but I get a lot of leaves from a black walnut in my back yard. Will they harm perennials? – B.T. –

If the perennial beds and walnut share the back yard, perennials there are probably already under the tree's influence. That would indicate that they can live with juglone -- the growth-suppressing chemical produced by the walnut's roots and present in all its parts to some extent. In that case they will probably not be harmed by that same chemical leaching from the leaves.

If the beds you plan to mulch are not under or adjacent to your walnut's branches, compost the walnut leaves first to allow the juglone to leach away.



## When plants kill plants



Black walnut is not alone in its allelopathy -- plant-killing plant ability. Other plants also beat their competitors via chemical warfare, among them butternut, horsechestnut, sycamore, potato, annual sunflower, perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, red fescue, mum, apple, the ornamental grass *Miscanthus* and the weeds quack grass, crab grass, nut sedge, Canada thistle, and lambs' quarters.

One reason these other allelopathic plants are lower profile than walnuts is that the species they suppress respond less dramatically -- their growth is slowed but the plant doesn't die. Another may be that the suppressed species are less important in agriculture or horticulture -- less likely to have earned research dollars. It's also the case that we've only just begun to recognize certain plants' allelopathic tendencies. Once we know how many other species are affected and the degree to which they are harmed by growing near a particular allelopath, black walnuts may have company in infamy.

Above, and left: Sometimes we hold off cutting down perennials until spring, leaving some for visual interest in the winter. But when we must cut to remove fungus-spotted peony foliage and stems from the bed to preserve the plant's health, that can leave a pumpkin looking lonely! No worry -- this is Sue Purcell's garden and she is very good at temporary fill with non-plants, such as here at her side entry. **We're talking about winter interest, entry garden design and capturing the garden in pictures, at Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison, Wisconsin this week. Come join us! See page 20.**



Can't  
shred  
'em?  
Spread  
'em  
anyway!

We use  
whole  
leaves as  
mulch all  
the time.



Right: Note the depth of the leaf mulch here as Janet wades in to distribute the pile. By spring, all that remains will be a layer of leafy stuff less than an inch deep.

### Tough to tell how close to cut in fall

I once attended a seminar that you gave on "Closing Your Garden" and you stated that all **perennials that are not woody can be cut to the ground in fall.**

This has been very easy for the most part except that I recently got a few new plants that have me stumped. One day I swear they are woody the next I think maybe they are not.



**When and how should I cut *Perovskia*, *Hibiscus* and peony?** - S.S. -

To distinguish between woody and herbaceous perennials, watch where new growth begins in the spring. If next year's growth begins from **buds on the stems, the plant is woody.** Even after leaf-fall woody plants can continue to shuttle the products of this season's solar energy down to the crown and roots. That hand-off may not finish until mid-winter. Even if winter's cold kills branch tips or the gardener eventually cuts off some of the wood, the plant will be a bit stronger if it was allowed to keep all or most of its wood until just before new growth begins.

If a plant's spring growth comes only from below ground -- **buds on the roots or crown** below soil level -- the **plant is herbaceous.** Its stems can be cut to the ground in fall without harm.



*Perovskia* -- Russian sage -- is a woody plant. Until it's well established, it's best left uncut in fall or only shortened rather than sheared to the ground. In spring it can be razed or cut more selectively like a rose, removing dead wood and thinning canes to leave only well-placed branches topped by a strong buds.

*Hibiscus* has tough, decay-resistant stems. However, it's herbaceous, as is the common peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*). Up on the stems, there are no buds set and waiting to sprout. It's necessary to scrape soil away from the roots to find the white bumps (*Hibiscus*) or pointed pink eyes (common peony) that will produce next year's stems. We cut both *Hibiscus* and peony to the ground in fall.

We make exceptions for some herbaceous plants. If they can stand up to snow and are visible and attractive from my winter quarters, we may leave them up for winter interest.



**Special note for gardeners temporarily hobbled by a leg injury or corrective surgery:**

While cutting down with Sue Purcell, we watched her glide all around her garden, bagging sticks and dragging bags just a week after foot reconstruction.

Now we know if foot repair ever happens to us, we want one of these scooters. And also some of Sue's attitude, which is to just keep gardening, no matter what!



**Spare a tree peony, cut its hybrids**

Since all peonies have a tendency to develop leaf fungal problems that can become entrenched in the wood or buds below ground, we do like to clear away all stems and leaves and put them in a hot compost.

Tree peonies (such as *Paeonia suffruticosa*) have buds on the woody branches. We leave tree peonies' branches uncut in fall. We rake their fallen leaves and put them in the compost.

Intersectional peonies (hybrids between the herbaceous and woody species) may have buds on the stems but they also have eyes on the roots. We cut the intersectional hybrids to the ground each fall and take the debris to the compost pile.

## *Hibiscus* (b)eaten from below

When we've noticed the quarter-sized holes made by **voles** and a *Hibiscus* is nearby, we set mouse traps to snag those rodents -- also called meadow mice. *Hibiscus*' sweet roots are vole candy, and we've seen many a *Hibiscus* sprout, then die back in spring because those vile voles have tunneled beneath the plant and **chewed its roots from below**.

This year thanks to P.P.'s sharp eyes and investigative skill, we added **boxwood** (*Buxus*) and **falsecypress** (*Chamaecyparis*) to our list of vole-favored roots. What had been vigorous, dense shrubs thinned out drastically and were at death's door from vole-munching root damage. After a season's pampering, they may make a comeback.

## Splitting daffs but sparing the tree

Nine years ago I moved into a new condo and planted 200 daffodil bulbs under a newly planted serviceberry tree. The **daffodils** flowered profusely, until about three years ago. Since then, each Spring I see less & **less flowers**. This past Spring, the only ones blooming were on the edges of the bed (farthest away from the tree). I want to dig up the bulbs, **divide & replant** them, but I am **afraid of damaging the tree**. What should I do? - C.K. -

Right: When you split this daffodil in two, you can still expect bloom the next season from the big bulb. However, its smaller daughter bulb or "offset" may need a year to bulk up to blooming size.



We think you'll have to decide what to do, clump by clump. Some you will be able to dig up, divide and re-plant out in the sun. Other clumps will have been grown over by serviceberry roots so that you won't be able to reach the bulbs without cutting a lot of roots. Rather than deal the tree a setback, leave those root-covered clumps to diminish. They'll eventually disappear as the tree's shade increases.

In fall, you probably can't tell exactly where the daffodil clumps are. You'll have to do some exploratory digging to find them, which means breaking more tree roots. So we'd wait until we **see the foliage emerge in spring, then begin digging** to determine which clumps are candidates for division.

Chances are very good that from any one clump you will net so many daughter bulbs that you won't need to divide everything. Just two or three clumps may divide into 200 bulbs. Some of those bulbs may be too small to bloom. However, once each one has more sun and its own space away from other daffodils, they will increase to blooming size in a year or two.

One difference between handling bulbs in fall and in spring is to expect them to look different. In spring this daffodil will no longer have its papery tunic. It grows that skin each summer as a moisture-conserving wax paper cover.



Right: You can divide established bulbs in fall, if you can find them. It's simpler to wait until spring to divide them as soon as they show themselves. In this April dig we divided these *Crocus* as well as some daffodils, tulips and fall-blooming *Colchicum*.



Below: Many gardeners wonder "Which way is up on this bulb?" Look for the flattened basal plate -- the area where roots were attached. (It's on the lower end of this *Iris reticulata* bulb)



Keep the basal plate down in your planting hole. Some bulbs may be hard to read, like minor *Fritillaria* (right; its basal plate facing you), and some such as woodland *Anemone* are impossible to decipher. You can breathe easy because you really can plant a bulb any way you wish so long as it's in loose soil. The bulb can reorient itself as it grows. Its top will grow upward, even if it starts out pointed down -- just like



sprouted onions in the bin in our kitchen.

Then when the new bulb forms, as happens each growing season, it will be right side up.

## Waiting for a hyacinth to multiply?

Dutch hyacinth don't usually produce daughter bulbs without a nudge from the gardener.

Below, right: Cut a notch in the basal plate -- where the roots form. (Green lines at right mark a good notch location.) Replant the bulb. The plant will cover the wound with callus tissue -- meristem cells that can develop into any plant part or a whole new plant. Eventually a daughter bulb will form there and you can split it away to grow on to blooming size.





## Falsecypress' fall browning is true to form

We have suddenly noticed a **falsecypress** in our yard **turning awfully brown on the inside**. Is this normal...? In the past there was brown, but nothing like this. – R.F.K. –

Your falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* variety) is undergoing a **normal fall change**. It's losing its old needles.

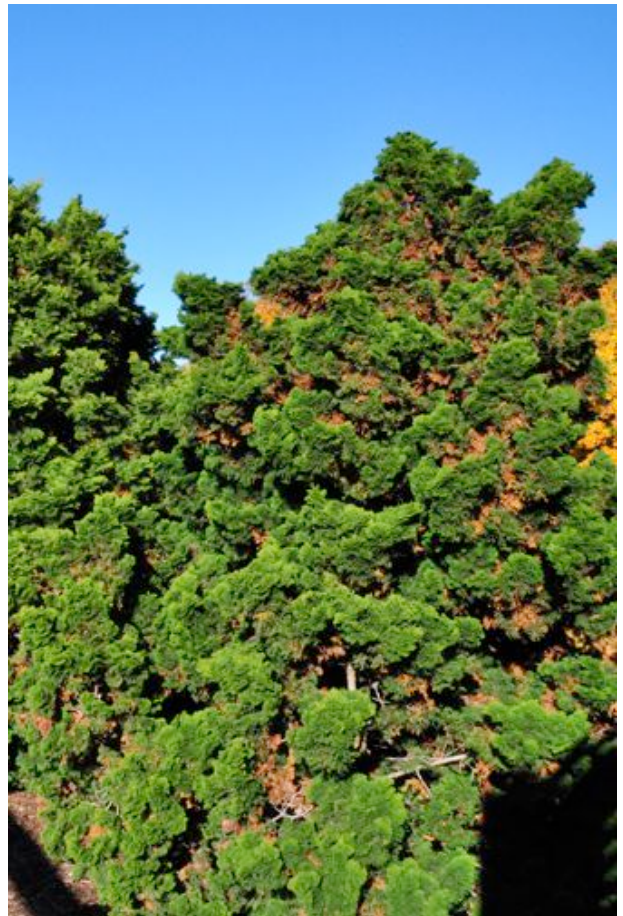
Evergreen foliage doesn't last forever. Depending on the species, an evergreen leaf or needle may last 18 months or 40 years, but sooner or later it will be shed. Some species do their annual shed all at once, some drop the old greenery over many months.

Several things can **make annual shed more noticeable** or alarming:

- If the evergreen is **a species that sheds all at once in fall**, its yellowing will be more obvious than on a species that sheds a little at a time throughout summer.
- In a year when environmental **conditions cause fall leaf change to progress quickly**, the yellowing may happen overnight.
- If the needles being shed were grown in a really good growing year and the years since then have been not so good, **the plant loses more of its greenery than usual**. Consider a Japanese red pine with needles that drop off after 3 years. If the tree grew pretty evenly for the last four years, it will lose 25% of its foliage in fall. If the growing was great four years ago but skimpy since then, the foliage that drops that fall might be 35% of the plant's greenery.

So long as an evergreen is losing its older foliage and keeping what's new it's probably okay.

This question comes up frequently and many Extension bulletins and other publications cover needle loss. (See *Searching answers when needles fall*, on page 14.) However, we've repeated the basics here (above) because we saw a way **to advance the bank of existing literature**. We've wished for but couldn't find an existing, comprehensive list of evergreens with foliage retention times. So thank you for asking, and prompting us to compile the list on the next page.





<b>Evergreens' Foliage Retention</b> Average lifespan: 1 to 3 years			
Evergreen needles and leaves aren't eternal. A needle/leaf may live 1 to 40 years beyond the year it forms.			
Species	Foliage life	Sheds:	Notes
<b>"Christmas" trees:</b>			
Douglas fir ( <i>Pseudotsuga</i> )	4 - 8 years	continuously	
Fir ( <i>Abies</i> species)	3 - 6 years	continuously	
Pines ( <i>Pinus</i> species)		fall	
Austrian pine ( <i>P. nigra</i> )	2 - 4 years	fall	Needles may persist 8 years
Bosnian pine ( <i>P. xx</i> )	4 - 5 years	fall	
Bristlecone pine ( <i>P. aristata</i> )	14- 17 years	fall	Needles may persist 40 years
Eastern white pine ( <i>P. strobus</i> )	1 - 2 years	fall	
Jack pine ( <i>P. banksiana</i> )	2 - 4 years	fall	
Japanese black pine ( <i>P. thunbergii</i> )	3 - 5 years	fall	
Japanese red pine ( <i>P. densiflora</i> )	3 years	fall	
Japanese white pine ( <i>P. parviflora</i> )	3 - 4 years	fall	
Korean pine ( <i>P. koraiensis</i> )	3 years	fall	
Lacebark pine ( <i>P. bungeana</i> )	3 - 4 years	fall	
Limber pine ( <i>P. flexilis</i> )	5 - 6 years	fall	
Loblolly pine ( <i>P. taeda</i> )	2 - 4 years	fall	#
Macedonian pine ( <i>P. peuce</i> )	3 years	fall	
Mugo pine ( <i>P. mugo</i> )	5+ years	fall	
Ponderosa pine ( <i>P. ponderosa</i> )	3 - 5 years	fall	
Red pine ( <i>P. resinosa</i> )	4 - 5 years	fall	
Scotch pine ( <i>P. sylvestris</i> )	2 - 4 years	fall	
Swiss stone pine ( <i>P. cembra</i> )	4 - 5 years	fall	
Spruce ( <i>Picea</i> species)	3 - 6 years	continuously	
<b>Needled evergreens often used in hedges and foundation plantings</b>			
Arborvitae ( <i>Thuja</i> )		fall	Entire branchlets fall, often remain hung up inside plant
Eastern arb/White cedar ( <i>T. occidentalis</i> )	2 years*	fall	
Western arb/Giant cedar ( <i>T. plicata</i> )	2 - 3 years	fall	
Oriental arb ( <i>T. orientalis</i> , a.k.a. <i>Platyclusus orientalis</i> )	2 years*	fall	
Hemlock ( <i>Tsuga</i> species)	3 - 5 years	spring/early summer	
Juniper ( <i>Juniperus</i> species)	10+ years	continuously	
Yew ( <i>Taxus</i> species)	3 - 5 years	spring/early summer	
Plum yew ( <i>Cephalotaxus</i> )	*	*	
<b>True cedar/Cypress/Falsecypress</b>			
Arizona cypress ( <i>Cupressus arizonica</i> )	*	*	#
Atlas (blue) cedar ( <i>Cedrus atlantica</i> )	*	*	
Cedar of Lebanon ( <i>C. libani</i> )	*	*	#
Italian cypress ( <i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> )	*	*	#
<b>Falsecypress</b>			
Atlantic cedar ( <i>C. thyoides</i> )	2 - 5 years	*	Foliage goes brown in year 2, then may remain for years
Hinoki/Japanese garden falsecypress ( <i>Chamaecyparis obtusa</i> )	5+ years	fall	Entire branchlets fall, often remain hung up inside plant
Sawara falsecypress ( <i>C. pisifera</i> )	5 years	*	
Alaska falsecyp. ( <i>C. nootkatensis</i> )	5+ years	*	

This list is just a start.

We've combined published reports and our own records, and left some blanks where we haven't yet found evidence or reliable reports. **If you can fill in any blanks,** report on species not yet listed here or contribute notes, let us know and we'll revise this chart.



Umbrella pine ( <i>Sciadopitys verticillata</i> )	3 - 4 years	*	
<b>Broadleaf evergreens</b>			
Azalea and Rhododendron ( <i>Rhododendron</i> species)	1 - 2 years	late summer or fall	Some species deciduous
Boxwood ( <i>Buxus</i> species)	3 years*	*	#
<i>Camellia</i>	*	*	
Cherry laurel ( <i>Prunus laurocerasus</i> )	*	*	
<i>Daphne</i>	*	*	Some species deciduous
Live oak ( <i>Quercus virginiana</i> )	*	spring	
<i>Euonymus</i> evergreen species	2 - 3 years	summer & fall	
Firethorn ( <i>Pyracantha</i> )	1 - * years	spring/early summer	May lose all leaves every winter in northern part of its hardiness range
Grapeholly ( <i>Mahonia</i> species)	2 - 3 years	spring/early summer	
Heavenly bamboo ( <i>Nandina domestica</i> )	*	*	#
<i>Hebe</i>	*	*	#
Holly ( <i>Ilex</i> species)	1 - 3 years	spring	Some species deciduous
Japanese andromeda ( <i>Pieris japonica</i> )	*	*	
Mountain laurel ( <i>Kalmia</i> species)	*	*	
Southern magnolia ( <i>M. grandiflora</i> )	1 year	spring	#

\* Observations and reports conflict or are lacking. We'd love to know what you have observed!

# Although we ourselves garden mostly in zones 4 - 6, many readers garden in zones 7 - 8 thus inclusion of these plants zone 5 gardeners may not recognize.



Left: Here's a branch of falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) at needle-shed time. Read the twig color to separate this year's growth (twig still green) from last year's (caramel colored twig) and older wood (gone darker). You should see that the foliage is still green on the wood formed during the last five years, if the tree is living up to its potential.



Arborvitae, juniper and falsecypress leaves clasp the plant's twig very tightly. See the tiny green specks here? Those are two falsecypress leaves we pried away from the twig. Because the entire branchlet (left) falls when its time comes, the interior of the plant may become congested with a tangle of brown. Shake the plant or hose it down to clear them if you wish to make the scene greener.





## Searching answers when needles fall

It can be a challenge to diagnose trouble, even if it's just to learn that what looks like trouble is of no concern. Next time you see something worrisome, try this: Search the Internet using words that describe what you see, plus the word "extension". Then check out the ".edu" references first -- those are the Extension bulletins.

For instance *evergreen needle shed Extension* will net you references such as this:

<http://utahpests.usu.edu/plantdiseases/htm/ornamental/needledrop/>  
<http://byf.unl.edu/natural-needle-drop>  
<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/07403.html> includes chart of <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/A2614.pdf>  
<http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/cherokee/documents/November2010-LeafandNeedleDrop.pdf>  
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/not-unusual-evergreens-shed-needles-fall>

Or *needles suddenly brown spruce Extension* will net you references such as this:

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/3000/3034.html> <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/M1265.html>  
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/SUL9.pdf>

Or *needles suddenly brown pine Extension* leads to:

[http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/plant\\_problems/hgic2353.html](http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/pests/plant_problems/hgic2353.html)

## Alone in the Garden? Never! Our mentors will always be with us:

Most of us had a **parent, neighbor or other veteran gardener** to guide us through our first attempts to grow. The **gardening advice they gave us** may include facts that took many years to develop and generations to confirm and tweak. Or they may simply be fun snapshots of characters that can shine for generations in a family history. For instance, when we wrote about gathering the end of season green tomatoes to ripen indoors, we were told:

*Mom always ripened the green tomatoes in the dishwasher and preferred the dishes be washed in the sink.*

- Susan Tatus-McClarty -

Is there pass-along gardening wisdom or fun in your hands now? Tell us about it -- we'll pass along all we can.

Right: 48 hours' worth of ripening time for tomatoes hung green in our furnace room. We wrap green tomatoes in paper or close them in a paper bag with a





ripe banana or apple, or bunch and hang them on their own branches -- all to hold and concentrate the ethylene gas the seeds are producing as they mature. The flesh of the fruit reddens in the presence ethylene. D.M. asks: Is hanging better than wrapping? We keep meaning to conduct a test, wrapping some and hanging others of the same type and age. But every time we try to run this test the evidence disappears into salads before we can properly compare the results!

### Aiming for Answers: Hit or Miss?

There are no sure bets in dealing with living things, but every situation we face helps us learn more possibilities -- especially when we share with each other what we've observed. So we're always glad to hear whether you used our suggestions, and what happened next.

You wrote about **flocks of starlings working their way across a lawn**, as a sign that maybe that lawn offered a lot of grubs as snacks. This fall I noticed starlings all over my lawn, so I went out and dug some test patches.



I can certainly see where the birds had been, by the beak-sized holes. I found grubs in almost every chunk of sod I cut and flipped. In an area I checked where the birds were not, I found *zero grubs*.

We aren't keen on spreading insecticide all over our lawn, so I'm going to let the starlings have their way right now and we'll mark the **spots where they concentrate**. If we do have to resort to insecticide, we'll use it only in those **grub-by hot spots**.

Thanks for pointing out the starling-grub link. - M.L. -

You're welcome!

Did we also already tell you that grub experts figure out which grub it is that's grazing on their lawn's roots, so they can better time their control efforts to kill the newly hatched grubs? And that the way to tell a chafer grub from a Japanese beetle, etc. is to look at the markings on its butt?





## Tip cuttings: Growing on from what people are saying this week

So much goes on in email exchanges between newsletters! We wish we could include it all. Excerpts:

### Sharing those divisions

I agree that not everyone has the qualities of an extrovert to seek out homes for plant divisions (thinking of myself here). What I have done the past couple of years is post a note on Craigslist ([www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)) specifying what I have and indicating that it is at the curb ("first come, first served"). The plant divisions are snatched up immediately using this method. Makes me feel good to share and takes very little effort. - K.C. -

### Better than a poke in the eye

...for a safety reminder (as you cut things down in a garden). It's easy to not see one (dried stalk) as you're focusing in on another and accidentally have that scape poke you in the face, eye, etc. Experience has taught me to take my time and wear safety glasses while working on this task. - S.G. -



### Holding tender bulbs underground

You mentioned overwintering bulbs like dahlias and cannas under 18" of soil. How can I do this? Is there an easy way to bury them so that they are easy to retrieve in the Spring? - P.B. -

We think it's easy to dig a hole about 24" deep and as wide as needed for whatever we're holding. Then we put them in the hole and cover them with something like burlap that can let some air and water pass but slow our shovel in spring so we don't slice right through our prize when we reclaim it in early spring.

Then we backfill the hole and put something like a bag of leaves on top to mark the spot. The leaves are best, as extra insulation.

We have been told we should be burying things 42 inches deep to be down where the soil stays at 40- to 50°F year round -- below the potential frost line. Yet frost rarely gets that deep into the soil in our area. Even though the temperature may drop to -20°F it doesn't hold there long enough to drive the ice that far into the ground.

## Hardy mums, continued

I finally had a minute to read your recent newsletter that began by talking about hardy mums. We grow and sell thousands of hardy chrysanthemums here in our greenhouses in Grand Rapids. We even ship them to gardeners outside the state via our e-commerce business. Our customers love the added color at this time of year. Some do use them only as annuals or porch pot liners but many expect and count on them to be perennial.

My perennial manager and I disagree with how you said to over-winter them.

We find that if they are not cut way down, just simply shaped and cleaned up by having their faded blooms removed with most of the plant left tall, they survive the winter much better. (They seem to collect their own protective mulch that way.) Of course, it also helps to have them in the ground for a longer time before winter hits, not just plunked in at Halloween or Thanksgiving time. That's how we tell our customers to care for them and what I do with the ones in my garden and in the gardens for which I am the caregiver. I find it to be quite successful.

Thanks for all the valuable information in your newsletters. You remain my garden guru. -  
Mary Romence, Romence Gardens & Greenhouses, 265 Lakeside NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503,  
616-451-8214 -

You're welcome, and thank you for letting us know we can shop your place even from afar. We didn't realize! [www.romencegardens.com](http://www.romencegardens.com)

## This week in our garden

### Grow with us! This week:

**Say good bye to summer stars.** The annual flowers that can't handle cold need to exit now. Not only to eliminate their sad-looking selves but to keep the bed healthier for next year's annuals.

If cold sensitive plants such as *Impatiens* are exposed to cold, tissues die and others are weakened. Fungi that aren't strong enough to enter lively plant parts take the opportunity to invade. They can multiply there, and there will be that many more lying in wait next spring to pounce on any opening in the new batch of plants.

Right: Snapdragons like cool weather. These at right are just forming a fresh set of flower buds October 18, and their foliage is still green and clean after several light frosts. *Impatiens* (next page!) are another story.







In late September after one light frost these *Impatiens* still looked good with their *Dahlia* buddies, if seen in passing. But a close look (above) shows the damage of cold-burst cells. Other leaves were only weakened but once the worst foliage drops away they'll remain to become infected (below).



Below: Planting too early can cause season-long trouble for cold-intolerant plants such as *Impatiens*. Notice the smaller plants in this bed? The stems of those individuals were weakened by cold soil and developed infections that never fully healed. The plants could not develop as well as the rest. Why would that one spot feel the cold and not the whole bed? Soil color, moisture level, individual plant condition, pattern of overhanging limbs and more all contribute to cold damage so that the answer is "Who can say?!"





**Green thumbs up** to all the gardeners who **share their produce with food banks** and soup kitchens. C.C. reported that Beverly Hills Community gardens donated as much as 96 pounds per week, for a total of "1000.5 pounds of fresh, beautiful and organically grown tomatoes, peppers, collard greens..." and more.

**Green thumbs down** to **warnings against pine needles as mulch**. It's an old tale that's been debunked but won't die. Experts who have *tried* to use these materials to create acidic mulch find it may be mildly acid but only for a fleeting period during decomposition. So calling pine needles and oak leaves troublesome acidifiers just doesn't wash -- especially in the Midwest and western U.S., the land of alkaline soil. Pine needles are great mulch.

It's simple to make sure garden produce like this assortment (below) goes to those who need it. Locate an area food bank (one way to do this is to search the Internet for *find local food bank*#), then gather up the garden's surplus bounty each week and drop it off.

#Such as

[www.ampleharvest.org](http://www.ampleharvest.org)

[www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

<http://foodpantries.org>

Photo below: ©2011

Catherine Connelly



Below: Rhododendrons, azaleas, other acid-loving plants and the garden in general love this pine needle mulch.





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

**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 is that every minute in a garden can be wonderful if I keep two things in mind. One, no one ever knows enough to be completely on top of a garden - even if we could remember everything at the right times to keep every plant in line, Mother Nature always has something new for us to learn. Two, that there are always more things going right than wrong in a garden. focus on the positive or you might miss it *all*."



**A gentle guy with an artist's eye...** just don't cross his plants or pets. He's been Santa's helper in his off-seasons for decades, where his soft voice, small stature and kind eyes are perfect for the shy kids frightened of booming, big-guy ho-ho-ho's. During the growing season he transfers that caring to the plants he places and pictures. But cross his backyard birds, unnecessarily harass a hawk or heron, or roust a toad that was bothering nothing more than flies, and watch his eyes grow fierce.

Email questions to Janet or Steven at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) or call 248-681-7850.

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

**Thursday, October 27, Friday October 28 and Saturday October 29**, Janet and Steven bring four classes to **Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison, Wisconsin**. They are **Winter interest in the garden** and **Garden Photography** on Thursday evening, **Entry Gardens** on Friday afternoon, and a **Garden photography workshop** on Saturday morning. For more information, contact the gardens' office at 608-246-4550 or copy this URL to your browser bar to read about classes and download a registration form: [www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm#workshops](http://www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm#workshops)

A chance to **Garden by Janet and Steven** -- observe or try your hand to learn about fall garden clean up at any of the places below. These sessions are free but require registration. See page 19 for more about the why and how of such sessions.

**Saturday, November 5, 9 a.m. - noon, *Garden by Janet & Steven*** at the **Detroit Zoo**, Huntington Woods, MI, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for Janet's & Steven's hands-on instruction in **bulb planting and fall garden clean up**. For instructions how to join us, call or email

Janet & Steven. Provide a telephone number in your email or when you call. Include the word "zoo" in the subject line of your email, please. JMaxGarden@aol.com, 248-681-7850.



### **The Garden by Janet & Steven series:**

You and we are let-me-see, hands-on people. That's how we learn best. So from time to time we schedule *Garden by Janet & Steven* sessions and list them in this newsletter to afford you that kind of chance to grow. You visit us in a garden to either watch or work with us. 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 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 come help us for a day, and stay on if you like, too.

Right: What *are* those people doing out there in the rain, staring at that tree? It's a Garden by Janet & Steven session taking place in a front yard on a rainy evening. (Give up a chance to garden because of a light rain? No way!) This dedicated crew watched, learned and pitched in to work out a way to save a tree from its own girdling root.





## 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 with new material and "hybrids" from our basic 100.

So, we're game for...

- a **how-to lesson for a garden club**,
- a **hands-on workshop** or
- a **multi-part class** for a small group!

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 times.



\*Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich have been digging, shooting and teaching how-to for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the '90s and ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring expert instructors who knew their stuff in a garden as well as knowing how to get their messages across in front of a group.

## You're true blue... and so is our coneflower!

The yellow coneflower we used as a donation telltale is all-blue. Thank you! We've paid the design and programming bills and are now learning to operate all the component parts of the site. We're itching to launch but determined to have everything usable *and* useful first. We'll keep you advised of progress right here.



## Donations always welcome

You helped us pay for the expert help we needed to insure that our website will be clean, easy to use and secure. Now the project's back to us, and we do a bit more as we can -- a process that's slowed a bit for the past few weeks, and a few weeks still to come as we close client's gardens. We hope to meet you there in November.

We're keeping our site ad-free, so we will always accept donations. **Send donations**, check payable to Janet Macunovich, to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328.

## 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 purchase hard copies or high-resolution versions of any of Steven's images you see in *What's Coming Up*.<sup>\*</sup> Or name a flower, type of scene or hue in mind you can request that dream. His library includes tens of thousands of plants and natural images.

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



hardy *Hibiscus*

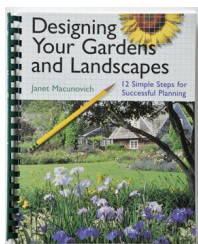
- **Matted, framed,**  
overall 11 x 15", \$48
- No-fade **cloth tapestry,**  
36 x 48', \$215

Describe your dream image, theme or color scheme to Steven at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com). He'll send you a photo sampler and price list.

<sup>\*</sup>Images in our 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.



## 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

### ***Caring for Perennials***

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.

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



### ***Potting Up Perennials CD. New for 2011***

Practical, beautiful answers about perennials and all kinds of flowers, trees, shrubs, design, pruning and much more is in this collection of 2009 & 2011's *What's Coming Up*. Includes 101 issues with over 1,700 pages, 1,600 articles and 2,400 images. Has a comprehensive index with how-to guide so you can search for any topic or detail in any of the 101 issues. 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 2011***

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



### ***Janet and Steven give you: Trees\****

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

### ***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 2011. Now they're collected in this set for your design library.

10" x 13" magazine, 48 pp. Color Ill.'s. \$12.00



### ***Janet and Steven give you: Garden Care\****

Vital how-to for tending a garden, from Janet and Steven's favorite articles on: bed preparation; soil testing; making a weed-free bed; spring start-up; improving hard-packed soil; fertilizing; watering; cutting back and deadheading; repairing irrigation; drought-tolerant plants; sharpening tools; tweaking in summer; staking; and the art of fall garden clean up. Items in this collection were selected from among Janet and Steven's ten years of *Michigan Gardener* articles. Each made its debut in that magazine, waited for its companion pieces and now they all join your library in this more durable and comprehensive form.

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

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**\*For a look inside, email [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) with the subject line "Magazine peek."**

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