

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns

Issue #163, November 9, 2011



Left: Hens & chicks face down frost and live up to the name, live forever, *Sempervivum tectorum*. So let's not even think of cutting them off in fall, or other evergreen perennials. (Page 8)

Below: No two *Ginkgo* trees are alike, yet all have something in common! See page 12.

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Check basics before accusing a plant of poisoning its neighbor

I've read your articles about **plants that can poison other plants**. I have a 3-4 year old **tricolor beech** planted within 6 feet of a stand of **zebra grass** and the leaves of the beech died off last summer. The nursery suggested this might have happened from lack of water due to the very hot, dry spell we had during summer. Might the problem be its proximity to the Miscanthus? What can I do to help it along for next year? - R. -



If our tricolor beech (*Fagus sylvatica roseo-marginata*) showed signs of trouble, even after 15 years on site, we'd check first into what may have changed in water, soil or light. Most plant problems track to those essentials.

beeches included, have a tougher time after transplant than those more commonly planted, such as locust and linden. Beeches are not so able to survive in **hard-packed, dry, infertile, overly wet and alkaline** soils -- conditions unfortunately common on newly developed sites. To alleviate soil trouble, **loosen the soil all around** the root ball, at least twelve inches out from the transplanted root ball for each year it's been in the ground. Dig or drill that circle around the new plant, so air and water can penetrate easily to at least twelve inches deep. That's what it takes for soil-enriching microorganisms to get established and help the roots.

It's unlikely that the zebra grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Zebrinus') is having any significant negative effect on the beech, not chemically anyway. Although that grass is an allelopath -- able to produce toxins which can stunt or kill other plants rooting into the area -- its toxic effects aren't very strong or far reaching. It might kill seedling competitors but large woody plants probably won't react in any serious way.

Did you **rule out all other possibilities** before casting a suspicious eye on the grass? It's a good idea to look first at water, light and soil condition.

Drought is often a problem. Recently transplanted trees can suffer leaf scorch and leaf loss during a hot, dry year.

How to help a young tree take off and grow!

Large transplants are more vulnerable than smaller plants because as much as 90 per cent of the root mass may be left behind in the growing field when a large plant is transplanted. That means the plant is "running on empty" from the start. Even a few days of dry soil can do it in. So water thoroughly, then **check the root ball** and surrounding soil by feel daily until you know how quickly the plant uses all available water. **Water whenever the top two inches feel dry** -- even if that's in April or November.

Consider soil trouble, too. Some species, beeches included, have a tougher time after transplant than those more commonly planted, such as locust and linden. Beeches are not so able to survive in **hard-packed, dry, infertile, overly wet and alkaline** soils -- conditions unfortunately common on newly developed sites. To alleviate soil trouble, **loosen the soil all around** the root ball, at least twelve inches out from the transplanted root ball for each year it's been in the ground. Dig or drill that circle around the new plant, so air and water can penetrate easily to at least twelve inches deep. That's what it takes for soil-enriching microorganisms to get established and help the roots.

That's especially important to beeches, which aren't pioneer trees but old forest colonizers. They prefer soil improved by a century of other trees' leaf fall and countless generations of soil dwelling critters that flourish in a protected woods. Beech roots like it cool, too, as it would be in a shady woods. So, mulch the whole root zone to moderate the soil temperature.



Above: We've seen *Miscanthus* in enough mixed borders (here, the variegated *Miscanthus* known as zebra grass with *Hydrangea*, Joe Pye, arborvitae, bee balm and others) to know it's not a stone cold killer, except to lay on and shade a neighbor to death.

Below: The hedge is only half height at one end (blue bars). The reason: A Norway maple whose limbs are just visible at right (red arrow). Sure, the tree's an allelopath, but perhaps more importantly, it's shading that end of the hedge



A large woody plant's root system at planting time is almost always smaller than what's required for independence. The roots simply do not cover enough territory to provide the canopy sufficient water and support, either because they have been confined to a pot or were cut back drastically when the plant was taken from the growing field.

As a result, we direct special attention to a recently-planted tree or shrub. We keep it up until the plant **becomes established**, which means until it has **a root system large enough** to support its top.

Zebra grass: More bully than killer

When we discuss allelopathy, we hedge our statements with "unlikely", "might", and "probably" because there's **relatively little known about allelopathy** as exhibited by plants, **beyond black walnut' effects**. We've had centuries to observe walnut's effect on various species, including two important food crops that succumb to walnut wilt -- potatoes and tomatoes. So we've had both time and incentive to record and analyze walnut's effects. That history doesn't exist for most other species recently recognized as having herbicidal tendencies.

Observers have noted so far that **where *Miscanthus* grows, few seedlings of any other species** grow. It's likely that *Miscanthus* emits a chemical that inhibits

the germination of other species' seeds.

The **grass family has a number of members that employ this tactic**, including corn (thus corn gluten meal as a weed preventer), rye and quack grass. Some are more powerful than others -- a thick stand of rye is a pretty mighty seed preventer, but quack grass can slow and stunt the growth of mature perennials such as peony and iris.

When is a new tree out of the woods?

Established: Since we cannot see the plant's root system we **read the top growth to gauge establishment**. When an average branch tip produces as many inches per year of new growth as its species' average, we consider it established.

Recent: We call it recently planted if it went in fewer years ago than its trunk diameter at planting; e.g., less than three years for a three inch caliper trunk.

Right: When its trunk was three inches in diameter, we transplanted this weeping white pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Pendula') from one place to another in the garden. For three years afterward, its annual growth rate did not measure up to its pre-transplant 8 inches, so we gave it special attention as a "recent" transplant. In year four, it resumed its former growth rate and we declared it "established."



Remembered fun: Radio days and *Translator Man*

We, students, and friends had a great time making radio ads. Our *Translator Man* series poked fun at botanical name snobbery. Who had more fun -- those who read the calm, logical lines of Translator Man, those who created the mob scene noise, or the radio audience?

Translation student (panicked): Translator Man!
Translator Man!

Translator Man: What is it?!

Translation student (breathing heavily from exertion):
I've just come from the botanical garden, sir. The taxonomists...

Translator Man: Now, calm down. Steady. What about the taxonomists?

Translation student: Sir, I heard them planning. They've formed a taxo-terrorist group! They're going to come destroy our Translation School because they liked it better when there was less plain English spoken at garden centers. Oh, what will we do?!

Translator Man: Well, we won't panic, that's for sure.
We know we're providing a useful service to gardeners everywhere, translating for shoppers who have to listen to unintelligible things like *Tilia cordata* and "avoid trauma to the cambium"...

Translation student: Littleleaf linden, and "don't scrape the bark off the trunk."

Translator Man: Very good! So we know it's a worthy service and we will prevail.

(Mob sounds)

Translation student: Oh, no, Translator Man, there they are. The taxo-terrorists!

Translator Man: Rally round, translators!!

Announcer: To be continued! Meanwhile, remember that you never need a translator at...

Walnut snacks and radio gems

Win a bet for me. Are black walnuts edible?

One more thing. I remember when you were on radio and had some humorous ads for "Translator Man." Better late than never, I just want to say I love the idea of someone translating Latin plant names for me! - G.A. -

We're glad you liked Translator Man. thanks, you remind us of a fun time!

We can **eat the nuts from all the walnut trees**, including black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), butternut (*J. cinerea*) and English walnut (*J. regia*). However, taste testers say **black walnut's bitter** compare to the cultivated varieties of English

walnut, which come across as milder and buttery. That may be an oil issue, as there's about 10% less fat in the black walnut. Or maybe it's the body telling us what it needs -- the black walnut has proportionately more protein but the English walnut has more than double the amount of inflammation-fighting, cholesterol-lowering omega-3 fatty acid.

**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. We give extra weight to the words of someone like our friend Marge Alpern, 91, who has gardened and watched gardeners all her life, or long-time gardener Tom Clothier who we know through the impressive writings he's made available on the Internet. Listen to what they say and imply, about time:

You don't plant a garden, you grow a garden. And be patient. Give everything a second chance. - Marge Alpern -

I harvested 2660 (wal)nuts from one tree... ...200 nuts every day until finished. ...It takes 35 minutes to remove the husks, 15 minutes to scrub and rinse the nuts two times (and clean the driveway), 2 hours to dry in the sun, 24 to 36 hours to dry internally in my herb drier, and about 4 weeks for the nutmeats to cure. This is not a big deal, even if your procedures require more time. - Tom Clothier (<http://tomclothier.hort.net/>)

This week we thought of Marge and Tom when seeing a flower open in time-lapse, fast-forward film. It reminded us of Walt **Disney's** *Wonderful World of Color* TV show, which featured such a flower in its opening sequence. We never knew until now, that we both remembered and loved that introduction specifically for **the magic of seeing that flower open**.

Relish a black walnut...

...if you can shell it!

The seeds of black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) are considered less tasty than English (actually, Persian!) walnuts (*Juglans regia*). That can be debated, since taste is subjective, but another big difference is indisputable -- black walnuts are hard to hull, even harder to crack. Heed the voices of experience for hulling- and nut-cracking directions:

For hulling:

- Work with ripe nuts: when the **hull changes from green to yellow-green** and you can dent the hull with your thumb.
- Wear **plastic gloves** and protect hard surfaces or you skin and surface acquire a long lasting dark brown stain.
- Work on a hard surface and use a strong knife to score the hull all the way around, then twist it off.
- Remove remaining bits of hull as soon as you can since it can discolor the nutmeat and make the nut more bitter. Fill a tub with water, **soak and stir** to accomplish this.

Cracking on...

- Then crack the nuts. Clamp one at a time, seam horizontal, **in a vise** and tighten it until the nut just cracks. (Thanks for this to the generosity of Tom Clothier and his impressive, well-linked archives. See *Alone in the garden? Never!* at left, and <http://tomclothier.hort.net/page21.html>)

Or...

Use a high quality metal nutcracker.

Drive a car over them. If the pavement beneath is owned by neatniks, cover it first with several thicknesses of newspaper so it won't leave so much stain.

Hit each one sharply, with a hammer. Set it on a hard surface pointed end up.

Put the nuts into a heavy canvas bag on a concrete floor and use a sledge.

Stomp down hard with the heel of a work boot.

We searched the Internet to revisit that show opener, found one from 1964 and one from 1970. Watch the two, made just six years apart and both pretty influential on children, and we'll bet you, too, will see the line between the good old days of leisure and **the modern age of rush**:

Check the pace of Disney, 1964:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kBBVcgvMZU>

Then compare it to the 1970's version:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4UBhDxG3yc>



People are in such a hurry that they miss big color like the smoke tree (below). What hope is there that they'll see this white leaf *Lamium*, snuggled into the fall leaves and producing a few off-season blooms?

An eye for the flowers of Fall

I hope you're enjoying this fall as much as I am. I cannot believe that my **rose bushes are still blooming**. And, they are more beautiful and fragrant than they were all summer. I'm telling you, the end is near. I had a **daylily** blooming at Halloween and I've seen dozens of **dandelions**. I wish I knew if this were really unique or if it's old age creeping up on me. – J.K. –

Oh, it's definitely old age creeping up on you, and causing you to appreciate every day that much more! :)

Daylily fall bloom: **it happens** now and then -- you just missed 'em before.

There are almost always dandelions that take advantage of fall to re-bloom. Also some lilacs, forsythias, azaleas, creeping phloxes, myrtles and others are fooled into opening a few of next spring's flowers ahead of time. **Who notices that when they're rushing** to get to work, or to make the next meeting on time?

As for **roses, they really may smell better now**, because they are on slow-forward. The chemical changes that happen as a flower ages (and which the bees read so well) take a *long* time when it's very cool.

The 45mph garden

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

Right: What a warm spot on a gray late fall day! It's **American smoke tree (*Cotinus obovatus*)**.



Throw down the gloves - and the seed -- to grow biennials

I have very poor luck **getting foxglove to survive the winter** and early spring. The last two years, the foxglove lived through the winter but gradually died during March-April. This has been true of small, new plants, medium-sized plants that had not bloomed during the previous season, and also mature plants that had bloomed.

These foxgloves are in sun half the day, perhaps more during spring. The soil is fertile. The bed is raised and exposed to the wind.

Also: **Should all perennials be cut back now?** I know to leave my oriental poppies alone, but how close do I cut delphiniums and phlox? I usually cut old growth on daisies and coral bells and leave the new growth. Is this correct? - M.B. -

Biennial foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) would normally be green long into winter, protected by fallen leaves and the shelter of many trees in its native woodsy environment. Exposure to wind and drought during winter can kill it or weaken it so that it falls prey to stem-rotting fungi as the new season begins. It's a plant that can benefit if it has moist soil as fall turns into winter, and **an airy covering of non-matting oak leaves or straw**.

We find that biennials, including foxglove, pick their place. The mature plant needs to winter well, but it's as important that its seed can prosper. The simplest, quickest test of whether a place is right for foxglove is to **sow seeds there in late summer or fall**. Leave a light coating of leaves on that part of the garden, and check for seedlings in spring. No seedlings? Try a different species! Seedlings present? Add a few pot-grown older plants if you want to have both blooming and juvenile plants right from the start.

As for cutting back perennials: It's tough to give "general" rules for the dozens or hundreds of perennial species that may be together in one garden. Our best shot at this, in brief:



Foxglove and other biennials are beautiful creatures often left to become ugly, full of bloomed-out stems because we're told "They must go to seed, don't deadhead." Although a biennial's seed must ripen and fall to insure a continuing cycle of 1st year seedlings and 2nd year bloomers, no garden needs *all* the seed a foxglove can produce. Go ahead and deadhead, keep new flower stalks coming, and let just a stem or two at the end of summer ripen its seed!

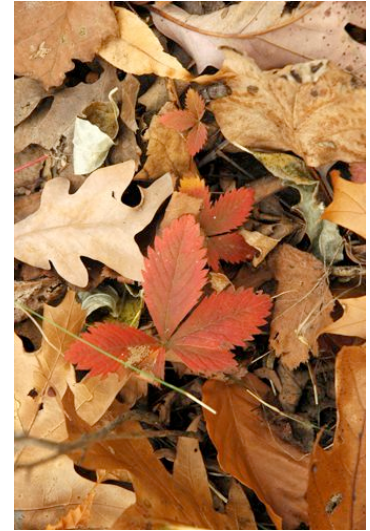
*Of course they grow where there are leaves! Leaves don't smother seedlings that **belong** in the woods. Trillium seeds and the like just wait and come up in little windows of light as leaves decay, while still being protected from abrupt temperature change by the remaining leaves.*

- Mickey Loomis -

1) It's okay to cut back to the ground just about anything that is not woody. Wait and cut the woody plants in early spring. Where there's any question about woodiness to cut it back only partway, to about six inches tall.

2) No plant *needs* to be cut back. Fall clean up is based more on aesthetics, pursuit of the most efficient work routine, and efforts to forestall certain plants' inherent problems.

Right: Fall's beautiful, even with untrimmed perennials in the mix. See the ruddy wild strawberry foliage in this fallen leaf mix? The plant's living the good life on soil built from the remains of tumbled cranesbill, doll's eyes, meadow rue and other woodland perennials. No one clips them or clears away the fall leaves but they all keep on keeping on.



Winterizing Perennials: Rules all meant to be broken

Herbaceous perennials: Cut away. Non-woody plants, which begin their new growth from the roots next spring. Stems can be cut all the way to the ground in fall. Basal leaves can remain, or be cut. Examples:

Astilbe

Blackeye Susan (*Rudbeckia* species)

Blanket flower (*Gaillardia* species)

Daisy

Delphinium

Herbaceous potentilla (*P. himalayense*, etc.)

Hosta

Iris (really, you are only cutting off leaves as the stems are the thick horizontal runners)

Ornamental grasses (see also exceptions)

Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)

Standard, no-wood peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*)

Tall *Sedum* such as 'Autumn Joy'

Tall *Phlox* (*P. paniculata*)

Woody perennials: No cuts in fall. Woodyies develop bark. Next year's growth comes from above-ground buds on branches. They take longer than herbaceous plants to transfer year-end energy to their roots, and also store some of it in their stems and buds. If woody perennials must be cut, best to wait until early spring so that they can continue to store away energy throughout fall, and begin recouping what was lost right away:

Butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*)

Creeping phlox (*Phlox subulata*), perennial candytuft, rock cress (*Arabis* species)

Dwarf spirea (*Spiraea* species and varieties such as 'Gold Flame.')

Lavender, thyme, sage, germander (*Teucrium*)

Russian sage (*Perovskia*)

Shrubby potentilla (*Potentilla fruticosa*)

Exceptions: Things which can be bypassed during fall cutting:

Any perennial or grass that looks good from to winter viewer can remain. Cut it back in spring.

Perennials with evergreen leaves; e.g., coral bells, *Lamium*, Lenten rose (*Helleborus* species), barrenwort (*Epimedium*) blue oat grass, blue fescue, and Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*). They probably won't die if cut in fall but don't you want something to see in late fall and very early spring?

Perennials that start next season's leafy growth in fall, such as oriental poppy, and biennials such as foxglove (*Digitalis*). These can be cut but are best left alone.

No real need to cut herbaceous perennials, ever, so long as untidiness doesn't bother you. Their new year's growth eventually covers old stalks.

Any woody plant that is well established and out-growing its welcome. Such plants can be cut any time. If it's already too large, why worry about allowing it a few extra weeks to store energy for next year?



1



2



3



4

1) Why cut *Bergenia* when you chose it for winter color? 2) Or try to clip just the Solomon's seal leaves in this mix of evergreen *Epimedium*, evergreen grapeholly and near-evergreen Serbian bellflower? 3) When we do cut, it's often so we can get to weeds that would hide under the plant's summer skirt. 4) Then, we cut all the way!

Aiming for Answers: Hit on grapeholly protection

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.



Winter cold turns the leaves of Oregon grapeholly from green to maroon (above), a color that can add greatly to a winter scene. However, in the northern part of the plant's range -- zone 5 and 6 -- abrupt temperature changes in late winter can kill the leaves so they scorch (right) or brown out entirely and fall prematurely. This leaf loss is only a temporary disfigurement for a well established grapeholly. The branch develops new foliage. However, you might spare a younger plant the energy loss and help it establish more quickly by protecting it for the first winter or two.

Last year I wrote to ask you if I could cover my Oregon grape with leaves all winter to prevent frostbite here in zone 5. It's an infant plant, only about 18 inches high, so it wasn't hard to do. And I'm pleased to report that it worked perfectly. If I hadn't gotten a bit ahead of myself and uncovered it just before the last extreme cold snap, it wouldn't have lost even one of the evergreen leaves. As it is, the damage is limited. Finally the poor thing has an opportunity to grow more in a year than it loses! - N.P. -

Oregon grapeholly (*Mahonia aquifolium*) is a 6 - 8' evergreen shrub (3-4' in the dwarf, suckering form 'Compactum'). It's a broadleaf evergreen that can add coarse texture to the landscape. We like it for its ability to grow in shade and an established grapeholly's tolerance for dry, alkaline soils that can ruin other broadleaf evergreens.



Scrabbling in the garden, word play

We gardeners earn admiring murmurs when we display our garden's produce in vases and on plates. We can get a bit more mileage from our hobby by using horticultural terms to use up the odd letter tile in a word game or fill the irksome gap in a crossword. For instance:

Abscise; verb; ab SYZ; to separate naturally, as a leaf from a twig, a spent petal from a flower structure or fruit from a branch; *When the leaves **abscise**, the sun can reach in to warm us.*

Axil: noun; AKS il; the angle formed by the branch and the leaf stalk that departs from it; *In the leaf **axil** in autumn are axillary buds, which are compressed shoots that will develop into a branch or a flower cluster.* Below: Axillary buds, lilac bush.



Marcescent: adjective; mar SES ent; withering but not falling off, as a blossom that persists on a twig after flowering or leaf that hangs on after it's no longer green; *Many oaks have **marcescent** leaves, especially on the juvenile branches that have not yet produced flowers.*

Midrib: noun; MID rib; the central vein of a leaf (arrow, right), usually continuous with the leaf stalk; *Some leaves have one central vein or **midrib**, others have several main veins splayed like a fan.*



Tea Viburnum
(*V. setigerum*)



Rachis: noun; RAY kus; a main axis or shaft, such as the main stem of a multi-part (compound) leaf; *After all the tiny leaflets fall from the locust leaf, then the twig-like **rachis** falls, much to the irritation of those who dislike how its kind tangle in the rake's tines.*

Aralia elata. Arrow point to arrow point, one huge leaf. 50 leaflets yellowing and falling, one very long rachis yet to fall!

Rive: verb; RYV; To break into pieces, as by a blow; cleave or split asunder; *When you use a hammer to **rive** the black walnut's shell, there are far more pieces to pick up than otherwise!*

Scuffle: verb; SKUH ful; to move with a quick shuffling gait, scurry, poke at or disturb, scuff; *We hope a child learns to **scuffle** joyfully in fall leaves, and doesn't think the term means only 'to brawl'.*

Septum: noun; SEP tum; thin divider between two cavities or masses of tissue, such as the thin, hard divider between kernels in a nut; *Don't you hate it when you're cracking nuts for cookies and that hard, stab-your-gums septum falls in and hides among the nut meats?!*

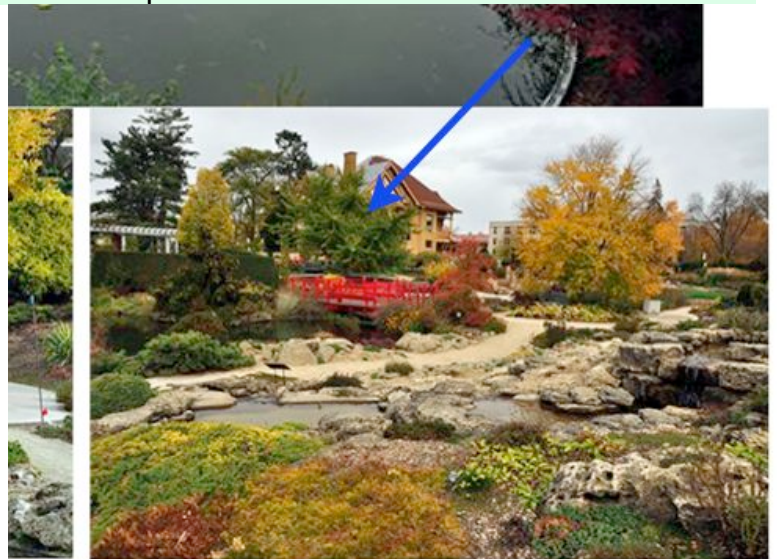
Tip cuttings: Growing on from what people are saying this week

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

Love that Wisconsin garden tour!

...Olbrich Gardens, Allen Centennial and the U of WI: I like the prairie! And the rock garden. Is that a spiky ginkgo behind the red bridge? The shot is a little pixelated and I can't tell for sure, but I think I recognize that shape. - S -

Good eye for plant form! Yup, it's a ginkgo. When it goes gold behind that red bridge, watch out!



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Everyone planning to plant a tree should scrutinize it as carefully as one might a potential spouse, for a tree's essential character is as unlikely to change over time! *Ginkgo biloba*, for instance, has a coarse edge to it in all seasons and ages. Look at the *ginkgo* gallery on this and the next page to develop your own feel for the "spikiness" S picked out in the scene at right from issue #162.

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It's a *Ginkgo* so it has rough edges - take it or leave it. Far left: The irregular outline is apparent even in winter and on individual ginkgos with (left) semi-weeping tendency and (below) weeping form. The tree at bottom left had major limbs pruned to keep them off utility line. Even that pinched-back portion maintains a decidedly spikey edge.



Tip cuttings (Continued)

Fall color commendations keep coming

Coming home from up North this week I was blown away by the yummy gold color of the naturalized larch stands!!

And in my own back yard the incredible vividness of the little coral bark maple. (Gold leaves, red twigs, shown below.) We are so fortunate to live in a place with such wonderful natural beauty!! - J.J. -

Above: *Ginkgo biloba* and (right) coral bark maple (*Acer palmatum* 'Sangu Kaku') both add rich gold to the fall landscape. Ginkgo belongs in full sun while the coral bark maple, like all of its kind, prefers the moderated environment of the understory.



Tip cuttings (Continued)

Design to disguise the above-ground pool

...pool disguise -- In 2010 my husband and I rescued 2 potted arborvitaes from his uncles' home (he had passed away and we didn't want to leave them for the new owners). I have kept them in the pots, put them on the porch for the winter, then put them near the pool filter for the summer. My suggestion is to have movable objects (living or not) and place them in spots around the pool area. This way, one can move them around throughout the year (and yard) to distract the viewer from always looking at the pool.

My other thought was to put green around the pool (or paint the pool) so it looks the same color as grass or to treat the pool as a huge pond and have plant stuff around it.... - N.G. -

Thanks for those great, practical ideas!

Voodoo lily in issue #161: enduring but flowerless where winter's cold

...about voodoo lily hardiness -- mine has been in the ground over winter for at least 3 years now (NE Livonia, MI, zone 6a). The leaves come up but never a flower. I'm really bad at weathering my bulbs indoors over winter, so if I can get away with not digging them up, I leave them... - N.G. -

This species flowers in the off-season, sans leaf. In zone 5's off season -- winter -- the cold stops the flowering process or kills the flowering shoot as it nears the soil surface. For those of us who like the dramatic leaf but don't like fetid smells, it's no loss!

First-nose report about voodoo lily

Regarding voodoo lilies. Our lily bloomed early in the house, too early to plant outdoors. It was gorgeous! As for the smell . . . Vultures circled the house. Our cat ran away, and the neighborhood dogs howled in agony. Our mail person stopped delivery. Fortunately, the beautiful bloom died back before we could list our house for sale. Plant at your own risk. - N.M. -



Voodoo lily flower - Phew! Photo ©2011 Dave DeVries

Voodoo lily chooses its place in zone 5 garden

My Voodoo lily (*Dracunculus vulgaris*) is outside year round in Marne, MI (Zone 5)...

I lifted my voodoo lily each year and brought it in for the winter. But about 4 years ago when I lifted it the little bulblets left behind in the soil actually survived the winter. They have steadily grown bigger each year and now stand about 3.5 to 4 feet tall. I did nothing to help this since I wasn't planning on it happening. I did not mulch or otherwise protect it. I had it in about six different places and it always left behind bulblets, but **only this one spot resulted in over wintering**. It's in a raised bed, against the house foundation in a southwest facing wall. Each year more bulblets are taking off and I actually had to dig out about 6 of them this year, they are spreading like a little forest. I gave the potted mother bulb away this year, and am instead relying on it coming back each year outdoors.

Bonus! I do not get any bloom - perhaps because it always blooms in Feb. and isn't going to outside. Can't handle the stench inside anymore now that the plant is big and if I'm going to remove the flower what is the point of it blooming? But I have to say that although guests (ok, *kids*) were intrigued with the flower, no one seems at all interested in the foliage - although I find it very interesting with the spotted stem and single huge leaf. - C.D. -

Wanted: Tomatoes for indoor garden

Do you know where we can buy vegetable starts to grow under lights in winter? We're vegetarians and want our own fresh produce all year. - M.G. -

Dwarf, determinate varieties are the ticket here. Short plants so that when they're under fluorescent fixtures there's not so much distance between upper and lower foliage that the lower stuff starves for light. Determinate -- producing just one crop once the plant reaches maturity -- so that branches won't keep growing after fruitset, which would put the ripening fruit in shade.

Our son and daughter-in-law have grown tomatoes for the past two winters in their Aero-Garden (<http://www.aerogarden.com>). The company offers seeds of varieties that suit indoor growing conditions. If that seed price doesn't suit -- more expensive than seed-alone since seeds come ready to go in peat pots and hydroponic rooting media -- you might assemble your own package. Buy your pots and rooting media in bulk, and order seeds separately. Shop for your equipment supplier's suggested type or choose another dwarf, determinate variety from a seed company. By sorting through seed company offerings for "dwarf" and then "determinate", we found, for instance, 'Terenzo' cherry tomato from Park Seed (<http://www.parkseed.com>) and 'Bushsteak' from Burpee (<http://www.burpee.com>)

Can't spook these tomatoes!

We are taught there are two main types of tomato: determinate and indeterminate.

Determinate plants are those that go to flower just once and set one big crop.

Indeterminate types keep making more flowers even as fruit from previous blooms is ripening.

We think there's a third type: *Determined* tomatoes, such as those that this year were still setting fruit as Halloween approached!

This week in our garden

Grow with us! This week:

Check its water and water it now if it was new this year and the soil around it is dry. A dry new plant in fall often becomes a dead plant over winter.

Discourage bulb-snatching squirrels by stamping the soil down well after planting bulbs. The season drives these pea-brain animals to dig, dig, dig. What better place to do that than where soil has been loosened for them?

Rogue out woody weeds now, As leaves drop and herbaceous stems fall, seedling trees and shrubs are most apparent. They stand upright and often bear leaves of a different fall hue than the perennial or groundcover in which they were hiding. They're not only easy to spot but where the mechanics of extrication might have left the host perennial mangled and unsightly, now removal can be invisible even if we must divide the clump to remove a well established weed.

So we walk through beds now to pluck out unwanted maples, buckthorn, bittersweet...

...and a prime target: poison ivy. While we still recall where it is, while the weather is cool so our pores are less open and the plant's toxic oil is less volatile. A redhead with sensitive skin like Steven can't approach the stuff even now but Janet can suit up for the attack -- long sleeves, high collar, and rubber gloves.

We trace vines back to their roots, looking for the source plant so we can dig that loose and follow all the shoots outward from that spot. All bits go immediately into a plastic garbage bag. Roots, stems and leaves all contain the allergen, urushiol.

Perhaps the toughest thing to do while weeding poison ivy is to avoid touching yourself -- pushing glasses back up on one's nose is a definite no-no when your gloves have been in poison ivy! Try to keep all such sessions short, or broken into 15-30 minute intervals punctuated by a glove change, then go inside to wash up right afterward -- self and clothes.



When poison ivy's leaves drop, there's less surface we can accidentally rub against, bruise and cause to leave irritating oil on our skin. So we mark the tree it's climbing and come back to cut and dig it out in late fall. Once it goes vertical, as up this tree, poison ivy begins to bloom and fruit (arrows point to clusters of tan berries). Birds enjoy the seeds and spread them farther than the vine could reach before!

Wash away houseplants' insect trouble. Plants that have been back indoors for several weeks have now been in dry heated air and lower light long enough to depress both growth rate and natural defenses. On these weakened plants, pests may begin building in number. "Suddenly" in midwinter they may take the upper hand. We start the winter routine, of a shower or bath for these plants every few weeks. We wipe or rinse the leaves, bottom and top, which clears the dust that makes it harder for them to make use of light, and that also removes insects and eggs.

Apply organic fertilizers such as manure, sewage sludge (Milorganite, Fertrel), green sand, cottonseed meal, etc. It takes time and the action of soil microorganisms to break down these products and release their nutrients. That starts happening now and resumes early next spring, before we're out. It's good to know that we can huddle indoors, but still be providing this help to plants, which don't stop for winter but continue to grow roots and ground-hugging, weather resistant leaves and shoots on every day the soil's not frozen.



The fertilizers we want in fall -- and most of the time! -- are organic and slow-release. They're made from manures and combinations of plant- and animal "meal". These derive most or all of their nitrogen from water-

insoluble matter that will break down slowly as soil microorganisms cause it to decay. Look for WIN-- Water Insoluble Nitrogen on the analysis portion of the label.





Green thumbs up to cold intervals during fall. The cold is a much-needed signal to plants such as roses, which need growing time to make their final internal preparations for winter. It's called hardening off, this growth phase. Plants that can harden off properly have much less dieback over winter. The cold was great for us, too, as we appreciate Indian Summer so much more after a taste of cold.

Green thumbs down to bare soil in fall. Nature protects the soil from extreme temperature swings, pounding rain and erosion with a live leafy cover part of the year and dead leaves through winter. If you must clean all fallen leaves away, replace them with one or two inches of mulch to take their place. Your plants will thank you next year!

Roses need cold snaps short of freezing, to nudge them into hardening off. Otherwise, they just keep focusing on this year's flowers rather than this winter's needs. We cut a spray of roses from a big climber at a client's place on November 2 and sometimes, as in this photo, our 'Mr. Lincoln' gives us its last rose at Thanksgiving. They're more beautiful in a vase than any other roses of the year.



Above, right: We don't cut back the evergreen *Dianthus* or coral bells, or the ground-hugging foliage of *Sedum* 'Red Carpet' but we do protect that bare soil with mulch.

Right: Want to cover your soil to protect it, but prefer the bare soil look? Use a compost or, as at Olbrich Botanical Gardens in Madison, Wisconsin, use shredded, partially composted leaves.

Don't worry, it always comes. Call it Indian summer or whatever. There are always a few days of beautiful weather after Veteran's Day. - Marya Macunovich -



Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

An eternal student of gardening,

Janet Macunovich embraces the perspectives of Thomas Jefferson, 'an old man but a young gardener' and philosopher-garden writer Allen Lacy who can 'spend an entire lifetime in one corner of one garden and still not know all that's going on there'. She aims to keep studying all her life, in classrooms and in gardens. "It's such a privilege to work in other peoples' gardens," says Macunovich, "where the same plants I grow in my yard show me faces I wouldn't see otherwise. Some years I work in 100 gardens and don't see the same thing twice. To observe, research and experiment, then develop my understanding even further by writing it down for others, it's all better than gold."



An instructor who finds ways to reach every student. Horticultural photographer Steven Nikkila earned his degree in Landscape Technology from Oakland Community College in 1989. Since then he's helped thousands of people learn about photography, plants and gardens at gardening conferences, professional plant societies' symposia, community education organizations and botanical gardens. He also served as a senior instructor for The Michigan School of Gardening from 1996 to 2008. "I think one of the most important things about both teaching and photography is the angle you take. Everything has to make sense and be useful to the particular audience. When a Boy Scout troop asked me to help them with tree I.D. and photography, I used essentially the same materials I'd put together for the Master Gardener program and an Extension Educators' workshop. But it was a whole different class once I tailored it for the Scouts' perspective."

Email questions to Janet or Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850.

Visualize: Where we will be, and where *you* want us to be!

It's one of the gardener's biggest challenges, to confidently project what an area will look like after a change in planting. Fortunately, Janet and Steven are not only pretty good at visualizing but know how to teach others how, too. **Use this winter to plan beautiful changes:**

Saturday, November 19, 10 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. *Visualizing Landscape Changes*, a hands-on workshop by Janet & Steven, sponsored by the **Antrim County MSU Extension**. Free to active Antrim County Master Gardeners; a small fee to others to cover supplies and lunch. Contact Gloria Campbell at 231-533-8818 or campb536@anr.msu.edu for more information.

Saturday mornings, January 21 and February 4, 2012, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., it's the 21st annual *Winter Seminar Series* offered by **The Detroit Garden Center**, at Historic Trinity Church near Detroit's famous Eastern Market. This winter's topics are *8 Months of Color* and a *Propagation Workshop*, both led by Janet, with a third session to be held on January 28 that's still

being developed. You'll pay a pittance of a fee for a great deal of fun and learning, thanks to the educational outreach of all the good volunteers at the DGC. For more information or to reserve your seat now, contact the Detroit Garden Center at 313-259-6363 or detroitgardenctr@yahoo.com

SPECIAL OFFER on hands-on sessions this winter!

Garden by Janet and Steven this winter. We'll **clean and sharpen tools, and prune**. We're setting dates now -- **locations depend on you!** We offer these sessions because we all learn so much better and have more fun when we have our hands on.

If you are game to don your long johns and join us outdoors, or bring your tools to set a spell with others learning to sharpen,

let us know where you are so we can choose the most desirable locations!

Email JMaxGarden@aol.com, subject line: I want to Garden by Janet & Steven. In the email tell us what towns you include in your home range, and what topics you're most interested in.

There's more about *Garden by Janet and Steven* sessions on page 21.



The snow will fly but plants do not sit still. The daffodils in this garden sat just below ground level and photosynthesized all winter. Along with *Trillium* and other early spring beauties they are ready to pop up and take advantage of all that elbow room in spring. We do the same thing, pruning during winter thaws when it's so much easier to walk in the garden and see what we're doing. We hope you'll watch for our *Garden by Janet and Steven* sessions and come warm up for the new season this winter.

I have been defrauding myself all this time in letting others do for me
what I should have done with my own hands. - Ralph Waldo Emerson -

To attend *Garden by Janet & Steven*:

We're let-me-see, hands-on people. That's how we learn best. From time to time there are *Garden by Janet & Steven* 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 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 us to let you learn "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 us at the Zoo**, email mstgarden@gmail.com with the subject line of your email "Help at zoo."

Where we *Garden by Janet & Steven*

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

- Someone pays for the time, or we're on a site where we volunteer regularly. Although we love to share what we know, we also 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 teach 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 prepared for just about anything...

- **how-to lessons**,
- **hands-on workshops**, or
- **multi-part classes** ...for your group!

We can also connect you to one or a whole line-up of other experts* who know how to explain how-to. Give us a **call or send an email** to make a date, request our class list or get a referral.

JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850. Our calendars fill six months to a year in advance.

*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. They continue to support that speaker network.



Garden Art for the wall... a great holiday gift

Steven's decorated many walls with great garden and Nature images. He can help you do the same for your walls or your holiday gift giving. Capture and give to friends and family the garden beauty you love, framed or on canvas to your specifications.

You can purchase hard copies or high-resolution digital files from Steven's library of over 100,000 garden and nature images. You can choose from Steven's images you've seen in *What's Coming Up** or you can tell Steven which flower, type of scene or hue you have in mind. He'll make some matches for you

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

Examples:

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

Describe your dream image, theme or color scheme in an email to Steven at JMaxGarden@aol.com. He'll send you a photo sampler and price list.

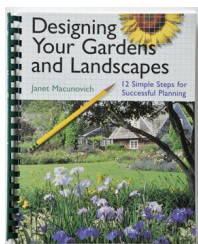
Right: *Digitalis purpurea* may have gotten its common name, foxglove, from folks glove. The flowers were imagined to be the tips of gloves suitable for the mythical "wee folk" or fairies said to roam the woods.

Perhaps you'd like a collection of photos to decorate a child's room, each with this kid of connection to classic children's tales. Steven can make that happen!

*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've 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.

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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.

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

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

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