

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and  
Steven Nikkila answer  
your growing concerns  
Issue 136, March 16, 2011

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selling. Order forms will return in issue #137!

### If you love a tree, can you axe its roots?

We planted several trees ten years ago. They are  
pretty good-sized now.

Three years ago I put cement retaining blocks around  
four of them. The tree roots are now pushing up some  
of the blocks and it is starting to look unsightly. We  
were wondering how much of the root system we could  
cut without damaging the trees. - J.B. -

Root cutting **always causes some damage**. How much  
damage, how long lasting its effects are, and just how the  
particular damage affects the rest of the tree **varies** with  
amount cut and location of cut. You're aiming at a critical  
root area so please think it through before you cut.



Above: Tree roots flare from a trunk base. This is  
natural, necessary, and must be treated as a no-cut  
zone. Not every tree develops such a massive  
flare as this beech yet every tree should *have* a  
flare, even when it's very young. See page 2 to  
learn why, and page 4 to help flare-less trees.  
Below and on page 5: Ringing a tree may cause  
more trouble than it's worth.





Here's some help figuring the costs of a cut, so you can decide what's worth doing, or not.

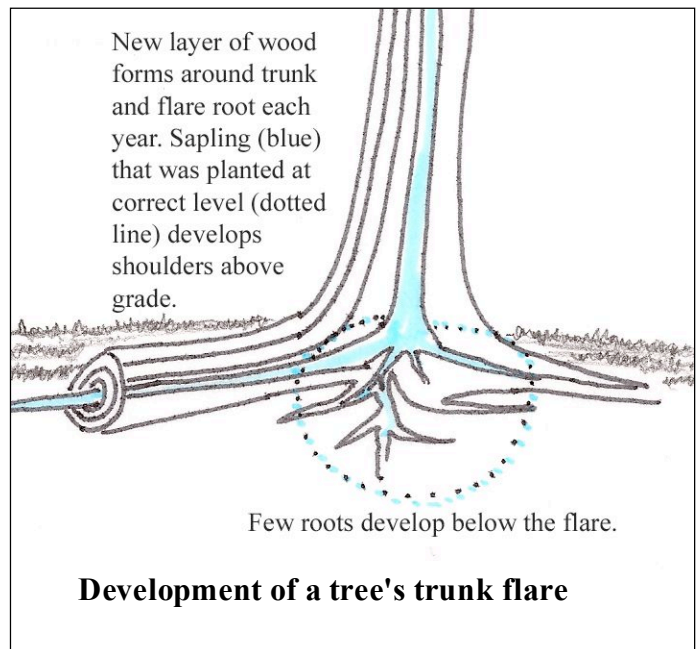
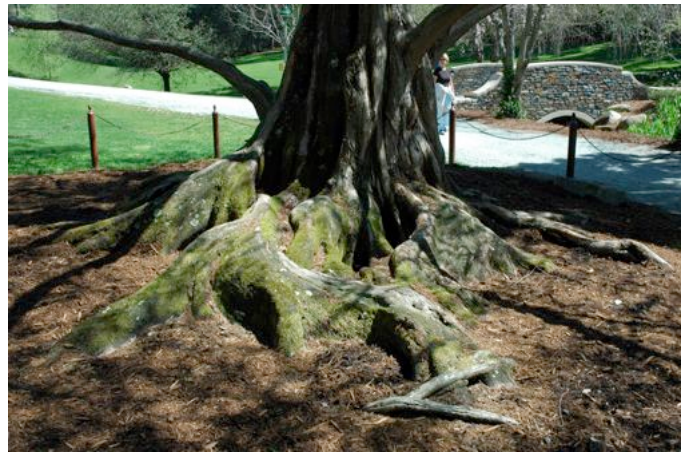
Choosing from our **four suggestions** will be easier if you can picture a tree's root system. Be sure to look at *Round above, pancaked below* on page 4.

**1)** Simplest option with least negative consequence for the tree: **Remove the blocks.** You can **fill between visible roots**, tapering the fill to make a wide, gradual mound as Nature would if the tree was in the wild. Use only soil that's loose and dark -- full of air space and humus. Roots can thrive even under six inches or more of that kind of cover. **Keep all soil away from a tree's trunk**, however. Leave a wide, shallow depression there. To create a neat edge, cut a shallow trench every spring and fall well out from the trunk, where the roots you cut are smaller than your thumb.

**2)** Another option is to **make the ring wider** -- ultimately one foot in radius for every inch of expected tree diameter. (If you expect to keep the tree until it has a trunk that's 12 inches in diameter, circle it with a radius of 12 feet.) This places the ring out beyond the point where the tree's upper roots will keep thickening. As in option one, if you add soil within the ring, keep it away from the tree's trunk. This wide ring has no negative impact on the tree and also creates a bigger circle which will remain in proportion and attractive even after the tree's grown large.

**3)** You can **start over with new trees**, loosening the soil around their root balls in a widening ring each year. More main roots will develop at greater depth. Block-lifting may never be an issue except within a couple feet of the trunk and then only when the tree is quite old. Once again, if you create a ring of any kind and add soil, keep it off the tree's trunk.

**4)** **Prune some roots, build around others.** Use a trowel and water to clear enough soil away around the tree to distinguish between primary flare roots and secondary roots that branch from those flares. See if you can cut selectively to take out only secondary roots, then leave gaps in your block wall to bridge over flare roots.





That fourth option is **root pruning**. You can cut some secondary roots, or flare roots beyond the critical zone (outside the circled area in the page 4 diagram *Round Above, Pancaked Below*). How much you can cut is figured as for the tree's top, per the one third rule (box at right). Since the root system is hidden, use the diagram on page 4 to guesstimate what cuts add up to one third.

**Pruning's one third rule:**

We can pretty safely reduce total leaf count or total root tip count by one third if we then pamper the remainder with a close eye out for any trouble plus steady water and fertilizer. (See also page 14)

Most trees have under a dozen flare roots, each one a conduit for a varying number of root tips. Guess **how much impact a cut will have** by the root's direction of growth and relative thickness. Big roots got that way by having more root tips. Flare roots that reach well watered lawn may have more total tips than those that end at a driveway or traverse dry, sandy soil.

When you cut roots, do not assume there are others below that will take over. Even the deepest natural **root systems are relatively shallow**. The roots form just one or two layers, almost entirely within the top 18 inches of the surface, and the vast majority of those in the top foot..



Rake the mulch away and see that this maple planted in hard packed soil formed roots only in the loose surface layer. These roots should not be cut within 5 feet of the 5-inch trunk but can be covered with loose soil. Keep the soil well away from the trunk, since bark below grade is very susceptible to rot. Rotted bark can no longer protect the critical underlayer called the cambium, which is exposed to infection by killers such as butt rot fungi. When the cambium dies, the tree dies.

**Snowdrops: Theirs is a fragile but hardy celebration... in the very teeth of winter.**

- Louise Beebe Wilder-

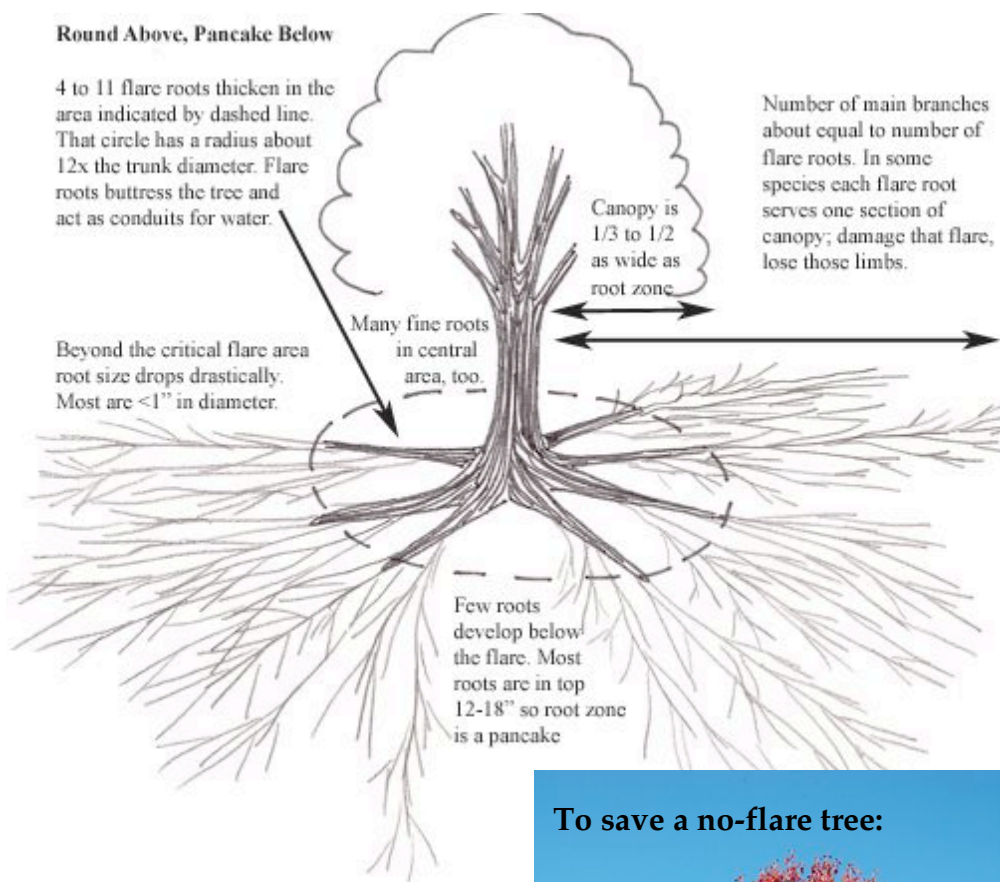


## Trees: Round above, pancaked below

Tree branches grow mostly up and out so the "ball" of branches becomes both wider and higher every year. A fast growing tree may increase its canopy 18 to 36 inches in height and diameter each year.

The root ball we see at planting doesn't remain round. Roots at the outer edge of the ball and nearest the surface grow most quickly since they have access to the most oxygen, water, and fertilizer. Those lower in the soil and closer to the trunk grow more slowly and branch less. Thus the ball becomes a pancake -- a wide, steady "foot."

A main root adds more inches per year than a branch. If an average branch grows 12 inches per year, the average root may be adding 24 or 36 inches annually.



**To save a no-flare tree:**



Above: This pancake root system is normal and was sturdy for most of a century, until a larger tree fell across its canopy. Right: When we see a stove-pipe trunk base we are often tempted to conduct a rescue operation, "Poor tree! Let's come back at night and dig all the mulch and soil away before it's too late!"



## The mystery of tree rings

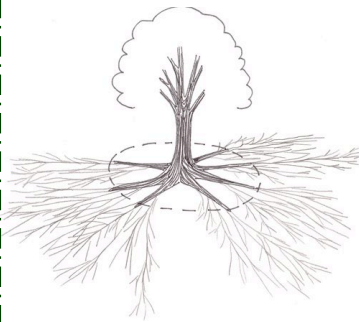
Why do we ring around trees? Sometimes because we're very proud of a lawn, and want it to have neat edges. That ring is often small, to minimize loss of lawn -- so it's soon out of proportion to the growing tree.

Sometimes the ring's made of planting an ornamental ruff of flowers. That planting is not a good idea. If the tree is newly planted, competition from those flowers can reduce or even stop tree root growth. To plant around a new tree, outline a circle several feet wider than the new tree's root ball, then plant only at the outer edge of that ring.



The only good reason for a tree ring is to eliminate lawn next to the tree. A simple layer of shallow mulch can serve this purpose. It reduces competition so the tree's roots grow more quickly and reduces the chance the tree trunk will be damaged by mowers and weed whips.

We can't call it beautiful but at least mowers won't come close enough to damage this tree, and its flare is intact.



### Have a care, save the flare!

Help others **appreciate a tree's flare**: Clip and share!

A tree's flare roots are the most important it has for stability and water collection. Cut even one and it may reduce the tree's water collecting ability by 10 - 20% for a long time and destroy its balance forever. In addition, cutting a flare root closer than one foot away for every inch of trunk diameter -- within four feet of tree trunk four inches in diameter -- almost certainly means rot will extend from that root stub on up into the trunk. That tree loses not only one leg of its balance but its trunk becomes less able to bear a shifting load.



### Volcano mulch: Just say "No!"

Do not pile mulch against a tree's trunk. This mounding of mulch is one of the leading causes of tree failure. We know you see this volcano mulching everywhere but it's *WRONG* everywhere. It's unfortunately self-perpetuating because inexperienced and uninformed people copy what they see done. Don't let anyone do this to your trees.

## What to do about that gnarly beech

If uneven surface between flare roots is troubling, add loose, humus-y soil over and between those roots, and plant a shade loving groundcover. That's what would happen in a woods as falling leaves and windblown material collect in the natural process of soil-building.

If you add soil beneath a tree's limbs, *never pile it against the tree's trunk.*



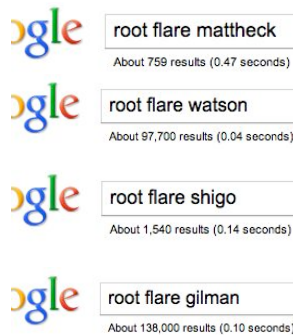
## Keeping a tree's root zone small

A tree's root system can be kept small if you start cutting early in its life and prune annually. Cut outside the flare root's critical zone (diagram *Round Above, Pancaked Below* on page 4). Loosen the soil beyond and between flare roots. Then more growth may develop from

roots below the flare, increasing the root zone's depth rather than its width.

Roots might sometimes be contained by deep edging, installed when the tree is small.

The tree's top may have to be pruned to keep it from overbalancing. Its root area must have extra water and fertilizer, as a pot bound plant needs more water, more often than others.



## For more: Search key words *root flare, Watson, Gilman, Mattheck, Shigo*

The importance of the flare roots and these long term effects have been demonstrated by the International Society of Arboriculture and leading authorities in the field, such as Gary Watson at the Morton Arboretum, Ed Gilman at University of Florida, Claus Mattheck of Germany's Karlsruhe Research Centre, and the late great Alex Shigo of the U.S. Forestry Service and Shigo Associates. Their work proved that man's mental image of tree root systems needed total re-drawing.

However, even 30 years after the new picture was drawn it's still not getting through to the general public. Most have an inaccurate image of what's under and supporting a tree, and are clueless about how our activities within the root zone affect the tree. These misunderstandings are major factors in an escalating tree failure rate.



## Spruce minus needles: Its future's in the math

We purchased a **small evergreen tree** (a short-needled tree) two Christmases ago. We used it indoors then planted it in the back yard. It **grew beautifully** in the spring. It was perfectly shaped and looked so healthy. **Then we went on vacation** last fall. When we came back the **top branches were totally bald**. At first I thought it was deer, although they hadn't touched any of our other little trees out there. My husband built a cage to prevent further nibbling.



Apparently, it wasn't deer because the tree is looking worse. I've never seen a tree die so quickly! Especially when it was so beautifully green and clearly growing during the spring and summer! - C.J. -



in light of *Round above*, *pancaked below* on page 4. If it had grown "free" for its six or seven years of life, it would have had a root mass four feet across and eight inches deep. That big pancake would have brought it enough water to survive. The pot shaped plug it actually had wasn't up to the challenge.

Maybe it wasn't only a matter of inadequate root. There may have been/may be a constriction around the base of the trunk. An overlooked cord, piece of burlap or wrapped root can tighten as a trunk thickens, block starch transfer from needles to roots and cause a lot of roots to die. When summer's worst heat and drought set in, such a tree has even less to work with.

It's so sad when this kind of thing happens. It probably wasn't really a sudden problem although the final drying out happened quickly. It's like a cut tree over the winter holidays, beautiful but getting drier until one day when major shedding starts. Today the tree's intact, tomorrow needles fall like rain.

We don't think a pest did this. More likely, it's a growth problem, and our bet's on a root inadequacy. The tree was overcome during summer's hottest, driest days because its roots were not covering a wide enough area. It just couldn't replace the moisture the foliage was losing. The needles died when their connection to the plant's water conducting system failed. After drying for a month or so, they began to fall.

It takes time for a nursery-grown root mass to reconfigure to self-sufficiency. Plants with narrow, pot-shaped root balls are most likely to fail and usually do so when the going gets tough because the gardener's stopped paying them special attention. Think about this tree

#### Forum's already there, website will share

This newsletter once was and still may look like a question-answer publication. Actually, the fluidity of email has turned most of what we do into dialogue.

This exchange is typical. What you see here is a half-dozen emails each way which we've combined.

It's good we can condense and focus it for you but also a loss. Perhaps one of the side doors we opened and closed along the way may have led more directly to something going on in your garden.

On a website with a live forum, more gardeners will be there as we travel, questioning and contributing. Straight routes will become well branched learning trees.

Help us get that website up sooner. See *Still a few petals shy of a Forum* on page 11.

Be sure this tree isn't standing deadwood, before you plan further rescue efforts. Are the buds at the tips of the branches still there? Are they moist and green inside? Existing buds are the only future a branch has, since needled evergreens do not have much if any ability to regenerate from dormant buds. Buds won't leave you guessing. Branches may take months to dry out after dying, but buds die and dry very soon after the needles stop feeding starch to the twigs and those twigs stop conducting water.

If your tree keeps the needles we can see in your photo, it may survive. Almost certainly, every branch already bare has died or will die. Cut them -- they don't have greenery left to support themselves and no future since the buds died, too. It will take years but growth from below can re-establish a pyramidal shape.

We've traced the trunk (vertical yellow line with a crook at the bottom) and one branch of each annual whorl. Whorls 3, 4 and 6 are almost certainly completely dead, with too few needles and buds to support their wood. ("Support" means to conduct enough photosynthesis to provide wood with starch to fuel its daily needs and periodic growth.) The trunk above whorl 2 will probably die, too, since its sustenance must come from foliage above itself, and those are nearly bald. Only a few of the oldest branches have a leaf:wood ratio high enough to support growth.



### But do I dare move it? It's had such a hard time!

If a plant is in trouble because it's in the wrong site, a move is the best remedy. Even if transplanting takes a toll, the plant's chances of recovery improve in better growing conditions.

### Can this tree be saved?

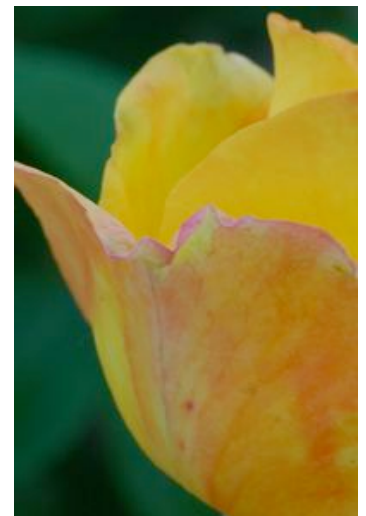
Despite its sad appearance, the little tree pictured above has more chance at survival than a bigger tree that's lost needles. Leaf:wood ratio is key.

Look at the ratio of needles to wood on the tip of a spruce, pine or fir branch. That high ratio of greenery to wood is what it takes to support good growth. Those needles fuel their own daily activities, the extension of their branch, and also provide for needle-less limbs and roots below, parts that can't produce their own fuel through photosynthesis.



*Move those roses as soon as you can dig. They will probably hardly notice. ...they're a lot tougher than we give them credit for.*

- Nancy Lindley - Great Lakes Roses



A needle-rich tree in a good site makes energy at



such a rate that it can't even grow quickly enough to use it all. It pads roots and wood with the excess starch, then uses those reserves to rebound from calamity. In comparison, a poor tree starves after a catastrophe.

If we steel ourselves to do the math where our woody plants are concerned, we may more often choose to cut our losses, start new and do more to help the replacement tree build a good underground bank of roots.



Left: Consider the wood-heavy ratio of this tree afflicted by tip blight. It has so few needles supporting each foot of wood that it must burn its reserves, and maybe give up the scantiest-clad limbs in a process called "dieback" before reaching a point where its greenery can meet the needs of remaining live wood.

After that, if all growing conditions remain good the tree may put a tiny bit aside one year and be able to increase its new, needle-rich growth the next. That may mean a slightly larger increase the next year, and the year after.

Below, right: This pine is losing foliage after trenching behind it destroyed roots. Its comeback can be a very slow process, like a person recovering from near bankruptcy with such huge expenses that putting anything by is really tough or impossible for a while. The more leafless wood there is, the higher the tree's operating expense and slower its recovery.

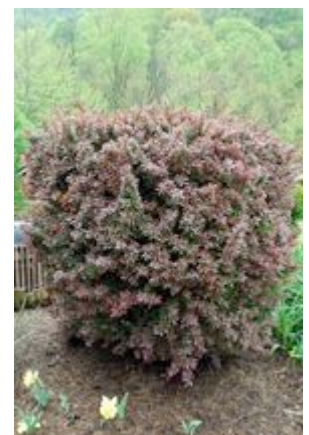


Below, left: If a tree was not growing well or still recovering from past crisis so its reserves are low when it experiences a new problem, that's real trouble. This pine was damaged when a devastating winter weather anomaly destroyed much of its root system, then had massive needle loss the following spring when remaining roots couldn't meet the tree's water need. Like many white pines all across northeastern North America it was still struggling, thin and pale 15 years after the bad winter. Its "last straw" came during a dry summer when the homeowner turned off the sprinklers to save money.



## Deciduous/broadleaf advantage

Deciduous plants and broadleaf evergreens have an advantage over needled junipers, arborvitaes, pines and spruces after leaf loss. They can use their reserves to develop greenery from dormant buds, more quickly re-establishing a healthy wood-to-leaf ratio. Chop a barberry like this to the ground and every stub will develop new shoots from dormant buds.



Plant health, hardness of cut and our timing make a difference. Early in spring, plants' internal chemistry and external stimuli combine for the year's best growth. Choose a healthy plant, cut it hard in spring so its bud:wood ratio is high, and new shoots may each grow several feet in their first year. Wait until summer to chop it back or cut it only by half so it must start anew with a great deal of leafless wood, and the comeback will be less vigorous.



## Errata

In *What's Coming Up* #135 on page 9 we were inaccurate regarding garden location and plants. The tomato plants pictured at the top of page were grown in a Michigan community garden. The plant pictured at the bottom of the page is a potato grown in Cornell University Plantations Pounder Heritage Vegetable Garden. (We've revised the archive edition -- thank you, S.B.)

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

Most of us had a **parent, neighbor or other veteran** to guide us with **examples and advice** that had been developed, confirmed and tweaked over years or generations. Some of what they gave us wasn't in words, and can come back if we picture the person at work with plants.

That happened this week in emails between us, B.C., K.B. and R.S. about how to root cuttings. As we discussed recommendations from textbooks for "gentle bottom heat" two of us realized, "Well, sure! I saw (My Mentor) setting new cuttings on top of the radiator in the sunny back room..."

Our teachers knew that plants grow more roots, more quickly when their greenery's cool and well lit but the root zone's warm.

### Nature's bottom heat is on!

In spring the air's cool, but the ground's warm, thanks to ever-rising heat from Earth's core plus increasingly direct sun absorbed at the surface. Perennials, shrubs and trees are growing roots right now at great pace. If you planned to move something this spring, do it now. The plant can make a whole spring's worth of new roots before facing summer's heat.

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

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

### Growing new tips... and losing them!

A while back you wrote about a plant losing lower leaves. What about new shoots that die before they finish growing? - J -

...we look for root problems. ...outdoor plants, too. Rotting root tips, for instance, often take new growth with them. Look into what may have changed to affect the roots, which may also involve de-potting, digging up, or baring some part of the outer edge of the root zone to see what's going on.

Losing older, lower leaves?  
See the article *Jade green grows only in bright light* in *What's Coming Up*, Issue #123

### Spring's here!

Crocuses up... sandhill cranes back!

### Fish survived

...and the frogs are at the pond edge!

*I used to worry about bulbs... how to stop them from coming up early. Now, after years of watching I know they're often up several inches in March, but bloom fine regardless.*

- Theresa Bismack -



## Sterling shady nurseries that should have been listed in issue #135

... why not Klehm's Song Sparrow Farm? ... shade content equal to or greater... been a leader in the business as long... - D.G. -

...American Roots in Ortonville, Michigan.

Owner Trish Hennig's been doing woodland natives as long as those others... - C.R. -

...Bordine's has *tons* of shade plants including natives and has been at it for two generations right in your back yard. Why wasn't it on the list? - J.D. -

...we just heard of a shade nursery you didn't mention, Munchkin Nursery... - S.G. -

**Munchkin Nursery?** New to us! However, the owners have been at it "only" 10 years, so even if we had known of them they wouldn't have qualified for that list. Yet we're always glad to learn of specialists we haven't tried, especially from those who've bought from, visited or have other insights.

### Cut back barberry?

...regarding Barberry. You said it could be cut back to the ground. Does this mean any species and how long will it take to come back? I have miniature or pygmy bushes that unfortunately, I have not pruned as much or regularly as I should have and they have gotten larger than I planned.  
- S.W. -

Any barberry species can be cut back right to the ground. If the plant is healthy and in a good site it'll grow a lot more than you expect right away that first year... depends on the variety. The full sized ones usually grow to about three feet tall the first year... The pygmy types pop back up to be six

As we wrote in the last issue, as soon as we hit "Send" on any list we realize we forgot something. And that's operative no matter how many times we revise.

**Song Sparrow** is wonderful. Owner Roy Klehm (in the background here, from when he gave Janet the Song Sparrow tour) is a gem even among all the great people in this industry. You're right, D.G., his nursery is great in all plant categories, especially peonies.  
songsparrow.com

**American Roots:** you bet. Trish has many native shady species. No mail order.  
americanrootswildflowers.com

**Bordine's:** Great all-round garden centers. No mail order.  
bordine.com

*March is excellent for seed-starting if you use grow lights. Without grow lights, though, wait until April.*

- Calvin Bordine -

### Still a few petals shy of a forum

We're working on our own web site, where there will be an open library of our work and a real-time forum where anyone can be part of all the discussions that take place now only in email with individuals, between newsletters. On a forum, things like garden center lists will be able to evolve over time and for readers' locations.

We aim to have that site up this year but have to cross a big hurdle in terms of development and hosting cost.

We would love your help. **Send your donation**, check or money order payable to Janet Macunovich, to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328.

Here's our **Donate**!! tale cone flower.

It's tracking our website development progress and answering the question, "How much more do you need for the website?" We'll feature it here so you know how far we are toward our goal.

When it's **all blue**, we're gold!





to 18 inches... If you cut them back to stubs before they push out any of their preplanned growth, they will form new growth from dormant buds...

To save our hands and arms from thorns as we cut back a barberry, we wrap a bungee strap around it to cinch the branches in tight, or tie a thick cord or rope around them and pull that tight. Then we use loppers to cut them all off just above ground level. The branches come away in one bundle that we can carry easily, painlessly to the yard waste area.

We try not to complain. Mostly we work with *Berberis thunbergii*, which as barberries go is not all that dangerous. Others have much more puncture power.

One reason to cut a barberry to the ground every 3 or 4 years: As they age, twigs become brittle and are shed. They drop into the garden and end up embedded in our hands. When we cut the shrubs hard so they are all-new every few years, there are no brittle old bits!

Another reason to cut barberry is to enjoy more colorful foliage. People often say of variety 'Rosy Glow', "It never showed much pink!" That's usually because the gardener repeatedly sheared it since it turned out to be larger than expected. The newest foliage has the best color, so the yard



waste bin got the color you wanted to see! To sidestep this problem, cut it back in early spring to two feet shorter than the finished height you want, then let it grow all year. Enjoy every bit of color.

Think you have it bad, handling *Berberis thunbergii*, the Japanese barberry species that includes 'Rosy Glow,' 'Crimson Pygmy', and 'Gold Nugget'? Maybe you don't know about all the other barberries, some with very long, stiff spines (right)...



...or spines on leaf edges as well as on twigs (left). Those leaves drop to the ground. Even evergreen barberries shed leaves periodically, so there is finger-piercing material on the ground around these plants even if you keep them cut every few years to prevent brittle branch fall-out.

### Breaking the 1/3 pruning rule (From page 3.)

It's a guide, not a law. Healthy, fast growing species give us lots of leeway to deviate.

We break it all the time when we cut butterfly bush to the ground every year and cut tree-form weeping mulberries, catalpas, pussy willows, smoke bush, roses and panicle hydrangeas to nubs-on-a-stick each April. We abide by it in roundabout way as we cut spirea or barberry to the ground... every 3 or 4 years.





## This week in our garden

### Grow with us! This week:

Time to CUT!!! Evergreens, hard. Grasses, to the ground. Deciduous shrubs treated as perennials, including butterfly bush and blue mist spirea, to the ground. Cut more now to do less total cutting and enjoy your plants more. *What's Coming Up* issue #86 included a how-to guide for pruning just about every shrub. (Excerpt from that guide on page 16.)

### Reprise from *What's Coming Up*, issue 86

#### Yew shrubs that may need pruning, why and how

**Yew** (*Taxus* species)

- kept tightly shaped and smaller than its potential, as in a squared hedge. 6 + 6a + 6b; 17
- kept smaller than its potential but allowed a natural, loose outline. 7; 17
- grown for full size and natural shape. 1 + 1a
- has been too big for two or more years. 9

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#### Cutting directions

1 - Cut only to remove wood that's dead, damaged, or declining. Cut when you will.

**1a** - While the plant is young, select permanent framework branches. In August of any year, cut out excess, awkward or weak growth while that wood is still small.

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6 - Cut it back hard before budbreak. Remove as many total inches of height as the plant produced last year. (If this is the first year you follow these directions and last year you sheared it repeatedly, estimate its potential growth by multiplying the times you cut by how many inches you sheared each time.) This can mean shortening a boxwood by 6 or 8 inches, a dwarf burning bush, yew or privet by one or more feet. It will leave bare wood showing. Do it. Cut harder, less often!

**6a** - Then, thin the plant's shell by clipping some of the remaining branches to shorten them by another year's growth. As you thin, target the thickest branches with the densest cluster of "fingers" at their tip. Thinning may leave "holes" in the surface but don't worry. Through the openings, light will reach into the plant's interior, promoting growth from within to quickly fill any gaps and keep the plant healthier and more dense.

**6b** - Finally, don't cut again until all soft new growth hardens, usually in early August. At that time, cut just to even out the branch tips.

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7 - Wait, put up with irregularities until August, then cut for the shape or size you want. Do this by cutting back any limb that has crossed the lines you set to define its greatest acceptable height and width. Shorten each limb you cut by about two year's growth. Determine annual growth rate by looking for the differences between its current-year wood and older wood. Often, new wood has not developed bark or is a different color or texture. Cut any of that limb's side branches, too, if their tips extend beyond the end point you just established.

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17 - You may read that cutting this plant too early in spring, in late summer, or in late fall rather than in spring is a mistake because this "stimulates new growth which will be killed back." We respectfully disagree. Someone, sometime may have seen this ill effect and hoped to spare others the loss by advising "prune only in spring." However, we have seen many plants cut at "wrong" times with no lasting damage or even any more damage than occurred to other plants not treated in that way in that year...

#### Looking for back issues?

If you've lost one, or weren't on board 'back when', you can:

- 1) Send us an email. We may be able to re-send an issue or two. (Our availability and computer time varies; be patient with us.) Or,
- 2) Ask a friend who also reads *What's Coming Up* to relay a copy. Or,
- 3) Order our CDs. Or,
- 4) Donate to help us get our website up where all back issues will be available at a click. \$20 is great but even \$1 helps! Send checks payable to Janet Macunovich to 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328.

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Notice the burn on dwarf Alberta spruces -- it's much worse where the plant is closely surrounded by lawn, rather than in a garden. Just another effect of that seriously competitive plant, grass.

(Check *What's Coming Up* issue #131 for details on this scorch and what you can do about it.)

**Green thumbs up** to answering the call of the sun one day in March... and not stopping. If you plan to prune hedges on a certain Sunday in March but it snows that day, don't settle back into the lounge chair and let winter's inertia reclaim you. Go repot a houseplant instead, start some seeds, go have the lawn mower blade sharpened, anything!

**Green thumbs down** to **bonus bulbs** shipped to us as if they're wonderful when they are a grower's excess and often downright **weedy**. For many people, planting a bonus bunch of star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*), Bermuda buttercup (*Oxalis pres-caprae*) or grape hyacinth (*Muscari armeniacum*) was the start of a weedy nightmare.

### Booting a bad bulb

To oust unwanted, naturalizing bulbs is a years-long effort at best. Any bulb or bulblet left behind after a dig may wait -- dormant and unseen -- until the next growing season. Then it pushes its foliage up into the light so early the next year that by the time you begin gardening that spring the bulb beneath is already as large and able to shed viable parts of itself as the one you tackled the previous year.



Smother such a bulb area and grow *nothing* herbaceous there for two years. If you dig out any desirable plants before applying smothering newspaper and heavy mulch, clean that plant's roots and crown completely or risk taking bulblets of the weed plant with it to a new bed.

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

**The toddler who asked "Why?" grown up and out in the garden.**

One day when her daughter was two and peppering her with "why," Janet Macunovich's parents laughed and said, "So now it's *your* turn! You used to drive us crazy with 'why' when you were little!"

"Used to?" said Janet's husband. "She's still doing it!" Janet's been gardening professionally for over 25 years and loves to solve garden puzzles, from what to plant where to meet diverse expectations, to why a plant acts one way in one situation and differently elsewhere. She's studied at colleges, botanical gardens, professionals' workshops, in her own garden and extensive library. Yet she finds the most answers in talking to people with questions. "I'm glad to be able to help others garden better at the same time as I indulge my own need to know 'why'."







**That quiet garden guy who spreads calm like a comfy blanket.** Steven Nikkila, horticultural photographer and joint chief of a professional gardening service, is a safe port in the midst of energy that can spawn headaches in those less well grounded. He rarely loses the clear vision that lets him frame the shot or cut to the chase, even when his wife or family are so charged up with new ideas that the work of the day is in jeopardy. With a steady hand that once "put the magic touch" on his own infant children and ran a house full of his own and others' kids, he directs, does and also captures garden work and play of all kinds. His photos lend beautiful grace to many books, magazines and catalog pages.

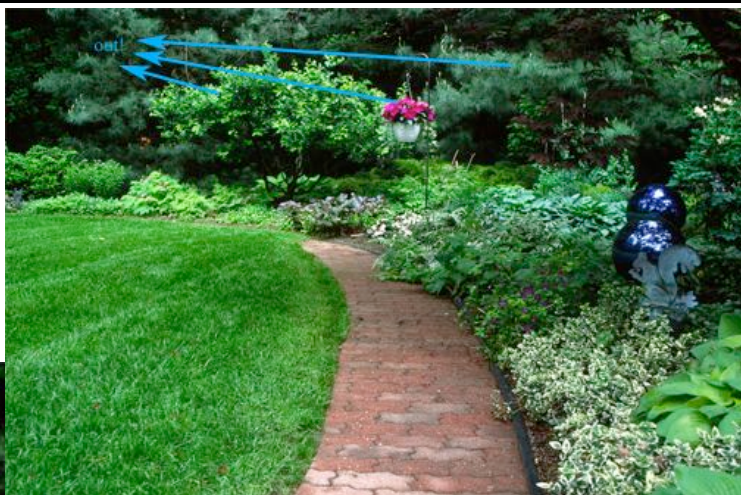
Email questions to Janet or Steven at [JMaxGarden@aol.com](mailto:JMaxGarden@aol.com) or call 248-681-7850.

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

**March 19, Saturday, *Improving an Established Garden*** is Janet's part of the afternoon sessions at the 12th Annual spring education event, "The Art of Gardening Seminar", hosted by the Allen County Master Gardeners in **Lima, Ohio**. Registration forms and more information is available at [www.allen.osu.edu](http://www.allen.osu.edu) or contact Gretchen Staley, Allen County Master Gardeners Association, at 419-302-4234.

Janet told us years ago to mark off a 10' x 10' area and *stay in it* until everything that needs doing there, is done. It works. In the garden and in my house!

- V.S. -





**It's time to *Garden by Janet and Steven - bring your gloves and tools!*** These four sessions are free. You must email or call (JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850) to reserve a spot and learn the location. Include your phone number so we can call you as the date approaches, in case weather changes the plan. All are limited-space. See page 18 for more about such sessions.

**March 24, Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, *Garden by Janet*** in White Lake Township, Michigan, we'll *prune an overgrown crabapple*.

**March 30, Wednesday, 5:00 p.m. to 7 p.m., *Garden by Janet*** in Wakefield, Massachusetts, doing *basic garden clean up and pruning*.

**April 2, Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, *Garden by Steven*** at the Detroit Zoo, Woodward Avenue at I-696. Your chance to volunteer at the zoo in exchange for hands-on instruction in cutting back after winter, early season weed prevention, and pruning. To join Steven at the zoo, email [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com) with the subject line "I'll garden at the Zoo."

**April 6, Wednesday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, *Garden by Janet*** in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, *cutting back burning bushes and doing a garden check up*.

**March 24, Thursday, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., Janet's recipe for *More Color, More Fun*** at the Waterford Township Library in **Waterford, Michigan**. Free. Call the library at 248-618-7694 for information.

**March 26, Saturday, Janet's at the Huron County Master Gardeners' Spring Into Gardening Day** in **Ubly, Michigan**. *Naturalized Gardening* and *Perennials for the Collector* will be Janet's contribution to the day long event. Pre-registration is required to attend. Go to the following website:

[http://www.msue.msu.edu/portal/default.cfm?pageset\\_id=27408&page\\_id=44700&msue\\_portal\\_id=25643](http://www.msue.msu.edu/portal/default.cfm?pageset_id=27408&page_id=44700&msue_portal_id=25643) for more information.

**March 26, Saturday, 10:00 a.m., our friend, student and fellow professional gardener Sandra Healey** is at the **Westland Public Library** (6123 Central City Parkway between Ford Rd. and Warren Rd.) in **Westland, Michigan** to help you with *Landscape Design and Renovation*. Free, no advance registration necessary.



Sandra Healey, here with Steven, completed two years of classes and an apprenticeship with Janet and Steven ten years ago, then started her own business doing garden design, care and education.

**April 2, Saturday, Janet is part of English Gardens' Garden Party weekend** in its **southeast Michigan** stores.

*Low Maintenance Landscape* will be discussed at the West Bloomfield location (248-851-7506) at 10:00 a.m., at the Royal Oak store (248-280-9500) at 1:00 p.m. and in Ann Arbor (734-332-7900) at 4:00 p.m.

**April 3, Sunday, The Garden Party continues at English Gardens' southeast Michigan locations.** Janet will be advising on the *Low Maintenance Landscape* at the store in Clinton Township (586-286-6100) at noon and in Eastpointe (586-771-4200) at 3:00 p.m.



**April 4, Monday, *Landscape Renovation***  
**& April 5, Tuesday, *Placing Trees in the Landscape***

These two classes are help for those who've decided to make a change or who are faced with an unexpected change, such as the loss of a large tree to emerald ash borer. Janet explains how-to at the **Cox Arboretum in Dayton, Ohio**. Attend one or both sessions. 6:00 - 9:00 p.m. Monday and 9:00 - 11:00 a.m. Tuesday. More information, fee and registration at 937-434-9005 and at the arboretum's website. <http://www.metroparks.org/Parks/ViewEvents.aspx?Park=Cox>

**April 5, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.** The Beverly Hills Community Garden presents "***An Organic Vegetable Garden Primer: Planning and Planting Q&A***" especially for beginning gardeners. Led by Janet. At the Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, 20000 West Thirteen Mile Road, **Beverly Hills, Michigan**. Email JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850 to reserve a spot.

**April 6, *Garden By Janet***, Grosse Pointe, Michigan. See pages 16 and 18.

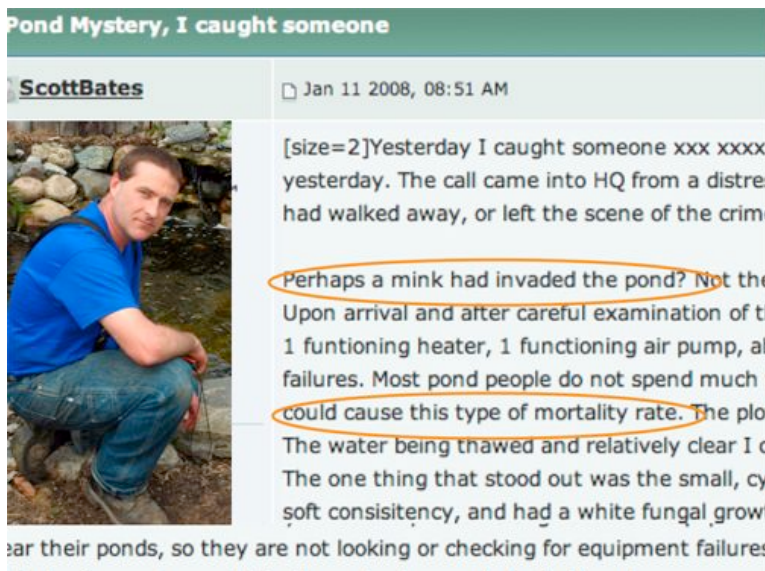
**April 12, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.** The Beverly Hills Community Garden presents "***The Vegetable Garden is Planted; Ongoing Care and Troubleshooting Q&A***". Moderated by Janet Macunovich. At the Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, 20000 West Thirteen Mile Road, **Beverly Hills, Michigan**. Email JMaxGarden@aol.com or call 248-681-7850 to reserve a spot.

**April 9, Saturday, 11:30 a.m.** ***Spring Start Up*** and ***Canned Goods: Gardens in Containers*** are Janet's topics during the Ray Wiegand's Nursery Open House in **Macomb, Michigan**. Free. No reservations required. Call 586-286-3655 for more information.

**April 10, Sunday, 11:00 a.m.** Steven Nikkila will be discussing ***Shade Gardens*** and ***8 Months of Color*** during the Ray Wiegand's Nursery Open House in **Macomb, Michigan**. Free. No reservations required. Call 586-286-3655 for more information.

**April 11, Monday, 7:00 p.m.** Janet will cover ***Great Plant Combinations*** at the Huntington Woods Library, 26415 Scotia Road, **Huntington Woods, Michigan**. The program is hosted jointly by the County Downs Garden Club and Huntington Woods Tree Board. Free. Open to the public.

**April 17, Sunday, 3:00 p.m.** Plymouth Nursery's Open House in **Plymouth, Michigan** features Janet's ***Best Foot Forward: Ideas for Entrance Gardens***. Free. No reservations required. Call 734-453-5500 for more information



**Time to Tend your pond!** Above: Scott Bates, owner of Grass Roots Nursery, is one of the most knowledgeable people in the country regarding water gardens. More than that, he explains how to and makes you laugh at the same time. As a moderator of the website forum that Janet and Steven administered along with expert friends, Bates not only answered questions and checked the accuracy of others' statements on the site, but gave us humorous, helpful pond puzzles.

At this nursery in New Boston, Michigan, Scott offers free weekend how-to sessions for pond owners. Check his website, [grassrootsnursery.com](http://grassrootsnursery.com) or call 734-753-9200 for more information.

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

We go where we're invited! That's taken us all over the country and then some over the past 20 years. We address many topics, drawing from our list of **100+ talks**. We also continue **to meet groups' needs** and expand our horizons by developing new material or "hybridizing" from what we already have.



So, whether it's...

- a **how-to lesson for a garden club**,
  - a **hands-on, on-site workshop** or
  - a **multi-part class** for a small group,
- ...we're game!

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

**JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850.**

Our calendars fill about a year in advance for spring weekends, and six months ahead for most other weekends and evenings. Give us your dates. Then we can meet you in *your* garden.



Steven Nikkila and Janet Macunovich have been digging, shooting and teaching how-to for 22 years. They began producing conferences in the early '90s and ran a gardening school for 12 years, featuring expert instructors who not only knew their stuff in the garden but how to get their messages across to a group. Janet and Steven are glad to help you themselves or refer you to others to meet your group's need. Contact them at JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850 to set up a talk, workshop or class.

### About Garden by Janet & Steven dates:

Since gardeners are let-me-see people who learn best with hands-on, from time to time we list *Garden by Janet & Steven* sessions here to afford you that chance to grow. You visit us where we're working to watch or work as you choose. Generally, there is no charge and we're in one of two types of locations:

- 1) At a **garden 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 our work may be of interest to you, we invite you in.
- 2) In the **Detroit Zoo, Adopt-A-Garden** program where we're 23-year veterans. Many people have worked with us there, some for a day and others for years. You can check out this program by coming in as our student on a temporary pass. **To join Janet at the Zoo**, email [mstgarden@gmail.com](mailto:mstgarden@gmail.com) with the subject line of your email "Help at zoo."

### Scheduling a Garden by Janet & Steven

Sometimes we are asked "Can you come do one of your workshops in my garden?" Maybe! 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 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."