

What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila answer your growing concerns
Issue 139, April 6, 2011

In this issue:

Cuts are the burning issue:

burning bush, pages 1- 2

climbing- & shrub roses, pages 10 - 11, 15

tree hydrangea, pages 15 - 16

smoke tree, page 17

holly, page 19

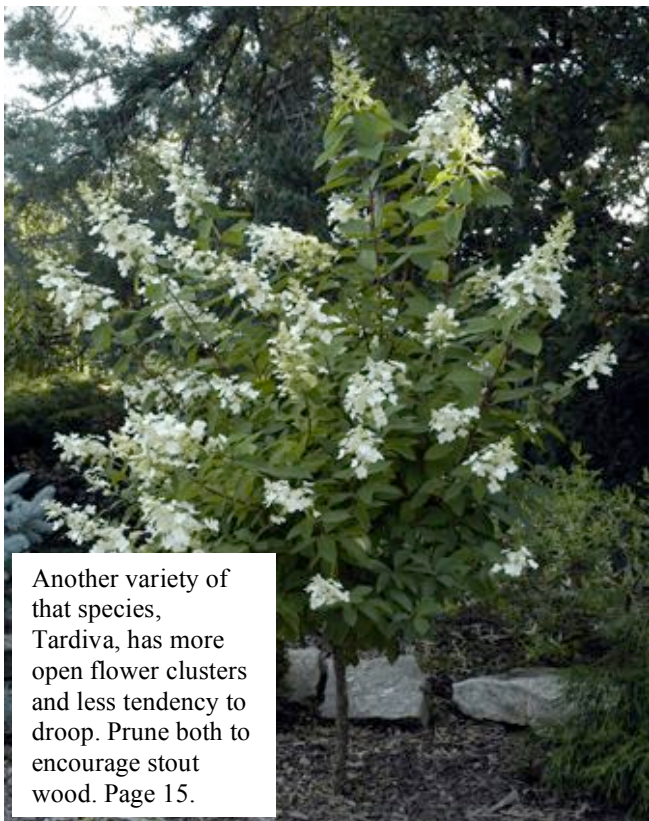
Viburnum, pages 22 - 23

Helping construction damaged tree, pp. 3 - 4

A stake in underground wires, page 5

Weed killer choices, pages 5 - 7

Peegee hydrangea (right) has heavy flower clusters that tend to sag.



Another variety of that species, Tardiva, has more open flower clusters and less tendency to droop. Prune both to encourage stout wood. Page 15.



Saving plants when weed sprays stray, page 7
Common ground to scale control, page 8
Grave gardens of Bavaria, page 9
Evergreens suddenly ever-brown, page 10
Enjoy April flowers, pages 12 - 14
Another web petal goes blue! Page 23
Clear water as pest control, page 15
Tip cuttings about tree selection books, page 15
winter interest in shade, pages 17 - 18
moving bulb plants, page 18
successful pro gardeners, page 19
fizzled burning bush, page 20
vine weevil war, pages 20 - 21
splitting peony, page 21
new shrubs from clippings, page 21
and sod peelers page 22
Who are Janet and Steven? Page 24
Invite us to your town, page 25
Where to catch us in-person, pages 24 - 25
Books, magazines & CDs order info will return!

Save shrub's looks and your time by pruning just once, and hard

Is there a **best time, worst time to prune compact burning bushes**? Most of the information I have seen suggests they do not need pruning but due to windows, etc., sometimes it is necessary. – R.A. –

Compact burning bushes (*Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus') have long lived wood that's naturally attractively configured. So they **don't need pruning if you can accept them eight feet tall** and

wide. Since most people who choose a "dwarf" were not intending to give it that much room, and since burning bushes do manage to keep much of their charm and health even when regularly pruned, they are more often pruned than not.

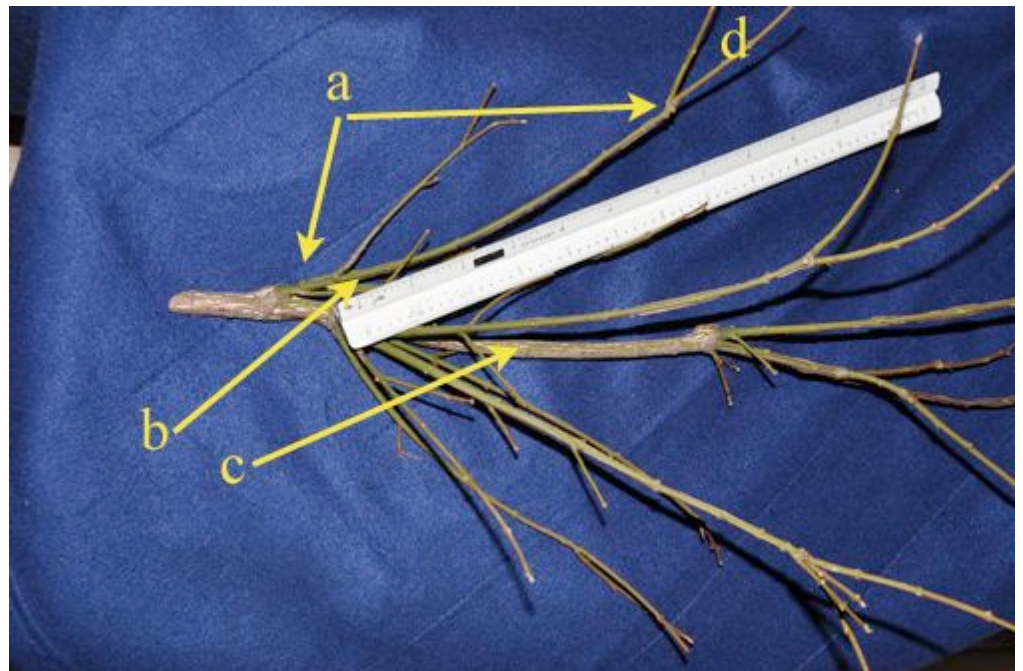
Our own burning bushes and various other shrubs have just done their periodic shrinking routine, because **it's pruning time now**. We aim to cut just before the plant was going to begin growing.

When cutting over-large deciduous shrubs, **cut hard**. That means to remove not just the current excess but to cut back even further **so the plant can grow back to the desired height or width** by the end of this season..

Depending on its health, a burning bush may grow four, twelve or eighteen inches a year. **Determine your shrub's growth rate** by locating a twig that grew all last year without being cut. Measure the length of that new wood -- bark on first-year wood will be greener and less coarse than on older wood.

Now, **the hard part** that most people cannot handle. Steel yourself and **cut hard**. You'll probably even see some bare wood for a few weeks. The alternative is to spend extra time in repeat pruning, yet end up with an unattractive and over large plant, anyway.

Shear at a level that is one year's growth below your desired height, one year's growth inside your desired width. Then, identify the thickest branches and cut them **back even further**, by another year's growth. This one-time, two-step annual pruning saves you time and keeps new wood, leaves, and flowers forming deep into the interior. In promoting vigorous new growth you prevent the "hollow ball" look and avoid health problems common to repeatedly sheared shrubs.



A shrub or tree's new growth is often distinguished by greener or lighter bark (b: new wood; c: old wood). Identify new wood to know what that plant's growth rate is. On this burning bush branch it's 7 inches (a) with a 3-4" second push of growth (d). One way to maintain this and other woody plants at smaller-than-potential is to cut it back by its total growth rate just once a year, in early spring. Have faith, make this hard cut plus some thinning cuts. The plant will reward you with lush new growth and no need for repeat pruning, other than a light trim in July or August if you prefer a close-sculpted look.

We stock up on bandages in early spring as pruning season whisks us back into full-speed gardening. We take care, as rusty gardeners, since those new saws and sharpened pruners seem to seek out fingertips.

- Janet & Steven -

Tree's lost root and limb? Grab a hose, not a lawyer

A large maple tree in our front yard isn't doing very well.

Three years ago an ice storm knocked a large branch down. We cut back the ragged piece per Arbor Day Foundation guidelines.

The next year our street was repaved, and ditches scraped. The maple's roots were dug at by a front loader, left exposed, and then covered by a thin layer of sod.

Last July, many leaves turned brown and fell. We called the county and the road construction company. They both said scraping the roots would not have caused this trouble even though I pointed out a maple flourishing on the other side of our driveway where no ditch work was done. The county had a tree person look at the tree and his opinion was that the branch had been cut wrong letting in disease.



The roots of a tree extend well beyond its dripline -- a circle described by the outer branch tips. Some tree species, such as this *Magnolia*, have especially sensitive roots. The roots may be seriously damaged by digging to change that walkway at left to pavers, locate a wire or widen a driveway. This great tree might die or die back.

We would like your unbiased opinion. We also need to know how to help this tree. It is given fertilizer each year and last fall we watered it quite a bit as suggested in your column. Smaller branches continue to fall from it during snow and wind storms. – R.R. –

We're a bit short on unbiased opinion. You say the arborist reported poor pruning. Was there no mention of the roots? We have little respect for an arborist so ignorant or unaware of tree anatomy and root configuration as to say there would be no consequence from major root loss like scraping away at half of the root zone.

However, in this situation there's no gain in finding fault. You're right to focus on helping the tree. Losing a major branch is a grave set-back. Even if that's the only problem, it can be a set-up for failure in the next drought. That next drought may be a classic extended rainless period.

However, it may occur only in one tree during a normal summer if that tree has recently lost 25% of its roots to construction damage.

No use, either, debating how well a broken limb was cut. **Any wound or cut is an opening** to disease. "Good cuts" minimize the risk of infection but can't eliminate it. Cuts made perforce after a storm are rarely good cuts. Even the best of them can't un-do tears that ran down into the trunk, for instance. Then, even the best tree surgeon must compromise.

Once in trouble, a tree can slide downhill quickly. **Energy is what's most needed** for recovery and its sole energy source is its foliage. Yours lost energy in losing a limb's worth of leaves, having to grow wound wood around a large opening and in shedding leaves early. Although it might have borne leaf loss, trunk wound, root damage, and drought one by one over time, the combined serial injuries have probably been enough to make the tree "die back." That means it's shedding its most expendable wood to strike a new balance between its non-energy-producing woody mass with its energy-making leafy portion. **Help it grow and keep leaves.** (See *After a tree's lost limb or root*, at right.)

Be observant throughout the tree's recovery period, so you can fend off any more leaf loss. This doesn't mean to spray pesticides willy-nilly. Pesticides and fertilizers are like medicine -- not without side effects, some of which can slow a tree's growth. On another tree, side effects might be bearable, but your tree doesn't need any more trouble. It would be wise to **hire an arborist** to check periodically and advise you about the best course for this tree, this site, this year.

Don't skimp on water if you mean to save a tree. It's not unusual for a medium sized tree to move more than 500 gallons of water from the soil into its canopy on a summer day.

After a tree's lost limb or root

Your best move is to energize the tree, soon, and keep the energy flowing uninterrupted. In the spring after a tough time, a tree's sap may flow weakly and leaves form slow and small. What you want is a strong sap flow so leaves will form quickly and begin supplying energy sooner.

Since sap is **water**, start watering right away in early spring. Don't wait for warm weather or irrigation system start-up.

Aerate to let water penetrate better.

Fertilize with slow release organic fertilizer throughout the tree's entire root zone in early spring and again as leaves start to drop in fall.

Go without lawn over the tree's roots, if you can. Mulch there instead. This spares the tree a great deal of competition.

Keep watering whenever the soil is dry, until dieback ceases and growth resumes. This may take years.

Take a picture in spring as the tree leafs out, from a distance so you can capture the outline of the canopy. Re-take the same picture each spring. Compare the amount of dead wood -- branches that are not leafing out. This is how to determine if the loss is continuing or has stopped.

In general, allow **one year recovery for every inch of trunk diameter**. When you see the tree has stopped dying back, it's turned the corner. If dieback continues despite your best efforts, at some point you may have to let the tree go.

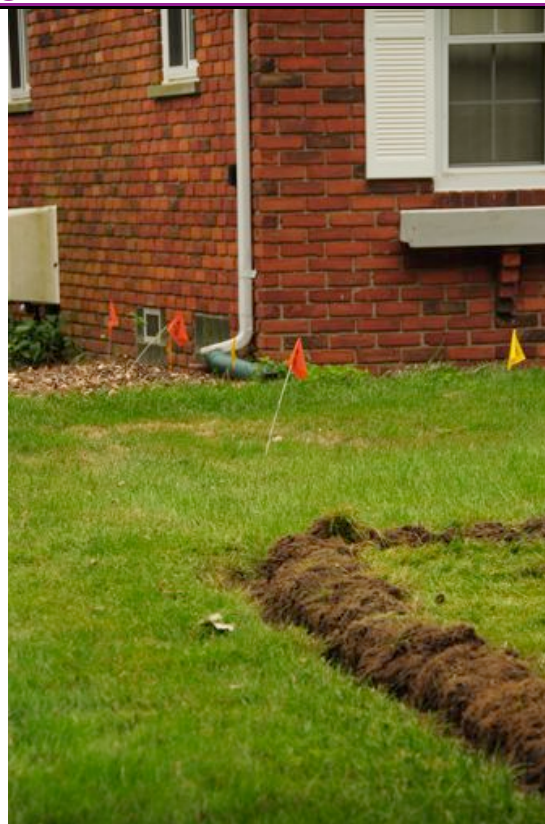
Before you dig: Wave a red flag... or yellow, orange or blue

Thanks for your help with our design problem. We'll have that **area by the utilities boxes flagged before we dig**, for sure. Is that service called MissDig throughout the country? That was an excellent piece of advice--I almost forgot about it. - B.N. -

Whether you're a homeowner or contractor, if you plan to dig more than a few inches into new ground, **dial 811 to call your area's one-call utility staking board**. You'll learn whether there are buried lines and wires are on your property, and where. The service is free. Each utility company will come out separately after your call. They'll flag approximate locations of pipe- and wire routes or post an "all clear."

Take photos from several angles after all the flagging is done, so you can quickly recall utility locations in the future, rather than calling and waiting for flaggers.

Keep in mind that there may be **pipes and wires buried in your yard that will not be flagged** by utility companies because they are your own private utilities. We do our own detective work to learn about the existence of and locate irrigation lines, invisible dog fences, gas lines to feed outdoor lights and appliances, electric lines to garages and pool equipment, conduit to satellite dishes, water circulation pipes for geothermal heating, etc. We are probably never going to stop being surprised by what's down under.



Dial 811: Your lot will grow flags!

Red: Electric lines

Yellow: Gas or petroleum pipe

Orange: Phone, cable TV

Blue: Water pipes

It's free. It's smart. For more:

www.call811.com

Speaking of design... These pages have been light on design lately. Not our choice -- we choose topics most prominent in that week's email. Lately, your email's focused on trouble...

Go light and choose right when using a weed killing chemical

In place of Preen which is expensive, **can I buy a weed & feed lawn fertilizer** (much, much cheaper) and use that instead on my garden beds? - L -

Please don't do it. Don't put herbicide on the ground without knowing which chemical you're applying and knowing you need it. Consider the immediate, long term, and economic effects:

Immediately:

- 1) Your **perennials** and any annuals already in place will almost certainly be **hurt or killed**.
- 2) **Weed seeds will still sprout**. (More on these immediate effects on page 6)

Long term:

Your perennials, trees and shrubs may suffer, even from "correct" herbicide. Herbicides have a **negative effect on beneficial soil microorganisms** that maintain soil structure and convert organic matter into fertilizer.

In addition, **herbicides can accumulate**. Plants may struggle or die, even from chemicals which are normally "safe" for use around "non-target" plants. (* More below.)

Meant to lay on a soil surface where it will be absorbed by sprouting seeds, **pre-emergence weedkiller** (such as Preen) will also **move deeper** into a bed as the gardener weeds and plants. After years of treatment with trifluralin (active ingredient in Preen), a perennial bed may exhibit trouble including **plants with pale, weak growth**, increased incidence of disease and reduced success rate of new plants and small divisions.

Some herbicides have a short life in mineral soil (mixtures of mineral particles from sand to clay) but **bind to organic matter** and humus in mulch and soil. Glyphosate (active ingredient in Round-up and others) is one. It is meant to have effect only when absorbed through leaves. Yet **trees and shrubs** in mulched beds repeatedly treated with glyphosate eventually begin to be affected as they **absorb more concentrated doses** of the chemical through their roots. They show signs of this in **deformed, weak growth**.

Economically:

Herbicides are **unnecessary expense** if applied to a broad area when only some spots in that area are weed infested. Why use it on hundreds or thousands of square feet of bed or lawn without reason?

We hope you'll **use herbicides only where there are weeds you cannot control another way**, matching the chemical to the weed type and stage of growth. If you do it just for easy care, keep in mind that someone stands to gain if you believe it's that simple.

About immediate effects (page 5):

1) The herbicide in lawn products is usually a mix of chemicals, including one or more post-emergence killer. Post-emergence chemicals kill what's already up and growing. The killers used in lawn care product spare grass plants and their close relatives (monocots). Most ornamental perennials fit the target description for lawn weeds. They are up and growing, have broad leaves, are not grass... They die.

For instance, Scott's popular LawnPro® Step™ 2 Weed Control Plus Lawn Fertilizer contains 2,4-D and Mecoprop.

2,4-D (2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid) is a post-emergence broad leaf weed killer that is absorbed through the leaves and works within the plant to kill it. It is effective against a great number of weeds.

Mecoprop is [R]-2-[4-Chloro-2-methylphenoxy] propionic acid, another post emergence, broad leaf weed killer, works better than 2,4-D against chickweed and clover.

2) A lawn care product with a herbicide mix may not include a pre-emergence killer (a substance that kills seedlings as they sprout). Trifluralin, benefin and oryzalin are pre-emergence weed killers. Trifluralin (dinitroaniline) is a chemical also packaged for garden use as Preen.

*About "safe" herbicides accumulating:

This is not commonly reported although we have often seen it and have discussed it on many occasions with credible sources. We believe that hard data may be scarce only because funding for research into this topic is not available. Rather, our chemical testing system favors research investment in product development and expanded use.

- We first discussed glyphosate build up in 1991 with an Ohio State University professor who introduced the topic in his presentation at an Extension conference.
- In 1993 we compared notes with SeaWorld of Ohio horticulturists who had reached the same conclusions about pre-emergence herbicides in annual beds.
- In 1996 as we toured gardens with the horticulturists at the Royal Botanical Garden in Burlington, Ontario we saw in a large bed of pachysandra the outlines of annual beds that had once occupied that area. The lines were apparent where pachysandra grew paler in response to the herbicide residue.
- In intervening and subsequent years we've made it a point to query herbicide use when we interview staff of botanical gardens, and learned that most have had similar experiences. Thus we feel it is best to report this, and caution you even though there has yet been no official study to corroborate or refute this compelling anecdotal argument

They treated my lawn and now my flowers don't look so good...

Overspray of lawn care products often causes collateral damage in adjacent beds. Sprays and granules may be misdirected, blown off course or rinsed off lawn to beds downslope. Most ornamental plants fit the definition of broadleaf weeds, and they die.

If you suspect overspray and can act immediately, try rinsing the plants and flushing the soil. If you see symptoms (below), it's too late to do anything but cut back and replace affected plants as damage dictates.

Looks like herbicide damage:

Some of the effects of auxin herbicides, including common broadleaf weedkillers Mecoprop and 2,4-D: Bending and twisting of leaves and stems is evident almost immediately after application. Delayed symptom development includes root formation on dicot stems; misshapen leaves, stems, and flowers; and abnormal roots. ...Injury to off-target vegetation is a major problem associated with these herbicides. (From Purdue University Extension bulletin.) Learn more. See *Research*, below right.

Simple, important advice about weedkillers

From Ohio State University's bulletin, *Broadleaf Weed Control for Home Lawns*:

Before using a postemergence herbicide for broadleaf weed control... identify the weed(s) which you are attempting to control. The reason is that not all weed species are controlled via the use of one specific herbicide. The homeowner may need to use a combination of two or more herbicides to obtain the desired control.

Getting the goods on weedkilling chemicals

Read the label before you buy or use a pesticide. (A weed killer is a herbicide, which is a class of pesticide.) Use it only as directed. Learn more about it by researching the action, effects and safety of the active ingredient.

Don't be waylaid by technical-sounding product names. Read beyond the trade name to find the chemical(s) that are the product's active ingredient(s). For instance, "Trimec" may sound like a chemical name but it is a brand name. The label will tell you it contains 2,4-D. and dicamba. Similarly, "Treflan" is a brand name for trifluralin.

Hands down: Weeding wins

Grins: To ...**professor...** Andrew Senesac of Cornell University Extension's Weed Science program. His years-long **weed patch trials** proved that neither landscape fabric (alone or with mulch cover) nor pre-emergent herbicides (such as Preen) are more effective in controlling weeds than **a thorough weeding in spring followed by mulching**. The landscape fabric and herbicide approaches were, however, more expensive and had some undesirable practical and ecological impacts.

- From *What's Coming Up* #41 -

Save your \$ for plants!

Preen and other pre-emergent weed killers are a waste of money if you have an established garden in good order and use mulch... If you have a **new garden** or you're **reclaiming an older bed** from a year or so of neglect, a **pre-emergent can be helpful for a year** or two. It can build up to harmful levels in soil if used **year after year**. **Used in excess** it can float in rain or irrigation water and accumulate in low spots. In either case it **can then cause trouble** for established plants, including yellowing, reduced growth and dieback.

- From *What's Coming Up* #91 -

Research a pesticide: Descriptions of herbicide damage (as above, left) and much more can be found by typing into an Internet search engine:

(active ingredient) mode of action
or

(active ingredient) weeds controlled
or

(active ingredient) material safety data

To each plant its own scale. For all, similar solutions:

A question about **scale**. We have it on euonymus (ongoing) and on a holly (this year, first time). **Suggestions for treatment?** - C -

The scale that lives on *Euonymus* and appears as white flecks all over stems and leaves at this time of year is not the same as any of the hard-shelled, immobile insects that may currently be flecking a holly. (*Euonymus* is the sole host for *Euonymus* scale. Holly is edible to lecanium-, holly-, oystershell-, greedy scale and six or seven others!)

Although they're **different pests and different plants, similar treatments** will apply.

First, **review the environmental conditions to see if you can improve** the plants' lot in life. Healthy, vigorously growing plants do a great job of creating their own pesticides and outgrowing their standard problems. Stressed plants become susceptible to insects and diseases because they're weaker, right down to flabby cell walls that fungus can easily penetrate and lack of potency of the distasteful substance in the sap that would deter sucking insects. Lack of light, compacted soil, stagnant air, heat where the plant species needs cool, or vice versa, and chemical exposure are common stressors.

Second, **select a way to interrupt the pest's life cycle**. In winter and early spring, each of the scales that may be on the holly, as well as the *Euonymus* scale, are immune to all but physical removal. The shells we see are lifeless husks. The clutch of eggs each covers is still dormant.

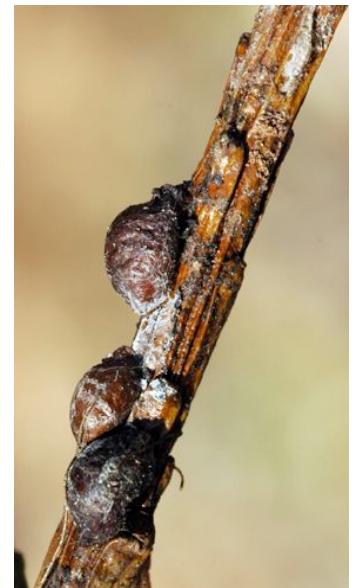
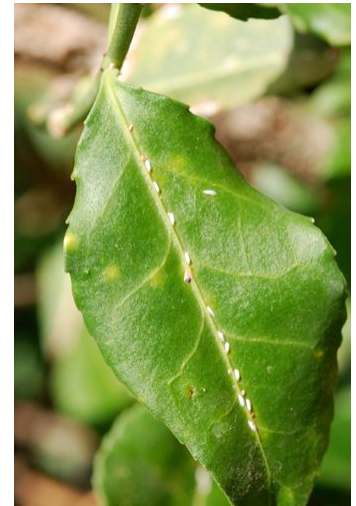
Scrape them off now, if you will. A forceful spray of water can thin their ranks, too.

Or wait until the leaf buds swell and begin to open on the plant, which is when the eggs will hatch. At that time, **apply an oil** so the newly hatched crawlers will smother as they emerge. You can use a oil prepared just for this purpose (Volck oil, Sunspray, etc.) or a vegetable oil if with soap and agitation you can cause it to mix in water and remain mixed while you spray.

Or wait a week after leaf-out and **apply a topical insecticide** (one of the soaps, or malathion) to kill the crawlers once they're all out and about but before they have developed protective shells.

Or **apply a systemic insecticide** that will be absorbed into the plant

and incorporated into all its parts. Any plant eater will get a dose of it, and it may last longer than a topical insecticide that lasts only until rain and sun rinse it away or break it down.



Top right: *Euonymus* scale. Right, center: Lecanium scale. Bottom: Like almost all other scale insects, pine needle scale can be controlled with oil applied at budbreak, since the young crawlers emerge from cover at that time.

Expert Gardener Afield: Report from grave Bavaria

The world is full of great gardens and even the widest ranging traveler can't see them all. Here's a **peek through expert eyes** at a garden spot you may have overlooked or not yet reached.



have a nursery do it. It's big business over there, especially now for Easter, All Saints Day in November and for Christmas.

No wonder that rubs off on everyone who enjoys flowers and makes me itch to find flowers here in our area. I am ready!

Dear friends,
I've just returned from 2-1/2 weeks in Bavaria, where spring really has sprung.

Gardening starts at the cemeteries as soon as you can dig the soil and plant pansies, violas, *Bellis* and primroses. A lot of people do it themselves but others



Margot
McCormack

Margot McCormack is a truly International Master Gardener who lives in Michigan but visits and gardens regularly with friends and relatives in other parts of the U.S. and in Europe.

Photos ©2011 Margot McCormack

We're all experts! Have your eyes been opened as you travel? Snap a picture and share it with us. Send it as an attached .jpg file, include a few words about it, plus the name of the photographer and permission to use the photo.

This week in our garden

Grow with us! This week:

See brown and revisit last December's sudden cold. Evergreen leaf tissues that burst when cold caught them not yet hardened off, may have stayed green until now. Lately, the plant scavenged nutrients from that wasted tissue so it became brown. Now we'll have to watch and see whether the tip buds survived. They often do since they are the first parts of a plant to harden in autumn. New growth may shortly replace or cover over the damage. If not, we'll prune out what's dead.

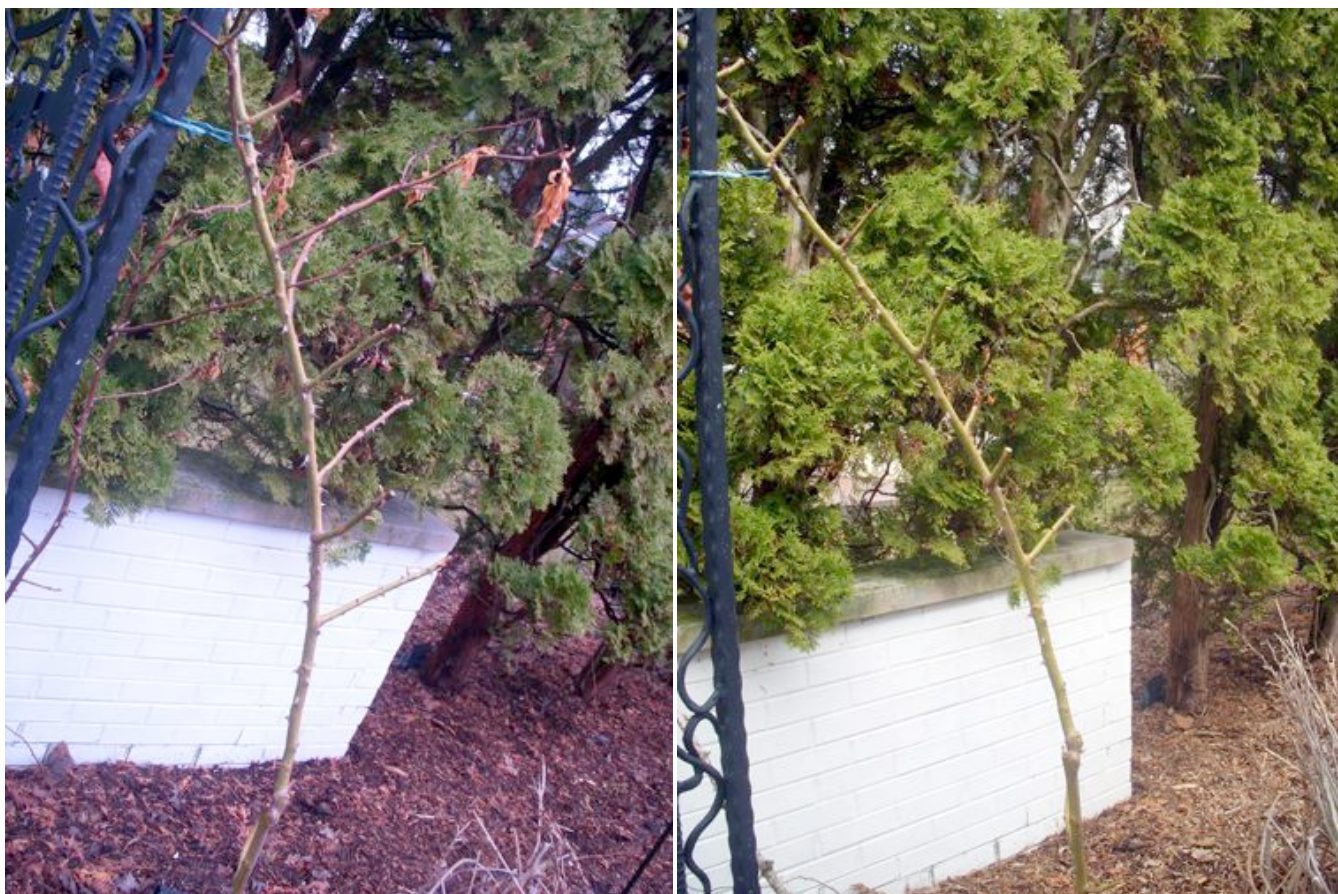


These yew leaves would normally withdraw water from their cells to prepare for winter. The process is gradual and can't keep up with a fast onset of cold weather in late fall, or a quick return of cold after a protracted thaw has revived the plant in late winter. When water in these yew leaves froze in a sudden cold spell, the cells burst and died. The brown dead spots "appeared" suddenly when the plant came out of its winter rest and salvaged what it could of the nutrients in that leaf -- including all of the components of the remaining green chlorophyll. Although these leaves as well as the flower buds (a) are probably so badly damaged the plant will shed them, the tip buds and the reserve leaf buds (arrow b; sheltered in the spot where each needle joins its twig) seem to be unharmed. New growth there will signal eventual recovery. Of note are notched leaves (c) and needles with ends chewed off, signs of black vine weevil damage (see page 10).

Prune roses. Hybrid teas? No sweat, we simply cut them back ferociously, leaving just a few buds on the best canes just above the graft union. **Pruning climbers, groundcover types** like the 'Knock Out' series and old fashioned shrub roses is a more involved **three-step**:

- We get tough with one or a couple of older canes on each plant, cutting them all the way back to stimulate the development of fresh young wood.

- Other canes we simply shorten to leave only hefty wood, and give their side shoots a cut back to a couple of buds.
- Finally, we thin the new growth, keeping just a couple of vigorous young shoots that we'll train into position to replace the old canes we cut out.



Rose pruning is an awkward photography subject. It's hard to illustrate it in flat photos, especially where there are many canes. So here's a simple, two-cane example. (Before, above left; after, above right.) We kept the cane that's vigorous and full of the side spurs that will produce the flowering branches. We simply shortened each side spur and clipped back the tip of the cane (the tip is not visible in these photos.) By contrast, we cut the aging stem 'way back. (It's barely visible at the center left edge of the left-hand, "before" photo). We'll look for the side spurs to bear lots of flowers, and for a replacement cane to develop from the shrub's base. We'll train in that new shoot to take the old cane's place. If this climber had a dozen canes, fanned across a wall, we would have taken these same steps, deciding whether to keep and how much to cut on each cane.

Try not to rant about pesticide pushers, but it's hard to keep a lid on it as the clever ads once again assault our ears and we see attractively packaged products multiplying at the garden center and home store. They're vying to profit from our mighty spring shopping urge.

Don't believe marketing ploys. **Don't apply pesticides for convenience sake, "just in case"**. If you are shopping for fertilizer, don't pick up one with weed killer "just in case." Most plants are healthy and do not need chemical help. A

Not a rate to be proud of:
Homeowners often apply pesticides at a greater overall rate than farmers, greenskeepers and horticulturists in public gardens. Professionals define narrower targets and use pesticides as needed. They rely on continual scouting for problems, not "just in case."

few pests are normal, within a plant's tolerance level. They're also essential to sustain the microorganisms, insects and animals that prey on the bad guys and save the day if pest levels rise.

Boycott pesticide that's packaged and sold as if everyone needs it. To put a weed killer or insecticide into fertilizer is as bad as lacing vitamin tablets with antibiotic. If you need fertilizer, apply fertilizer. If you need a pesticide, choose and apply the right one at the right time.

Talk about unplanned consequences!

About using fish emulsion fertilizer: I always recommend using it after a frost so it doesn't stink out the neighbors. Also, keep the project as simple as possible so as to not require a lye bath when finished. - Ruth Ann Frantz -

Enjoy the flowers. In an aggravatingly slow spring, it's all too easy to lose sight of the beauty. Steven took these and brought them in cheer Janet up, "Look, see what's out there in the cold and rain?!"



Left: Puschkinia always makes us smile -- it's the sweet light blue stripe on each petal of this - inch beauty. Below: Close relative squill (*Scilla sibirica*) is just 3-4 inches tall but its color carries a lot of weight.



Particularly troubling:

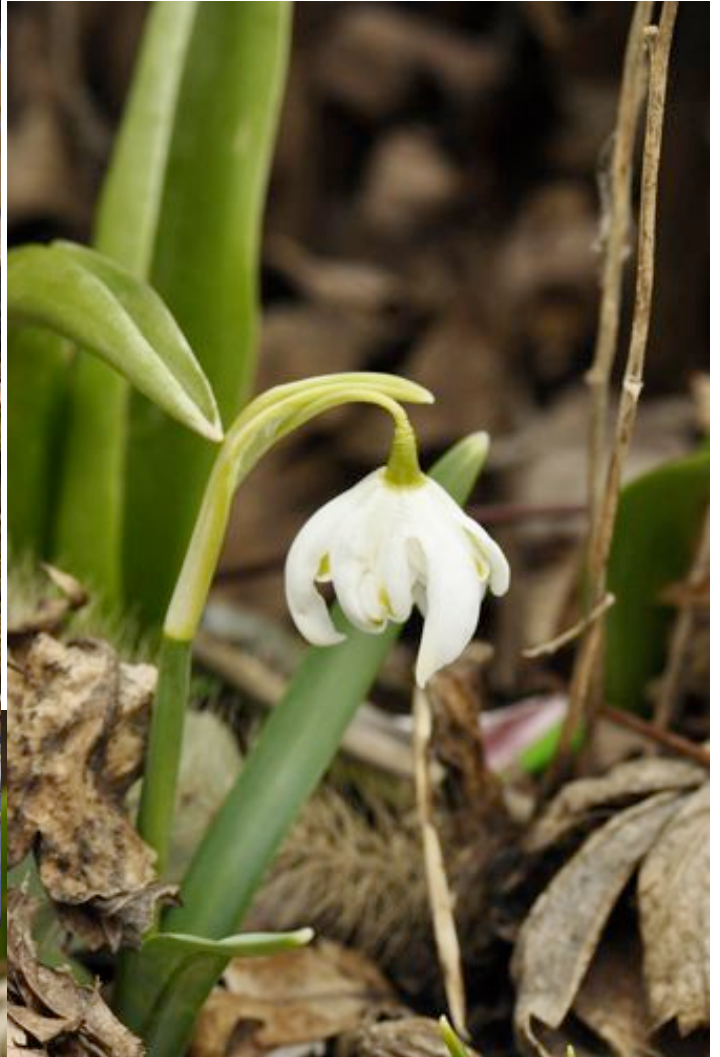
We regret the increased popularity of systemic insecticide such as imidacloprid (in Bayer and other companies' products). It's pure trouble sold and used as a just-in-case potion -- millions of gallons of the same chemical poured all over the environment, taken up by target plants, needy or not, plus by-standing plants.

There will be both unpredictable and all too predictable consequences, as billions of organisms are affected by and adapt to tainted soil and toxic plants. Do we care about bees and hummingbirds that sicken or depart an area because their food has gone bad? How long before pests we are battling now plus those currently at levels low enough to be no problem, develop resistance to this chemical

Didn't we learn these lessons, after the chemical flood of the 1950's and 60's?



Left: Brrr. Skunk cabbage blooms in its marshy home, literally heating its way up even through ice.



Above: Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) has been carrying on bravely for months in some gardens.



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

- Louise Beebe Wilder -

Left: The snow crocuses (*C. minimus*) have finished but these larger hybrid crocuses are just beginning.



Above: Lenten rose (*Helleborus x orientalis*) flower stems have risen up and opened their flowers. We could cut away last year's sullied leaves to improve the view, but that leafy blanket is slowing loss of heat from the ground, creating a microclimate all 'round the plant that may protect the flower buds from a hard freeze. Since the bloom can go on for another month, on stems rising higher and higher, we'll hedge our bets and leave the leaves just one more week.



Above: Iris reticulata makes a great cut flower.

Left: We love the deep red of emerging peony shoots.

Green thumbs up to clear water showers. Rinse dark sooty mold off tree and shrub branches, cleaning the wood. The sucking insects that caused it may or may not recur. (Much insect trouble occurs in waves and we may notice it only in a peak year right before a natural crash.) If they are still there in force, the renewed will call your attention so you can help the plant cope. While rinsing, it's worthwhile to give emerging foliage a vigorous shower too. That can unseat just-hatched insects, which are toast once they're off the plant.

Green thumbs down to the viciousness of some rose's armament. As P.D. puts it, "my neighbor (helped me) prune it and he was chewed up in minutes., bleeding everywhere. I told him to wear leather gloves, but no!"

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

So much goes on in email exchanges between newsletters! We need a website forum, where anyone can see and join in these discussions any time. Excuse this over-run as we try once more to include all the highlights via excerpts:

To choose a new tree

You said in a talk that there were a few really good books for getting a realistic idea of how big a tree or shrub gets, and how long it takes to grow. We like email and the Internet but we still love books! What books were those? - B.R. -

Native Trees, Shrubs & Vines for Urban & Rural America, Gary Hightshoe*

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, Michael Dirr

Landscape Plants for Eastern North America, Harrison Flint

*Out of print but so worth searching for through used book dealer networks such as abebooks.com

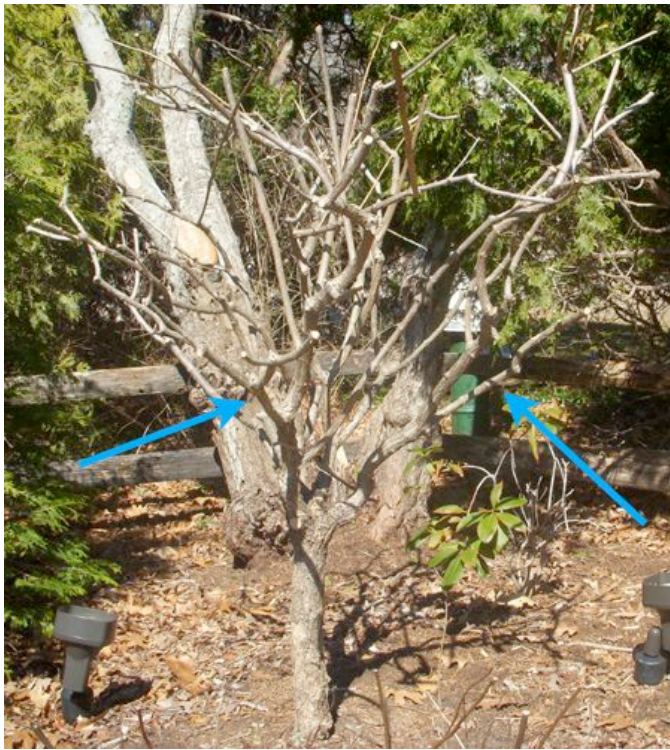
Hydrangea: Control 'Peegee' sag with "Oh-my!" cuts

...two hydrangea trees... planted two years ago... did very well last year. The branches at the top sagged producing huge blossoms. ...anything I can do regarding the sagging branches? In early spring, I cut back about 5 to 6 of the branches growing from the main trunk at the top, ensuring that I leave 2 to 3 nodes on each branch, in the shape of an umbrella. - Jim -

If it's a "peegee hydrangea" (*Hydrangea paniculata grandiflora*) which was bred expressly for its very dense-clustered, large flowers, the sag may be unavoidable unless you place stakes around the outer edges of the branches. That variety is just plain prone to producing flowers too large to remain upright once even a little wet, as with dew. What works with other panicle *Hydrangeas*, and the best we can usually do with a peegee, is to prune aggressively each year in early spring. (It sounds like you have; check the photos on page 16 to compare your aggression

to ours!) When pruned back to heavy wood, the branches that develop from those points tend to be thicker and better able to support the weight.

Panicle hydrangeas that hold their heads up better include *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Tardiva,' 'Pink Diamond' and 'Phantom.'



Arrows (above, left) mark what will be the high points of this *Hydrangea paniculata*'s limbs after its spring cut. Its six-foot presence was a bit more than desired last year, so we cut it back enough to keep it at about five feet at bloom time in August.

From our quick-reference pruning guide in What's Coming Up #86.

That guide described clipping *Hydrangea paniculata* and 63 other shrubs, in this format:

Hydrangea, panicle (conical flower cluster) (*H. paniculata*)

- kept smaller than its potential. 2 or 2a, 2b and 14
- in tree form 1 + 1a or 2c
- grown for full size and natural shape. 3 and 14

-+-+--+--+--+--+--+--+--+

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.

-+-+--+--+--+--+--+--+--+

2 - Cut it back as much as you like, at least to remove dead and weak wood. Do it in early spring, preferably just before budbreak.

2a - As #2 but without restraint, even cutting all canes to the ground.

2b - For shrubs (versus vines): Harder cuts prompt mostly vertical new growth and a leaner look. If your cuts leave branches with multiple side buds, the resulting shrub will be twiggy and may be wider than tall.

2c - For shrubs trained as trees, cut back branches as you will to remove dead and weak growth, or cut harder even to leave only short stubs branches off the trunk, but do not cut the trunk.

-+-+--+--+--+--+--+--+--+

14 - Wood that forms this year can bloom this year.

*I love the
Fiskars
pruners!
So many
people
swear by
Felcos, but
they don't fit
my hand as
well as
Fiskars.*

- Monica Milla -

Cutting back smoke bush

Did you say that smoke bushes could be cut way back about now? – S.S. –

Yup! Leave it alone and let it be a smoke *tree*, or cut it hard every spring and call it a bush. There is no in-between for this species. Once cut, it suckers prolifically and won't quit or take



direction. Cut as a bush, it generally has no bloom but larger, more colorful foliage than otherwise.

Smoke bush was also included in our Issue #86 pruning guide, *Cut now, and how!* We also featured it in issue #123 to show you its winter look and just-cut appearance.

Left: We cut this smoke bush back to stubs in early April. By July it's added four feet of lush colorful foliage.



For good looks in the growing season, work on winter's "bones"

...a space with little sun... not a huge area and has a small path through it to get to the water supply. It's under a picture window... bordered... by a cobblestone walk way. What can I plant for year round appeal... some good bones. – J.C. –

Winter interest is tough to prescribe without seeing the site. You may want to email a photo taken of that spot from where you most often see it. You are right to be thinking about it now, before plants get far into spring growth -- what you see then is what you've been seeing all

winter. If you can like it at winter's end, it's a keeper.

In shady areas, where the shade comes from trees, the type and position of tree trunks is one of the bones that must be considered. Sometimes we "play off" of trees' trunks, sometimes we try to distract the eye from them.

Other important bones in a shaded garden are paths. Make them wide and pleasant to look at even if nothing is growing there.

We usually add massed low perennials with varying textures and leaf color. ...*Lamium*, lenten rose (*Helleborus*), bigroot perennial geranium, *Epimedium* and Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) and others as is right for the site.

We'll also place evergreen or well-branched deciduous plants to add height or background color. ...yew, grapeholly and semi-evergreen *Viburnum* species such as 'Burkwood' and leatherleaf (*V. x rhytidophylloides*).

Right: In a shady area the winter scene may revolve around, or need to be drawn away from, tree trunks. Developing paths and other attractive lines is often the best improvement you can make to a naturally shaded scene. Take advantage of the last look at winter, to be sure that any clean lines like those at right, below, are preserved or enhanced by what you plant this spring and summer.



Bulbs up, and moved!

...some work on my front steps this next week or so. There are lots of minor bulbs... in the area... Would it be safe to dig up these bulbs, with lots of soil, and move them to another spot? - Y.S. -

Move them. Just dig them and replant. Wherever you can, dig deeper when you re-set big bulbs like tulips and daffs. Set them in so that what was up above ground is now below. Ours are planted 12 inches deep, where they're better off for many ways we may cover in a newsletter this month. For now, just do it.

The tough part about bulb moving is getting the spade deep enough to cut *under* the bulb. If you decapitate a bulb when moving it, replant the bulb, anyway. Enjoy the blooming stem in a vase.

Discussion between garden pros continues

..start a gardening/landscape business of my own. I would like to do that in a type of "side business". If you could start over, would you do anything different? - R.T. -

...another thing we'd do is work more on our standard business practices like communication. Right from the beginning. Being good gardeners is important, but being better at business would've meant figured our prices to include office staff year 'round. We are always behind in calling people back and letting clients know the latest on projects. During the spring rush, we're furthest behind and could most use the help, yet that's also when we have no funds available to meet payroll.

As G.M. says, this spring: *It sure is a slow one, I am very nervous that we are going to be weeks behind, my residents don't understand how the weather plays into that!*

For the pros in southeast Michigan, there's a meeting of the Association of Professional Gardeners on April 13, 7 to 9 p.m. at Bogie Lake Greenhouse, 1525 Bogie Lake Road in White Lake. Interested non-members are welcome. This is a group we helped form so those of us in this business could talk about these issues. Contact suegrubba@sbcglobal.net for more information about meetings, or watch the website associationofprofessionalgardeners.org

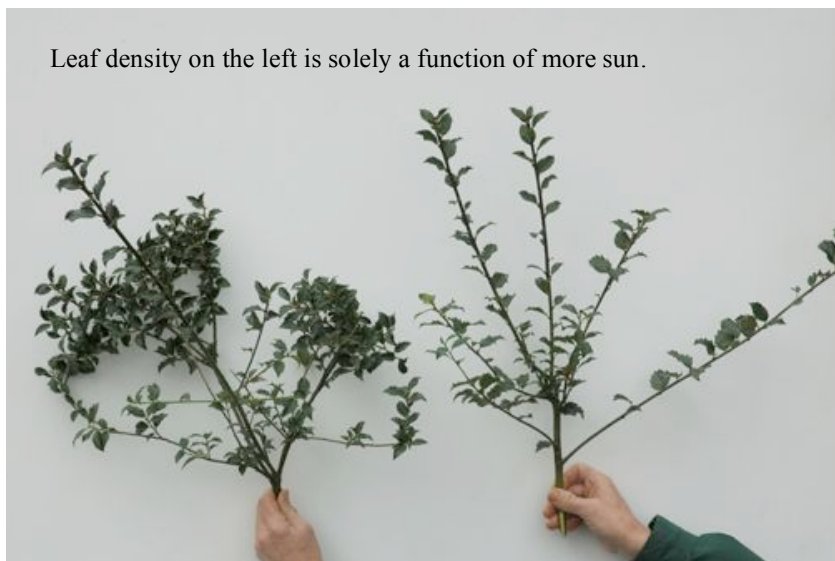
Holly heading for a haircut

...have some holly bushes that I would like to prune... are straggly and I am hoping to improve their appearance. They are planted as a foundation plant near our porch which faces north. - K.E.D. -

You can cut holly all the way back and they can sprout new from bare wood. But if they are straggly now they are not likely to end up looking much different, unless you change something in their environment that's been causing the thinness.

Most often with holly, it's shade that makes them thin. But too little water and nutrient deficiency can contribute. So keep the soil moist as they grow back -- but never soggy -- and add liquid with acidifiers. If your soil is alkaline, like most of the Midwest, an acidifier will dissolve some of the locked-in nutrients. ...Miracid qualifies, as does Ironite. Or you can use chelated iron, add soil sulfur pellets, and a liquid organic such as fish emulsion.

...can't stress enough that light is a major issue. Transplant the hollies or prune overhanging plants, or bounce more light in off crumpled aluminum foil...



Looking for signs of life

I have three mature burning bushes which have never given me any problem. I noticed that the one in the middle did not drop its leaves the way the others did. The dead leaves hung on and are still there. The other two are bare as usual. Is this an indication of trouble ahead? - W.R. -

...Certainly not normal... Scrape twig, look for moist green beneath...

Burning bushes are prone to a sudden dieback... Also to hanging on after rabbit damage, then dying... both usually happen in midsummer...

...possibility that those shrubs were so protected (near the house? Under an overhang?) that they didn't get the temperature-change cues last fall until late. The one in the middle may have been most sheltered and still had leaves when it changed from mild in November to very cold in early December, that would have killed the leaves in place.

One thing about spring: The answer's coming soon!

Black vine weevil wars, round 31!

...is eating the leaves on my climbing Hydrangea. After the plant flowers, something eats semi circular holes in the margins of leaves to the point of most of leaf gone. It seems it starts at the bottom of the plant and moves up. ...What do you suggest I do to prevent a problem this year. Do you have a book on plant disease I can get? - D -



damaged insect attacks about 150 different plants. It's most often described in connection with its most common, most economically important host species: yew, burning bush and rhododendron.

Invasiveness alert: Burning bush

Appearing twice in this issue as a tended ornamental, in some environments, including Massachusetts, *Euonymus alatus* (**burning bush**) is able to naturalize and expand into wild areas to the detriment of native plants. If your garden is situated so that seeds of this plant can move into or be carried by animals into natural areas, please think twice about planting it.

Alternative species

Euonymus alatus (burning bush) does have fine qualities such as good form and fall color. To have those features without the invasiveness, look into our native North American wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpureus*).

Wahoo is a small tree, 15 to 25', amenable to being kept pruned as a shrub. It has beautiful maroon foliage and red seed pods in late fall.

Hardy to zones 3 - 7. Available to home gardeners from places such as Forestfarm (www.forestfarm.com) and to garden centers from wholesalers such as Klyn nursery.

...a good description of black vine weevil damage, in its particulars (notches on leaf edges) and its pattern (bottom up). It might not show up when you look for HYDRANGEA problems because that

...weevil's not easy to control but July-August are the main times to intervene... It's the grubs eating the roots that are the most damaging. That damage goes on from September to mid April... So depressing to write about this anew. Will you check what we've already written in *What's Coming Up* issues 67, 102 and 103?

Might cost a few blooms to split and move peonies

...divide and replant peonies now? - M.H -

Yup. ...more brittle now than in fall, the new shoots break away more easily, and the roots are more snappable. Neither thing will hurt them critically but... you may lose some of this year's bloom if you break off those main (first) shoots. Those are the ones ready to bloom. Others will replace any that are broken but those will likely be leaf-only.



Clip a tip to make a new shrub

Red dogwoods grow wild in the area around our home and river. Can they be propagated like willows: cut off a branch and stick it in the ground to root? Sounds too easy to be true. - S.M. -



Indeed they can and this is an excellent time of year to do it. We make wattle fences (left) out of redbtwig dogwood, which involves sticking dogwood branches into the ground... fresh cut dogwood, we get about 10% "take" although we aren't even trying. ...shorter branches -- 6 to 8 inches -- have a better chance than long pieces. Once they root, they grow like sixty so they make up for starting out short.

More on starting shrubs and vines from tip cuttings in *What's Coming Up* #43

Night bandits with lawn peelers?

I have critter problem which I suspect is either a raccoon or skunk. ...strike at night ...patches of lawn peeled back and/or torn up. ...look like someone took a narrow hand trowel and neatly peeled back the lawn. - J.G. -

...raccoons ...peeled back sod as you describe, to pluck delectable grubs. Skunks hunt grubs, too but generally dig little pits to get them one at a time -- since their paws aren't as dexterous as raccoons' hands.

Beef up the lawn so its roots are deeper. That will mean the grubs are at more levels, not all so near the surface, and the grass will be better rooted to resist peeling. ...under your grass, is it uniformly loose soil or is there a hard layer within a couple inches of the surface? ...Aeration, more regular water during droughts, organic slow release fertilizer after aeration so the soil organisms use its carbon to flourish and make the soil crumble more, letting the grass root more deeply..



Even with two cuts, *Viburnum*'s hard to tame

Is the first half of April too late to do some hard pruning on a viburnum... it has a lot of redundant branches crowding each other from past shearings. - R.H. -

It's not too late this year. But watch those viburnums. Cut them hard in spring and they always sucker badly. Really show their worst colors. ...follow up and prune again in August to thin things out.

Viburnum (from *What's Coming Up* #86 pruning guide)

- kept tightly shaped and smaller than its potential, as in a squared hedge. 6 + 6a + 6c and 10
- kept smaller than its potential but allowed a natural, loose outline.

3 + 3a and 4

- grown for full size and natural shape. 1 + 1a
- has been too big for two or more years. 9 and 10

-+-+--+--+--+--+--+

3 - Cut to remove or seriously shorten some older canes to keep the plant full of new and middle-aged wood. Remove dead and weak wood from other canes. Prune in spring, the earlier the better, because you're trying to stimulate new growth.

3a - Canes you remove might have flowered this year, so these cuts "cost you" some bloom.

However, the price is right since this plant blooms better on newer wood than old.

-+-+--+--+--+--+--+

4 - After the plant's flowers peak, before mid-July, clip it to your desired height and width. Also, shorten further or remove branches that bloomed most heavily; make such cuts to below the lowest bloom on the branch. (Below developing seeds, as at right.)

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10 - Be advised that it will sucker profusely from every stub if cut hard, especially if cut in spring. Couldn't you simply find a place to let this plant grow to its full size? If not, follow up any spring pruning with at least one mid-summer cut to shorten and/or thin the new shoots.



Left: Another of our squint-it's-spring images. This leatherleaf *Viburnum* (*V. rhytidophylloides*) wants to be 12 feet tall. We keep it at six feet per directions on page 22. This spring we see pale young wood (a), older wood (b) and feel the satisfaction of knowing that last year our second cuts (step #4 in *Viburnum* box on page 22) were timed right. That is, we made our second cut early enough that all the limbs we shortened had time to develop flower buds before winter.

Looking for back issues?

Maybe we mention it, or you're directed to it when you use the index we send to all readers each winter. 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 response 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.
(Order form returns in #140) 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.



Above: Our **Donatella** coneflower is tracking our website development progress and answering the question, "How much more do you need for the website?" We're featuring it here so you know how far we are toward our goal.

When the flower's **all blue**, we're gold!

Janet, Steven, how does your website grow?

We're getting there! We're making an open library of our work, for the quickest connections between all that we and this network have come up with over years, on any topic. It will have a real-time, moderated forum where everyone can be part of every discussion that takes place now only in our email with individuals.

We aim to have that site up this year but with your help we're crossing a big hurdle in terms of development and hosting cost.

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

Who's Janet? Who's Steven?

A gardener who got carried away. Janet Macunovich has been known to two generations of neighborhood children as "the lady at the flower house, the one with no lawn." Her lifelong interest in plants grew to a passion after she spent the summer of 1973 working in England, where she had the privilege of apprenticing to tenth-generation gardeners in a 300 year old garden. By 1981 the last of the lawn disappeared from her yard just as her hobby -- helping others in their gardens -- grew beyond its bounds into a gardening business. Eventually her talent as a writer and speaker crossed with her experience in the garden to grow on as books (such as "Designing Your Gardens and Landscape" and "Caring for Perennials"), a weekly newspaper column, a radio talk show and a gardening school.

A garden- and nature photographer who likes his job so much that a waterproof camera case hangs right alongside his fishing tackle box and waders. Of this



arrangement he says, "I used to think that if I somehow knew a day was going to be my last day on Earth, I would simply take my pole and waders and go fishing, preferably up Schlotz Creek where Dad and Poppa and I fished. Now, I know I'd have to have my camera, too!" His love of the natural landscape shows in some of the plantings he and his wife do for clients of their gardening business. There, he might customize a rocky channel made to lead water away from downspouts to add "eddies" of small stone and an occasional larger rock "where a big trout could lurk." In the rain garden that receives that runoff water he favors plants he's admired along the edges of "his" fishing streams: turtlehead, cardinal flower, Joe Pye and marsh marigold.

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

Where to catch Janet, Steven and friends in-person:

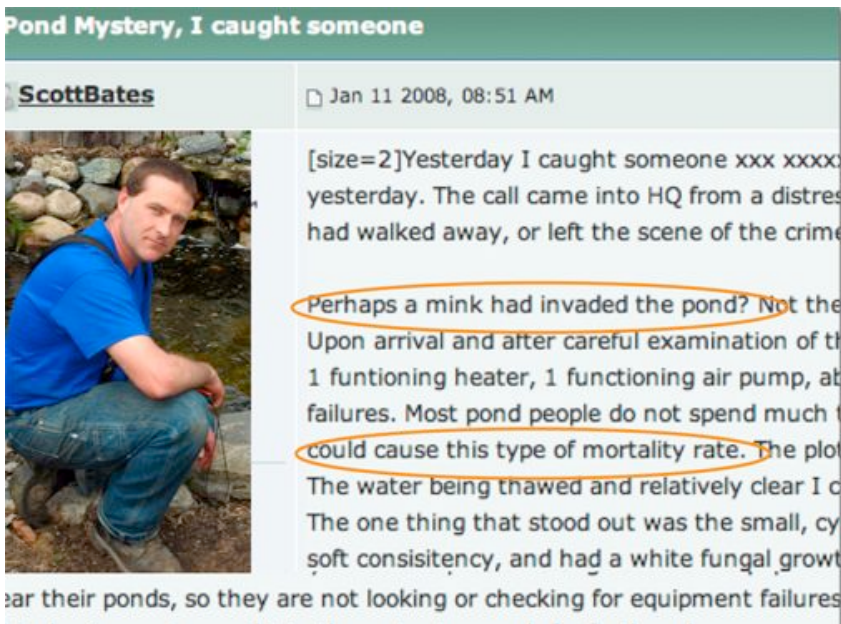
April 10, Sunday, 11:00 a.m. Steven Nikkila will be discussing *Shade Gardens* and *8 Months of Color* during the Ray Wiegand's Nursery Open House in **Macomb, Michigan**. Free. No reservations required. Call 586-286-3655 for more information.

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 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 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 or call 734-753-9200 for more information.

Saturday, April 30: Janet's double-header in **Saginaw, Michigan** at Abele Greenhouses:

Gardening on Clay Soil 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. How to work the soil and what to plant so you can reap the rewards of the richness of clay without breaking your back. and

Hardy Hydrangeas 1:00 -2:30 p.m. For those coaxing blue hydrangeas to bloom in zone 5, perplexed about pruning hydrangeas,

fighting the Annabelle hydrangea flop, and more. Abele's is on Wadsworth Road in the crook of the I-75 / I-675 elbow. \$6 per session or \$10 for both. To register, call 989-752-5625.

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 **multi-part class** for a small group,
- or a **hands-on, on-site workshop**
- ...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 ahead for spring weekends, and six months ahead for other weekends and evenings. Give us your dates. Then we can meet you in *your* garden.