



## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich  
and Steven Nikkila  
answer your growing concerns  
Issue #145, May 18, 2011

## A clear-cut issue:

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**Dear friends:** For most of us, the weather's finally letting us get out and get going.

**Cutting back is a critical must-do item** now: If you want to but didn't yet, it's not too late. We're curbing the text this week in favor of quick looks at some situations where it's often both "hard" to cut as much as we should, and "hard" that describes the cut we should make.

### Butterfly bushes

(*Buddleia davidii*)

currently take the prize  
for most questions.

#### Should they be cut?

They *can* be and many  
people opt to do so, if  
only to control the  
plant's prodigious  
potential. Above, and at  
right in the background  
(arrow) you see this  
shrub at what we think  
is its best -- a spray of  
sturdy canes 5-6 feet  
tall. That's all-new  
growth after a hard cut.  
Now look at the single  
shrub in the foreground,  
at right. When a  
*Buddleia's* canes do not  
die back over winter (as  
they often do in zone 5)

and the gardener lets them be, the plant may be far bushier -- twice as wide and up to twice the height.







Often, *Buddleia davidii* canes die back to the ground over a zone 5 winter (below, left). What about a **butterfly bush that didn't die back**? That's what's up with J.K.'s plant, at left. New growth is coming from all along the surviving canes. He can cut back just to strong new growth (arrows) and the plant will be very bushy and probably over 8 feet tall by bloom time. It may also bloom somewhat earlier than any of its fellows that were cut hard.

But J.K. doesn't have to let the plant have its head, just because Ma Nature's cold hand passed it by. It's not too late to cut it back hard. Without competition over their heads, those shoots coming from the very base of the branch (below) will be five feet tall by bloom time.

**Other woody plants** that can be cut so ruthlessly, even after leafing out and still come back well in terms of growth and bloom: Hybrid tea roses, rose of Sharon, blue mist spirea (*Caryopteris*), dwarf spirea, snowball *Hydrangea*, tamarisk (*Tamarix*), Russian sage (*Perovskia*).







**Our own preference** -- to cut butterfly bush to inch-high nubs every spring (above, one such grows back for the 20th time) -- is based in part on our desire to have more from every square foot of garden. Below: If you look close where the arrows point, you can see the butterfly bush coming up. The *Buddleia* will be five feet tall when it blooms in August but before then the space will have featured (below, left) crocus, hellebores, *Pulmonaria* and lilies. Below, right: This butterfly bush shares space with daffodils, lacy bronze fennel and giant *Allium* (strap-like leaves in the right foreground). Other early bloomers to pair up with *Buddleia*: Netted iris (*I. reticulata*), columbine and foxtail lily (*Eremerus*).





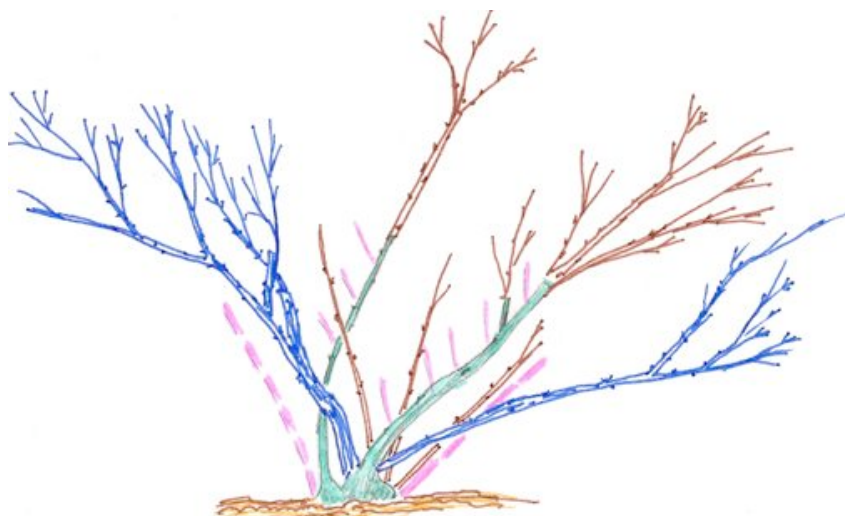


**Woody plants that show some brown after winter** -- such as the Oregon grapeholly, above -- may have lost only leaf or both leaf and wood. In this case, very sudden intense cold in early winter probably killed this shrub's leaves, but the brown didn't appear until spring when the plant renewed its chlorophyll everywhere else. The dead leaves will eventually drop off, or we can clip them off. Another broad-leaf evergreen that may lose a lot of foliage to the same quick cold is *Euonymus fortunei*.

Whether a plant's deciduous or evergreen, after growth resumes in spring it's apparent where the highest vigorous new shoots are. We can cut just above strong new growth, or we can cut further down to give tip position to a shoot that's growing in a direction we favor. It usually pays to wait a few weeks after new growth appears elsewhere on the plant, to see if dormant buds will push out to replace lost leaves or leaf buds.

### **Get tough with rambling- and groundcover roses**

and other shrubs such as *Weigela* that grow vigorously and can bloom more than once per season. Cut out some older wood each spring (here, the blue canes) to make way for vigorous new growth that will bloom well in the 2nd half of the summer. Cut to shorten any canes you leave in place, and remove all spindly growth from the plant's base (this eliminates what's brown in this illustration). What's remains (green) will develop side branches (pink) to bloom in early summer. Relieved from shading by older wood, new, strong canes (pink) will also emerge from the plant's base and be ready to bloom by late summer.





### Trim old flower stems.

Below: This panicle *Hydrangea* bloomed its heart out late last summer (inset flower). Those flower stalks have served their purpose and will eventually be shed. All new growth is coming from below those old tips (arrows). You can let Nature prune those tips away as they become brittle, or clip them now, yourself.

Other *Hydrangeas*, summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) and lilac (*Syringa*) also hold old flower stems and might be cleaned up in the same way.



**Clean up broken limbs.** Above: Some brown bits on evergreens and limbs that fail to leaf out on deciduous plants are simply mechanical breakage -- rough passersby, ice, snow, and wind can break twigs and branches. Once cracked, even if it continues to support some growth, that limb will always be weak and can only become weaker as growth beyond the break gets heavier. So when you see brown, look back along that branch for evidence of damage, and prune to remove all of it.

This dwarf white pine twig is weeping white sap at the point of the break. (Arrow.)

If I'm not scared when I look at how much has been pruned off the trees, then we haven't cut enough.

- Mr. Masters, Apple Grower, discussing pruning with Janet at the Farmer's Market, well into his 50th year of growing -

I love to prune... the thrill of going too far, then seeing it grow back!

- Virginia Holman, after 60 years of gardening -



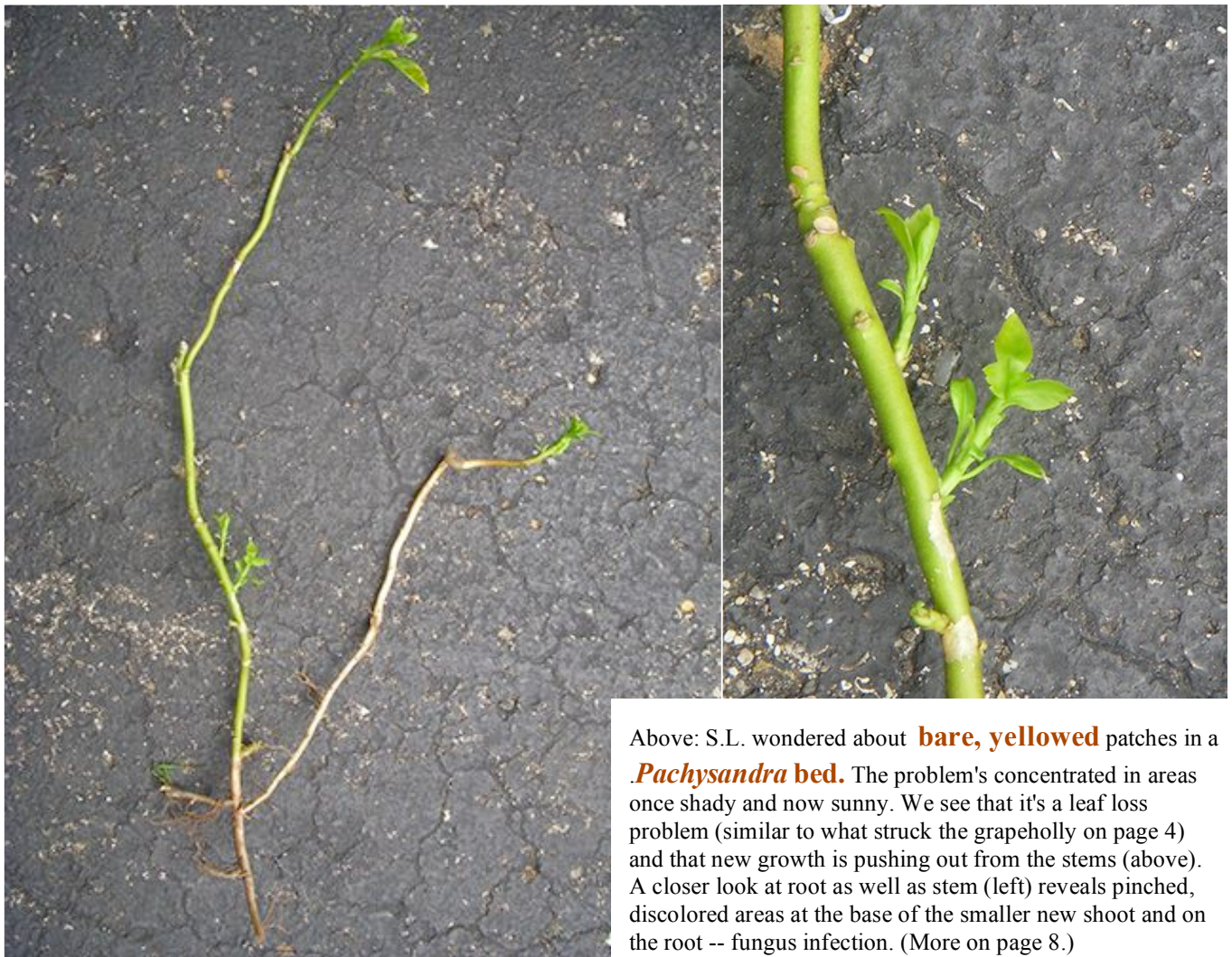


**You were brave enough to cut back hard...** on that overgrown yew, boxwood, *Viburnum*, spirea... Now be patient just a few more weeks. Woody plants cut back to wood that has no leaves or leaf buds ready to go, requires a bit more time to wake up its dormant buds and push out from there. So watch for the un-cut parts of the plant you clipped back to resume growth, or for plants of that type in the neighborhood to start growing. Then give your cut-backs 3-4 weeks more. E.O. took courage and cut yews back off her walkway in early April (above). They're still bare but not for long.

E.O.'s shrubs are now pushing out that heart-breakingly beautiful light green growth, from tip buds of intact branches (right, at arrows). At the same time, its wood is "breaking out" in waxy yellow-brown pimples (far right) that will be soft green leaf in about three weeks.







Above: S.L. wondered about **bare, yellowed** patches in a *Pachysandra* bed. The problem's concentrated in areas once shady and now sunny. We see that it's a leaf loss problem (similar to what struck the grapeholly on page 4) and that new growth is pushing out from the stems (above). A closer look at root as well as stem (left) reveals pinched, discolored areas at the base of the smaller new shoot and on the root -- fungus infection. (More on page 8.)



Above, and right: *Ajuga* that didn't remain **evergreen** has a similar problem. Exposure dried its leaves and they blew away during winter. New shoots are developing...





...but there's more. **Disease may be involved**, judging from the withered, discolored areas on the runners, crown and even the roots of the recovering *Ajuga* (Janet's knife tip is our pointer). For these plants or the *Pachysandra* on page 7, you might dig the plants, cut away all infected parts, and dip your selected divisions in a weak bleach solution or peroxide to kill spores. However, if you replant them in that same spot, trouble will lurk and recur, even if you douse the new growth at intervals with fungicide. The

**environment's the killer.** Correct the exposure issue. Plant to shade the *Pachysandra*, or drop a few evergreen boughs over the burned patch of *Ajuga* in winter. Or switch to a species better suited to that site, and outside the affected plant's family to lessen the chance of cross-infection.



**Green thumbs up** to that unidentified shiny object in the sky, which appeared briefly this week in various places in the Midwest.

**Green thumbs down** to that USO's effect, say critters such as this groundhog, who now have to share their garden with us once more.





We've been accused of not liking **lawn**, which is not true. Few things **make a garden look better** or feet feel more comfortable than lush grassy turf. However, we are not fond of trying to coax a single species of plant to grow across all different environmental conditions in a huge, ill-prepared bed.

So when we see patchy lawn like this we not only overseed with top quality grass seed (which includes seed from the newest, most disease resistant varieties) but do what we can to fix the underlying site difficulties. Here, the watering and fertilization are consistent between bare and thick areas, but in the troubled spots the soil is far more compacted. It's **time for aeration**.





**Looks drastic,  
really works.**

When you rent a core aerator machine or hire someone to aerate for you in spring or fall, show the operator these photos.

Top: The newly-aerated, high traffic area of a lawn at one of the top botanical gardens in the world.

Left: Effective core aeration makes the struggling lawn look temporarily *more* brown, because it's nearly covered in plugs of soil pulled from the sod. They will dry, crumble and mix with any new seed or top-dressing you apply.

Don't waste your time or money doing less. **If you can't see a layer of cores, it isn't aerated well enough.**





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You look up one day in late spring and what was **lush new growth is now wilted and brown**. (Above left, a Japanese maple; above, right, a doublefile *Viburnum*.)

As with the pine twig on page 5, there's almost certainly a disconnect between that limb with the wilted foliage and the roots. Trace that twig or shoot (above, right) back into the plant (below) until you find the place where it attaches to a limb that still has good growth. **Look for evidence of bark damage** there (chewing, separation, cracking, girdling cord or root). Prune out what's dying. Clean your blades with peroxide or bleach between cuts, in case a fungus is involved. Do what you can to protect the remainder from the animal, machine or environmental exposure that's hurting it.





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

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



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

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

**Left in the dust this week so we can all go get our cutting done, but back next week:**

- Where to catch Janet & Steven in-person
- How to invite us to speak or conduct a workshop in your community
- How the new website's coming, and how you can help
- How you can own Steven's beautiful photography for your walls
- Ordering information for our books, magazines and CDs