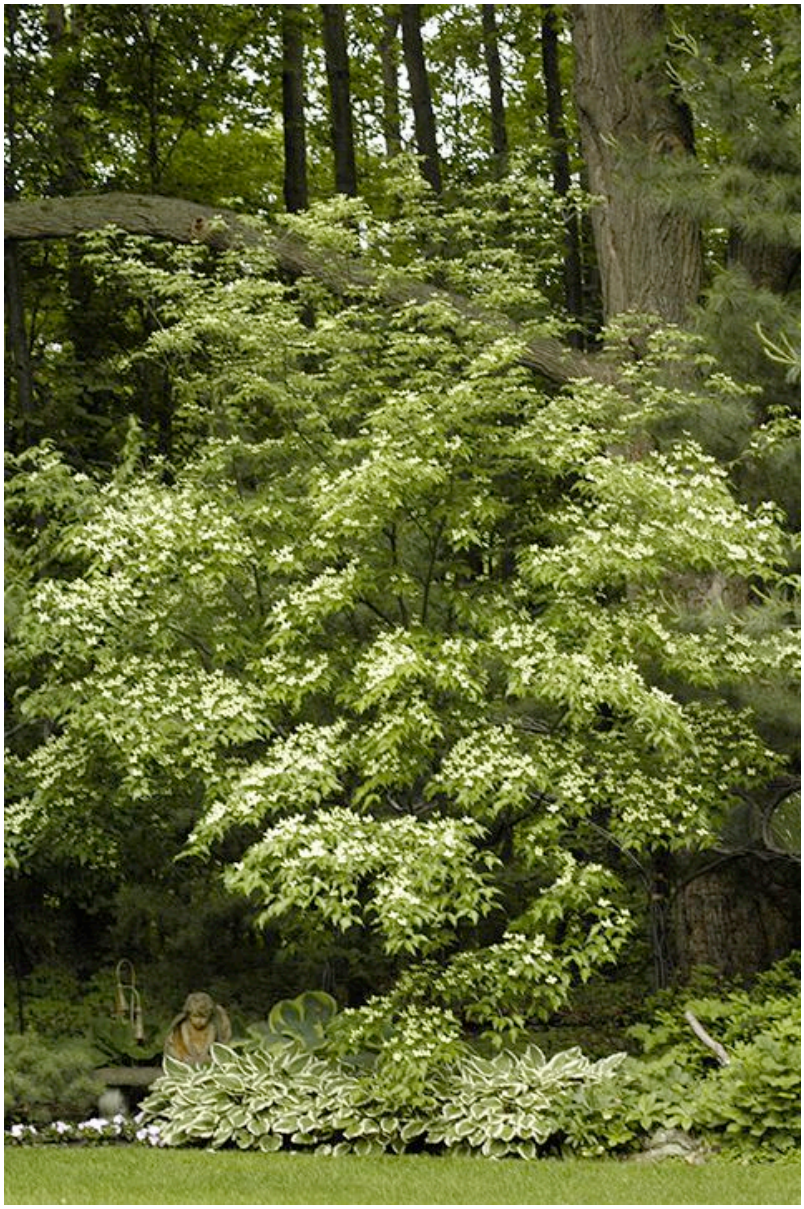
What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns
Issue 38, April 25, 2009

Here you'll find:



Kousa dogwood gives us summer bloom, fall color and interesting form and bark in winter. Yet sometimes a tree doesn't flower well. In my experience, the most common reason for sparse bloom is too much shade. For instance, in 14 years the kousa in this photo never produced more than a few flowers. Then one winter the huge sugar maple behind it (trunk in the background) was pruned to remove a high overhanging limb. This gave the dogwood almost two hours additional light each day. 18 months later, after growing for a year in that improved light, the tree bloomed as you see it here, its first big show. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Kousa dogwood steps out of the shadows

Hello, Janet. I have seen a plant in several places that I would love to have. I have seen it as a multi trunked tree, kind of a large bush about 12 feet tall. It has white flowers that look like dogwood -- only they seem to be there most of the summer. It seems to do well in a shaded courtyard, or in a north side planting. It could have been a Korean dogwood, I'm told. Can you help me figure out what this is? - M -

It very well could be a kousa dogwood (*Cornus kousa*), sometimes called a Chinese dogwood. Unlike our native flowering dogwood (*C. florida*) that blooms in spring before the foliage emerges, a kousa waits to bloom until June, after its leaves develop. Both trees look like they're blooming long after the flowers have been pollinated because the showy bracts remain white. Some varieties of the kousa bloom later than others and seem to keep the bracts all summer. 'Summer Stars' and 'Milky Way' are almost unbelievable in their long show.

After the bracts finally fade, the kousa continues to shine as it turns color in fall. In winter, the mature tree can be a stand-out for its multi-hue bark.

A kousa dogwood has potential to be quite a bit bigger than 12 feet. The one pictured on page 1 is about 20 feet tall and I've seen them hit 30 feet in width and height. Although the tree can be kept pruned to fit a small courtyard, I prefer to give these beauties their head. That's because only an artist with a saw can keep the tree small without ruining another of the tree's best features, its horizontally layered form.

Both of these dogwoods like the rich, loose soil of a woods and the moderated temperatures that come with living in the lee of big trees -- it's cooler there in summer than in more exposed sites and warmer in winter. Yet they bloom best when there is at least half a day of sun. So a position on the east or north edge of a mature woods is perfect.

Transplant now to stay on the good side of shrubs and perennials

When is a **good time to transplant** 'Knock Out' roses? When is a good time to split and transplant perennial geranium? - K. B. -

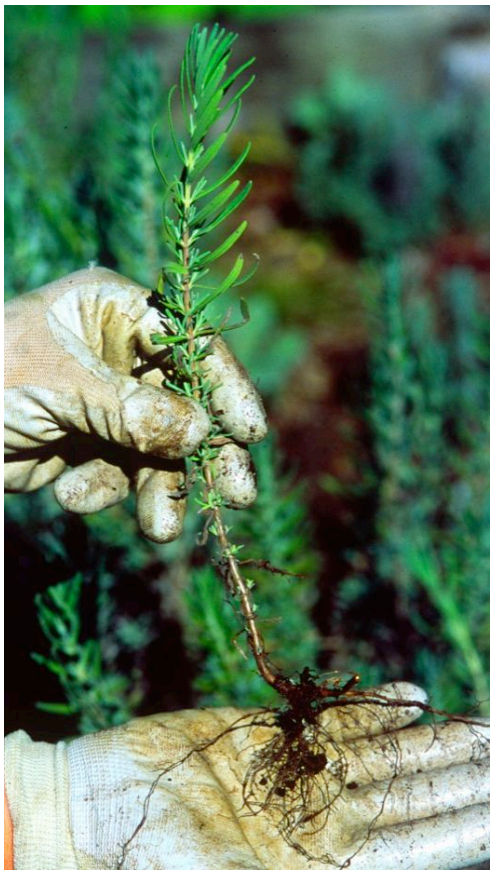
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Two great times to transplant roses and **woody plants**, K.B., are **just before they break bud** in spring and **as they end the year's growth and begin to harden** in the last week of August or beginning of September. Many have broken bud now but **I'm still moving them**. I wish I could have moved them a couple of weeks ago but the weather's been less than helpful this spring. So now I'm hustling to get them moved, since as the season progresses it's more likely that hot, dry weather will come to take a toll on their soft new growth before their roots can recoup.

In the past few days I've moved a shrub rose, a ninebark (*Physocarpus*), several hydrangeas, a juniper and a couple of barberry bushes. I dug each one to take the most root I could and made a watering levee around it once I had it in its new place.

A watering levee is a ridge of extra soil an inch or two high forming a ring around a plant's root system. When I water these transplants I pour into that ring. The levee holds the water to soak in over the roots.

Now I won't really think twice about coddling them any more this year. In contrast, those I move two weeks from now will probably need water more often than the rest of the bed they're



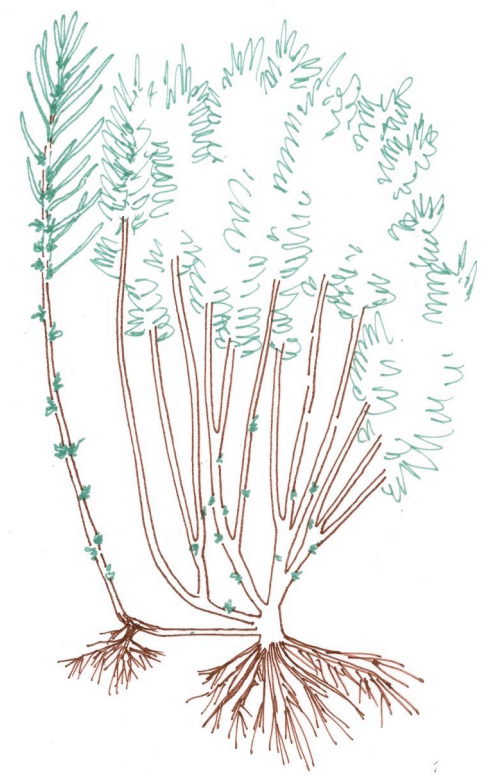
in. I might even need to find a way to shade them or give them a windbreak so they don't wilt on hot windy days this spring and early summer.

Likewise, **perennials** such as geranium **move and divide very well now** and in September and October, yet with attention to watering afterward they can move almost any time.

What you see is how you divide perennials

Hi Janet. I wonder if it is possible to successfully **divide lavender and perennial geraniums?** I believe both have a woody taproot and both plants are **getting too big** for their respective areas.

I do cut the lavender down each year to produce new fresh growth, but it is happy in its location (it is a path lined with them). Ditto for *Geranium* 'Rozanne'. When she is happy, she is very, very happy and is enormous. It will be her third year this year and although I will cut off all dead growth now she'll be 2-1/2 feet wide by the end of the summer. Since she blooms all summer long, I don't want to cut off all that exuberance. If I can **divide as a way to restrain** her, I will. - Lorenza -



Lavender is a woody plant, Lorenza, a "sub-shrub", with a woody root. Perennial geraniums' roots are not woody although they are thick and may seem very tough. Neither one has what I call a tap root, which is a structure like a carrot that's more vertical than horizontal and which remains an undivided crown although it becomes thicker year by year.

Seek branches that have layered to **make more of a lavender**. A layer is a limb that grew roots from its underside. To make a new plant, **cut any rooted limb away from the parent**.

This lavender branch (left, above) set its elbow down on moist soil and grew roots -- we say it's a "layer" or that it "layered." Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

A layer can develop on almost any woody-stemmed plant where a branch comes into contact with moist soil. This is how the lavender layer pictured above related to the rest of its mother plant. A gardener can encourage layering by lightly scraping the underside of a branch and then weighting it down to the ground or burying that limb while it is still attached to its parent. The limb continues to live off its mother plant's root system while producing restorative tissue called callus over its wound. Callus is capable of developing into any kind of plant part and usually forms root cells when in moist darkness. Cut the layer away from the rest of the lavender plant to grow it separately.

Removing layered side pieces in spring won't necessarily restrict the size of a woody plant. Take away a layer and nodes on limbs that would have been shaded by the foliage of that branch are released to grow. This growth comes quickly in spring when the plant is receiving all the natural signals to sprout from dormant nodes. As with other **woody plants**, it's often easiest with sub-shrubs like lavender to **keep them smaller than their age via pruning in summer** after the season's growth finishes. Then, prune to remove some limbs, perhaps the widest.

Geraniums form offsets. Also, the roots of some geraniums produce eyes. Eyes can sprout on the roots, making shoots that develop into new plants at a little distance from the original crown.

To divide a geranium:

- **separate a rooted offset** from its parent,
- break off a root plus the new plant it's produced, or
- clip off a root with eyes and plant it on its own with its upper end at or just below the surface.

Most geraniums have roots like the species known as bloody cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*, above). The plants more of themselves by both offsets and running roots. Notice the bumps on the roots -- each one capable of sprouting to produce a stem. Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

When you first start to look at roots the mass may be confusing even when a portion is rinsed of soil as in the previous picture. The drawing at left was made from that photo to highlight just the two parts of the crown indicated by the arrows. They are a mother plant (brown) which was able to produce enough starch to develop a fine root system of its own plus a daughter offset (red). The daughter has done well for itself, too, as indicated by its well developed roots.

Plants don't know math. Divided, they are often bigger than ever. Take four or five sections from an older plant, put one-quarter back in the ground, and the remaining shoots fill out with greater gusto than when they were more crowded. So, simply quartered in spring, the original plant may seem unchanged or even larger by summer, and each of its divisions may match it in size that first year.

Read the root to divide any perennial

Here's my procedure for dividing any perennial or shrub that I haven't divided before. I dig the plant, rinse the soil from the crown and at least one side of the root mass. Then I can see where to apply my shears or knife to separate some rooted pieces.

I've learned there are just a handful of ways to divide. I don't have to memorize a hundred ways for a hundred perennials and bushes.

Offsets (below) are daughter plants that form at the base of a stem then develop their own roots and stems. Snap or cut between mother and daughter to make more of an offset. **Hosta, daylily, astilbe, tall sedums, peony and daisy** are some that multiply this way. The connection between generations is very strong and close in some plant species, less so in others. A daisy offset comes away with a tug, an astilbe offset must be cut away from a near-woody crown. Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Rhizomes are stems that run on the surface or just below the soil line, developing new roots on below and new stems above. They're like offsets that take off horizontally. Clip out any rooted piece and you have a whole new plant. **Bee balm, toadlily, gooseneck (*Lysimachia clethroides*), mint, groundcover sedums, *Lamium*, yarrow *and* sweetshrub (*Clethra*)** are examples of rhizomatous plants.

Running roots are extensions from the root mass which can produce vertical shoots. Usually they exhibit this tendency as they spread beyond the mother plant's shadow where their shoots can break the surface to form strong new plants. Dig around a running root plant such as **Japanese anemone, blanket flower (Gaillardia), ostrich fern, and many groundcovers** such as snow on the mountain (*Aegopodium*) or plumbago and you'll find root shoots already turning into independent plants, or roots displaying bump-like nodes that are capable of producing shoots. Separate any of these roots from the parent to make a new plant.

Tap roots (below) are vertically oriented

structures that become thicker at their top and may branch a bit at the bottom but keep one undivided head over the years. Each year that head has more eyes -- buds that can produce new stems. **Balloon flower** (*Platycodon*), **butterfly weed** (*Asclepias tuberosa*), **windflower** (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*), **baby's breath, columbine and perennial statice** (*Limonium* species) have tap roots. To divide a tap root, slice vertically through the root (below) to make a division that includes at least one eye.

Layers are branches of woody plants that form roots where they are dark and in good contact with a moist, airy surface. **Lavender, thyme, creeping phlox, pinks (Dianthus), forsythia** and many other shrubs may root wherever one of their branches comes into contact with the soil or even an accumulation of their own leaf litter on pavement. Any layer can be cut away to grow on its own.

Youngest divisions are fast-growing kids to make any mother plant proud

As you cut to make divisions, keep in mind that the **younger, outer portions of a perennial** are the **most vigorous in growth, bloom and health**. Don't expect matching book-ends if you replant the old center and one of its divisions side by side. Daughter plants usually out-grow, out-bloom, stand straighter and show less pest damage than the mother plant.

The foreground 'Violet Queen' bee balm is a one year old division of the plan in the background/right. Given its own space to grow, the daughter became taller, longer blooming and kept its foliage more reliably than the crowded parent plant.
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila

What you see is how you divide perennials

Replanting divided perennials in spring or fall? Give them room based on the growth you expect this year. **A perennial division's new stems will spread as wide as its roots could reach at planting**. If the division's roots could be splayed to cover 18 inches last fall or this spring when I planted, I can expect its top to be 18 inches wide by summer.

Certain people expect plants to behave like new furniture -
to look always like the day they were brought home.
For those people I divide perennials regularly.
Lorenza Mueller-Hindle, professional gardener

May-day multiplication at Grass Roots

While I was dividing perennials this week I realized: It's almost May! So I've put my act in gear to get all my dividing done and settle everything in. Then I can mulch the garden and sit back to enjoy the show.

If you wonder about division, come learn on someone else's plants rather than your own precious darlins'. Next Saturday, May 2, I'll be dividing some of just about everything and sharing the splitting and the splits at Grass Roots Nursery in New Boston, Michigan. See the calendar listing on page 12.

Here are some of my favorite books for information about making more plants:

Propagation: Fine Gardening How-to Series
CD, Includes video of Janet Macunovich on Division; FineGardening.com

American Horticultural Society Plant Propagation
Alan Toogood, Ed.; Dorling Kindersley, publisher

Park's Success With Seeds
Ann Reilly; Park Seed (out of print - buy used)

The New Seed-Starters Handbook
Nancy Bubel; Rodale Press Inc., publisher

Seed Germination Theory and Practice
Norman C. Deno, 139 Lenor Dr., State College PA 16801

Plant Propagation: Principles and Practices
Hartmann, Kester, Davies, Geneve; Simon & Schuster

In my own books I've combined the best from many sources plus my own experience. Use the index on my *Asking About Asters* CD to search by plant name and learn which of the six books on that CD have articles about dividing that plant, then click to go right to the listed book and page.

My books at left are no longer in print but are combined on my CD, *Asking About Asters: Complete Library of Macunovich How-to*
It's 1,200+ printed, illustrated pages with one index; $25.44 postpaid to Janet Macunovich, 120 Lorberta, Waterford, MI 48328. For more, see page 11

Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

Treat wood as an ingredient in raised-bed vegetable gardening

Janet, I want to build a few **raised beds for my vegetable garden**, because I like the look of a raised bed and want to overcome the poor drainage of the clay soil under it. The problem is the wood to use. I read a few articles saying to **use cedar wood** but I can't find any that is 2" thick by 12" tall. The local lumber place has white wood. Can I use that? - Kris -

Hi, Kris. You're right to **avoid wood that's been pressure treated for rot resistance** when building vegetable gardens because the chemicals used in such lumber may leach into the soil. Certain plants can absorb those chemicals and concentrate them in their edible parts.

Cedar is recommended because it's naturally rot resistant. However, you can use almost any kind of untreated wood as long as you realize that at some point you'll have to replace it.

You might look for cedar posts at a place such as Tractor Supply (it's a fun place to shop for tools and materials for any outdoor project). Then the sides of your raised beds would look like rough log cabin walls. Or use "regular" lumber -- I've seen that last over five years, which is often longer than necessary since the average gardener seems to change gears or decide to change a garden's layout and structure after just three or four years.

This week in Janet's garden

Grow with me! This week I will:

Grrr! **Get rid of garlic mustard***. Its seed dropped into a garden and the seedlings conned that garden's owner into thinking they were just some of the regular guys. Now this year those seedling *Alliaria petiolata* are second year biennials, with a year's worth of weedy energy stored in their roots and a compulsion to bloom soon and drop lots more seed. Meanwhile, seed that fell last year but didn't germinate right away has sprouted everywhere. Tiny seedlings clutter the crown of every desirable plant, nestling in against the bases of shrub canes, filling the crevices in patios and stone walkways.

No getting around it, the second-year plants must be pulled -- soil loosened first so the long roots come out whole -- and the seedlings either smothered under thick mulch or hoed and plucked out of places that can't be smothered. Many perennials must be divided and their crowns rinsed to rid them of the pest.

It's one of the last things I want to do yet it must be done and quickly before these early-season relatives of money plant and sweet rocket bloom and scatter even more seed. It's hour after hour of pulling second-year plants and clearing in and around perennial crowns, then mulching. I curse the plant all the while for causing me to mulch heavily even in places where I would normally leave the ground bare to allow germination of desirable biennials such as *Angelica gigas*, foxglove, and self-sowing annuals like *Perilla*, dill and bells of Ireland (*Molucella laevis*).
*Copy this URL to your browser to learn more
http://www.plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=ALPE4&photoID=alpe4_001_avp.tif

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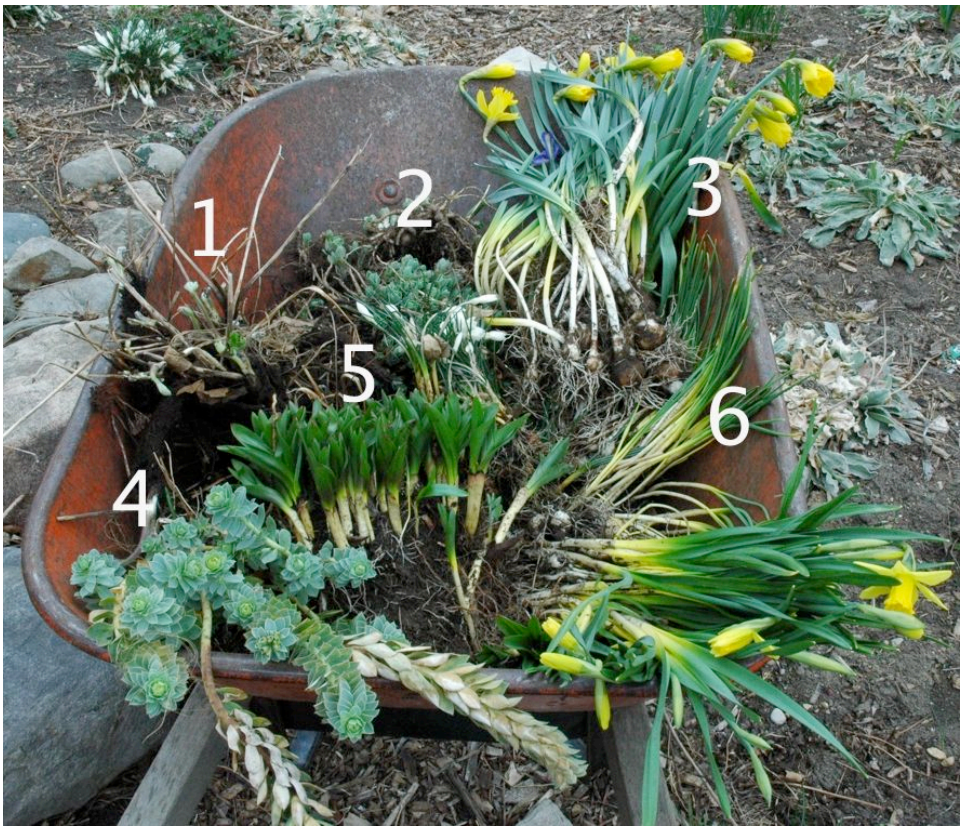
Divide and move just about everything. The rule of thumb is that plants which bloom in spring are to be divided in summer or fall, while those that bloom in summer and fall can be divided in spring. The rationale behind this rule is that plants very recently divided won't bloom as well as those that have had time to recover.

The reality is that many of us have both opportunity and motivation to move and change in a garden *now*. To say, "Nope, I have to divide that one later," is to thwart the energy and disrupt any rearrangements of multi-season groups.

In truth, you can **move almost anything at almost any time** if you take plenty of root and give extra consideration to the transplant in its new location -- don't let it dry out or be overgrown by its new neighbors.

A barrow full of plants I dug to divide and transplant one late April day:
1) swamp buttercup, (*Ranunculus acris*);
2) *Sedum sieboldii*;
3) daffodils;
4) myrtle euphorbia (*Euphorbia myrsinites*) - take care not to smear the irritating milky sap on your bare skin;
5) fall crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*);
6) quamash (*Camassia cusickii*)
Photo ©2009 Steven Nikkila



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Plant some fast-growing, cool-season edibles such as peas or lettuce in annual beds that are ready-to-grow but won't be planted with flowers until late May or early June. Few things are sweeter than a pea plucked right off the vine or lettuce clipped early on a cool morning and eaten for lunch that same day.

The 45mph garden

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

"I saw some bulbs blooming that looked like **no-stem tulips**," writes Linda. "Looked like someone cut tulip flowers, removed the stems and set the flowers back on the leaves. What's up with that?"

Tulips and daffodils are known to produce normal flowers that fail to reach the normal height, Linda. The blooms may sit on stems only a few inches tall even though the plant formerly produced 18- or 24 inch stems.

This happens when **the bulb did not experience enough cold** -- the plant's chilling requirement wasn't met. It happens after unseasonably warm winters and when bulbs not planted in fall and stored warm are put into the ground in early spring. Plants affected in this way can be expected to return to their normal ways in future years.

This is a situation in which northern gardeners can claim a growing advantage over southerners. Bulbs generally receive plenty of cold growing-hours in USDA hardiness zones 6 and lower. However, that's not always the case in zones 8 and the warmer parts of zone 7. There, gardeners are wise to ask around about which varieties perform best locally, or to shop from catalogs that state a bulb's chilling requirements. A tulip that "requires 500 chilling hours" is a better bet for southern gardeners than 1,000 hour varieties that are mainstays further north.

Wrap-up with Grins and Grow-ans that turn our green thumbs up or down

Grins: To Steve Nikkila's take on **the life-extending aspect of hard work in the garden**. He walked into the office of a landscape supply firm dressed in his rain gear, muddy from neck to sole, and ordered three tons of gravel.

The clerk who greeted him, knowing he had just that morning processed an order to send 12 tons of stone to Steve's work site, exclaimed, "Whoa, they're working you to death, huh?"

Steve smiled and replied, "Nope, I'm working like this for my *life*, so death won't catch me any sooner than it has to!"

Grow-ans: To **non-compostable debris in the garden** that demands a separate collection bin as I clean up beds in spring. Everything from plant tags to candy wrappers and bits of cellophane from roofing tiles must be segregated from the stems and clippings I put into yard waste bags.

While on this topic, what's with yard waste bag manufacturers, that they bundle the bags with plastic ties? Why not a paper sleeve around each set of bags, something I can simply toss into the last bag and send to the yard waste composting site?

Who's Janet?

A professional gardener with many hats. Versatility is essential for making gardens your business where the growing season is only eight months long. In 1988 Janet Macunovich turned her part-time gardening business into a full time affair and as the primary wage earner for a four-person family had to elect an off-season occupation, too. Drawing on college (she'd planned to be an art teacher) and career skills (11 years training telephone technicians and management) she decided to spend winters teaching and writing about gardening. "It was that, or plow snow!" Since then she's written nine books and over 900 newspaper and magazine articles, taught over 15,000 gardeners and green industry professionals, and run a gardening school, a gardening website and a weekly radio show. Email questions to her at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

Where to catch Janet in-person:

Saturday, May 9, 9 to 11 a.m., *Michigan Wildflower Walk: Garden revelations* at **Highland State Recreation Area,** White Lake Township, Michigan
Walk in one of southeast Michigan's richest woods to learn some native plants at their prettiest. Take tips from Nature and your guides, Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila, about soil renewal, fertilization, plant placement and more. Meet at Goose Meadow picnic area parking lot, Highland Recreation Area. Enter the park off highway M-59 west of Bogie Lake Road in White Lake Township. Follow that main entry road to the first siding, Goose Meadow. Dress and prepare for hiking, the weather and fun. Sorry, no wheelchair access at this location. You must bring with you or purchase a State Park daily- or seasonal vehicle pass for your car. $20 voluntary contribution. Limited space: Call or email Janet and Steve at 248-681-7850 or JMaxGarden@aol.com to reserve a spot. Provide a contact phone number.

Tuesday, April 28:
Michigan Native Wildflowers in the Garden, 7 p.m. at **Cromaine District library,** 3688 N. Hartland Road, Hartland, Michigan. Michigan has great diversity in its wild plants, and many are well suited to gardens. Come learn which to add to your garden this year. Free. Call 810-632-5200 to reserve a seat.

Saturday, May 2: ***More Plants, Free: Dividing and multiplying in your garden***, 10 a.m. at **Grass Roots Nursery,** 24765 Bell Road south off of South Huron Road at I-275 exit 11 (if you're coming from the south) or I-275 exit 11b (from the north). That's in **New Boston**, Michigan, the center of the water gardening universe. Want to make more of that unique, heirloom variety perennial or keep fast growers in line? It's high time to divide perennials for those reasons and to make them younger, more vigorous, pest-resistant, and better blooming. Janet shows you how to divide *everything*. Special bonus: those who come take my divisions home! Dress for the weather. Call 734-753-9200 for details and to reserve a space. Free.

Saturday, May 2: ***Janet's Favorite Plants***, 1 p.m. at **Gardenviews Store,** 202 W. Main in **Northville**, Michigan. Here are the trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals Janet picks when she must whittle her choices 'way down yet still be sure to design a beautiful, classic, enduring landscape. Pick from her list and use her tips for fitting one or a few into your garden. Free. Call Gardenviews at 248-380-8881 to reserve a seat. When you call you can also give Lou your email address to receive news of all of his events.