

## What's Coming Up:

Janet Macunovich answers your growing concerns  
Issue 14, November 8, 2008

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What beautiful weather we had for Garden By Janet workshops this week, and also great company like the *Parrotia* tree whose leaves you see here. More on page 6.

### Repeated blows required to **roust creeping Charlie** from lawn

Sam's **lawn really suffered** this year, "from grubs, construction equipment that drove over it when we built a garage, and finally drought when we didn't realize for several weeks that our irrigation lines got torn up in the process. (Building that garage cost us beaucoup in sprinkler system repairs. We're wondering now if we could have just paid the extra labor to have materials carried in by hand rather than hauled in and come out ahead!)"

So Sam had the lawn aerated and **overseeded**, "but plenty of **weeds came up** in the bare spaces, too. We used a weed killer in September to chemically remove the broad leaf weeds but it didn't touch the crabgrass. There is also some **creeping Charlie** there which survived that round of weedkiller. Is it true what we've heard that it's more likely to die if we spray after the first frost? Would that do anything to tone down the **crabgrass**? Can we spread crabgrass preventer now?"



Creeping Charlie is also known as ground ivy. Sometimes it's sold in pots, touted as a great plant for containers. By any name, it's a tough customer. Once established, it won't die from any one punch. Dig it out or apply herbicide then follow up with additional rounds. Photo ©2008 Steven Nikkila

I've heard lots of stories about what works **to kill creeping Charlie** (*Glechoma hederacea*), Sam. I've yet to see any of them work in one go. **Persistence prevails** against that weed. That, or killing everything in the area with herbicide or by smothering, then starting over.

**Crabgrass** is a warm season annual. It dies in the first frosts, if no before, then resurges next year as seedlings once the soil warms up. That's when **weed preventers are best applied** just before the seeds of the weed we're targeting are about the sprout. Despite the innocuous picture painted by the manufacturers, such chemicals do not "prevent weeds from sprouting" but kill small seedlings right after they sprout. To do that, they must be there on the surface of the soil as the seed sprouts, evenly spread and moist enough to dissolve and be absorbed by roots.

If I grew grass in  
my yard as in the  
flower bed,  
I'd have a "Turf  
King" crown  
resting on my  
head!  
- Frank Harney -

Any preemergent product spread in fall will float and puddle, dissolve, and blow about during winter. It's likely to supply patchy-to-zero coverage by spring. Save your money and apply it **when forsythia is in full bloom**. I'll hope for your new lawn to be already thick with new bluegrass or fescue seedlings by then -- you don't want to prevent *those*! Shaded within a dense stand of turf, sun- and heat-loving crabgrass seeds will not break dormancy.

Sweet flowers are  
slow and weeds  
make haste.  
- William  
Shakespeare -

Toward that end, aerate again. Fertilize, if your lawn consists of cool season species such as bluegrass and fescue. **Use an organic slow release fertilizer now**. Mid- to late fall fertilization can do more for a lawn than at any other time of year.

### **Leftover spruce becomes a Christmas tree with a future**

I bought a beautiful Colorado **blue spruce** that I had intended to plant in my front yard. I can't find quite the right spot yet so it is still **in its 20 gallon bucket** sitting in front of the pillar by my door. I'm now considering bringing it indoors to **use as my Christmas tree**. Can that be done without hurting the tree? If so, how long can it stay indoors? I live in zone 5. - Sherry -

**That potted tree can be a Christmas tree**, Sherry. It will smell better than an artificial tree and hold its needles better than a cut tree. The best part comes well afterward, however. That's when you stand outdoors, lean on your cane, tip your head way back as is necessary to admire a gargantuan tree and say "Remember when that was in our living room?"

My family hung holiday decorations on many potted and balled-and-burlapped trees. Eventually we stopped when we ran out of places to plant them in our own and neighbors' yards, and friends started screening our calls post-Christmas.

Keep the tree **cool and watered well** while it's indoors. Keep it **inside only one week** or less. Too warm or too long indoors and the warmth on its buds and moisture around its roots will conspire to undo all the hardening-off the tree accomplished in fall. When the celebration's over, let it **re-acclimate gradually to cold** by putting it out on a mild day **in a sheltered place** and keeping it moist. We often moved ours into the unheated garage for a few days, then set it out against the north wall of the garage. Some we planted during January thaws. Others remained in their second-stage acclimation place outside the garage, pot or root ball banked with bagged leaves and covered by old towels we could wet whenever they thawed. We never lost a tree.



You might not anticipate the biggest **problem -- size and weight**. The root ball of a four- or five foot tree may weigh 200 pounds. We never worried about the **floor supporting that** weight because our house is on a concrete slab. We did wonder a few times while lugging one of the bigger ones around, whether *we* could support it.

In case you feel that you somehow failed this tree and devised this starring role in your holiday as compensation: You are not alone in having plants left in pots over winter. Almost every



gardener I've ever visited in late fall has gestured toward a collection of potted items and said something like, "Don't look there, those are just things that still have to go in the ground." You're doing better than most by coming up with a use for your leftovers. This year I have a small hemlock, a tiny arborvitae, three *Dianthus* and a peony. Maybe I can talk Aunt Molly into letting me landscape her holiday village display with them...

One year our Christmas tree was an Alaska falsecypress (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*). We grow it in our yard but can't let it reach its full size, 40 to 60 feet. So we prune it every two years in December. The top comes in for the holidays. The branches droop gracefully but won't support ornaments at their tips, so we tether them with fishing line to a hook in the ceiling. (A hook we placed after a tree-climbing feline toppled one tree.) Photos ©2008 Steven Nikkila

## Reader begs a reprieve for beautyberry: Don't cut!

"**Don't cut the beautyberry** all the way down with those other bushes you listed, Janet," cries Peggy. "It does flower on new wood but only gets berries on two year old branches. What a waste if it didn't have the berries, they're so pretty!"

The beautyberry I listed -- Japanese beautyberry (*Callicarpa japonica*) -- flowers and fruits on new wood, Peggy. Maybe it's not so for the other *Callicarpa* species (Americans *C. americana* and *C. dichotoma* plus Bodiner's *C. bodinieri*). Perhaps yours is **a different shrub with that same common name**. Send a photo of the leaf/branch so we can sort this out.

**This is a puzzle** in another way. On woody plants, **wherever there are flowers, fruit can form**. Japanese beautyberry keeps growing at its tips even as older flowers further down are setting fruit. Since it blooms late, even into fall, the latest-forming flowers may appear after bees have

stopped working. They might not be pollinated and wouldn't set fruit. Perhaps those blooms come as nights get cold, so they don't live to become fruit. In both cases that bush would have fruit toward its center on the wood that's oldest (yet still "new") but not on its tips.

*2 year update: Callicarpa japonica blooms on new wood. All other beautyberries bloom primarily on old wood. So to keep new, vigorous wood coming in American beautyberry bushes, make thinning cuts to rejuvenate them, rather than cutting them to the ground.*

## **Winterizing tips, chapter 4: Stake but don't screen to allow hardening time**

**Place stakes for wind screens** and salt blockers you may need, but hold off on putting up the screens themselves. Stakes must go in before the ground freezes. Yet burlap and snow fence serve a plant best during the bitter cold of winter. Placed early, they do some plants a disservice by blocking light and air that help plants harden off during fall.

Better yet, **plan to replace wussy shrubs** or move them to protected areas so you can end the chore of putting up screens.

**Plan screens to block wind or salt** from at least three feet upwind of plants they're going to protect. Be sure the screen won't ever touch the plant. If there is screen-leaf or screen-twigg contact both salt and wind abrasion will transfer from screen to plant.

If you use **leaves as mulch** (you should!) but you've noticed they mat down, **mix leaf types**. For instance, Norway maple leaves may form mats so dense that they must be ripped apart in spring to let perennial stems emerge

without distortion. Yet those same leaves become a well-behaved mulch if mixed with locust, crabapple or cherry leaves.

**Compiled tips:** In the November issue of "Michigan Gardener" I list all my winterizing tips for you. That magazine is available free at garden centers or you can subscribe for \$16 per 8-issue year by sending a check payable to Michigan Gardner, to 16291 W. 14 Mile Rd. Suite 5, Beverly Hills, MI 48025-3327.)

If you are late with your autumn work, as I invariably am, the tulip bulbs will not pursue you with reproachful glances. - Christopher Lloyd -

## **This week in Janet's garden** **Grow with me! This week I will:**

Avoid making eye contact with my **canna-crazy, dahlia-dazed friends** who are foisting roots on everyone right now because they can't bear to compost a one. They say but seem not to hear their own message, "Look at the size of this clump I just dug up. To think it all came from one little bitty piece."

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**Dump potting mix from planters** into beds and spread it around. It's a light, airy mulch that's relatively free of weed seeds.

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**Bunch seedy stalks** I cut down in gardens if the birds favor them. **Set by the bird feeder**, they're soon picked clean.



## Expert Gardener Afield: Report from Iceland

Hi Janet,

I went to Iceland to see my half-brother Orvar and his family. The birches were beautiful yellow and I was surprised at what was in full bloom at the same time including *Alchemilla* and dame's rocket! And bergenia -- it wasn't blooming, just amazingly *huge*!

I went to Reykjavik Botanical Gardens and 'the world's most northerly botanical garden' in Akureyri on the north coast of the island. (Everything is on a coast since the middle's all glacier. Yet even though it's glacial and 1,500 miles north of Detroit it's way warmer in winter -- usually no colder than 25°F, because of the Gulf Stream.) You'd have loved both of them.

I stopped at a glacial lagoon in Jokulsarlon at Skaftafell National Park along the southeast coast. It's not a garden but we're always chasing after blue... The picture's not faked, it was really that blue.



The European and American plates meet in Iceland. It's land that really "grows" -- gets bigger every year because those plates are pulling apart. It's the cleft in this picture.

now. Its rocks are as showy as the flowers.

In Stodvarfjoruk we stopped in the garden of Petra Sveinsdottir, who was a great rock collector. Her garden (top right) is open

Come with me next time!  
Sherry Jakubik

**Sherry Jakubik is a professional gardener,** naturalist and devoted nature center volunteer. You've probably met her if you've visited Seven Ponds Nature Center near Metamora, Michigan. I've known and worked with her for nearly 20 years, as she's traveled across this continent and beyond to explore natural and horticultural wonders. She's often delights me with a virtual tour when she returns. I love to expand my world view through her eyes.

## 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.

The passing cars were probably slowing to look at Chris Henige's *Parrotia* (*P. persica*) trees in fall color but gardeners behind the wheel also notice other gardeners -- especially a whole group of them gathered in a front yard. That was me and my "Garden By Janet" gang, turning heads as we dug holes to check soil condition and combine what we learned there with soil test results Chris had from the Michigan State Extension. We came up with ways to make some of his plants that are struggling, grow as well as these trees.

Left to right, landscape designer/instructor Karen Skandalaris with "What's Coming Up" readers Maddie Laule, Nancy Strodl, Chris Henige, Priscilla Needle and Paul Needle. Backing them up is *Parrotia persica*, a tree related to witchhazel, ultimately 20 or 30 feet in height and width with traffic-stopping three-color bark. You can join me to learn in beautiful places, too. Check "Where to Catch Janet" at the end of every issue.



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

**Grins:** To weeding with a kindred spirit. What fun it was to hunt and destroy bindweed with such a one at the Detroit Zoo recently. No one who hasn't "been there" can appreciate the fierce glee in the cry "I found the mother plant of this colony!", properly applaud the extraction of a long, unbroken root or show true enthusiasm at the demonstration of a deft new move. It revives the kid in us, the one with friends who shared a secret handshake and code words.

**Grow-ans:** To putting off until spring what can be done now. November and December often afford better, more predictable conditions than March and the soil is more forgiving of our tread, less likely to be over-wet and easily damaged.

In spring I often think, "I should've done this last fall when I was younger and in better shape."  
- Curt Pickens -

## Turning off the garden lights issue?

Sue writes, "It appears to me that there is a fairly **simple solution** to the lights in the garden discussion. If you are in the garden at night, **turn your lights on** and enjoy; if you are not in the garden, **turn your lights off** so others can enjoy the night sky."



## Who's Janet?

**The toddler who asked "Why?" grown up and out in the garden.** One day when her daughter was two and peppering her with "why," Janet Macunovich's parents laughed and said, "Now it's *your* turn! You drove us crazy with 'why' when you were little!"

"Used to?" said Janet's husband. "She's still doing it!"

Janet's been gardening professionally for over 25 years and loves most to solve garden puzzles, from what to plant where to meet diverse expectations, to why a plant acts one way in one situation and differently elsewhere. She's studied at colleges, botanical gardens, professional associations' workshops as well as in her own garden and extensive library but, "I find the most answers in talking to people with questions -- lots of people in lots of gardens, until I recognize the important patterns and underlying causes. I'm glad be working in the field I love but even happier to be able to indulge my own curiosity to help others garden better." Email questions to her at JMaxGarden@aol.com.

## Where to catch Janet in-person:



**Saturday, November 15, 9 a.m. to noon, "Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!"** At the Detroit Zoo, my merry band of volunteers is **planting bulbs, fertilizing and mulching.** See "About Attending" to join us.

**Monday, November 17, 2 p.m., "Garden by Janet - Bring your gloves and tools!"** In Livonia, we're **clipping a young hemlock to refine its shape and restrict its size.** Email or call me (JMaxGarden@aol.com or 248-681-7850) to reserve a spot and learn the location. This is a limited-space workshop.

This cute young hemlock's going to stay small and be even cuter through our pruning effort. Come do the clipping with me November 17.

**Saturday mornings during the depths of winter.** In late January I'll host and teach in the Detroit Garden Center's 18th Annual Winter Gardening Seminar. This winter we focus on choosing great plants, saving time and physical wear-and-tear as you garden and meeting some surprisingly sophisticated native plants. Watch for more news here or check in as the snow flies for information from the Detroit Garden Center (313-259-6363).

## About attending Garden by Janet events:

We gardeners are let-me-see, hands-on people and that's how we learn best. In these sessions, I offer you that kind of chance to grow. You can visit me where I'm working and you can either watch or work with me side by side. I hope you'll bring your gloves and join in so you realize the most value for the time.

At the **gardens I tend through my business, Perennial Favorites**: I've worked for many years with some of my clients, who not only trust me with their landscapes but also understand my enthusiasm for teaching. They open their gardens to small groups who want to see and practice "how to." When the work I'm scheduled to do may be of interest to you and the situation allows on-lookers or apprentices, I invite you in.

I've volunteered in the **Detroit Zoo Adopt-A-Garden** program for 20 years. During that time more than 100 people have worked with me, some for a day and others for years. We have fun, we learn, we accomplish much. The program requires that regular garden volunteers complete an interview and orientation process but you can try it for a time or two on a temporary pass as my student. **If you'd like to join me at the Detroit Zoo**, email [mstgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:mstgarden@yahoo.com). Make the subject line of your email "I'll help at the zoo with Janet." That email will put you in touch with my good friend Deb Tosch who keeps my group's schedule straight while I plan and lead the work. You'll receive upcoming work dates and instructions for getting to the zoo and meeting up with my group.

Watch this space to join me in other non-profit gardening events and in gardens I design and tend.