

GardenAtoZ.com presents:

What's Up

Janet Macunovich and Steven Nikkila help you grow
Issue #174, February 29, 2012

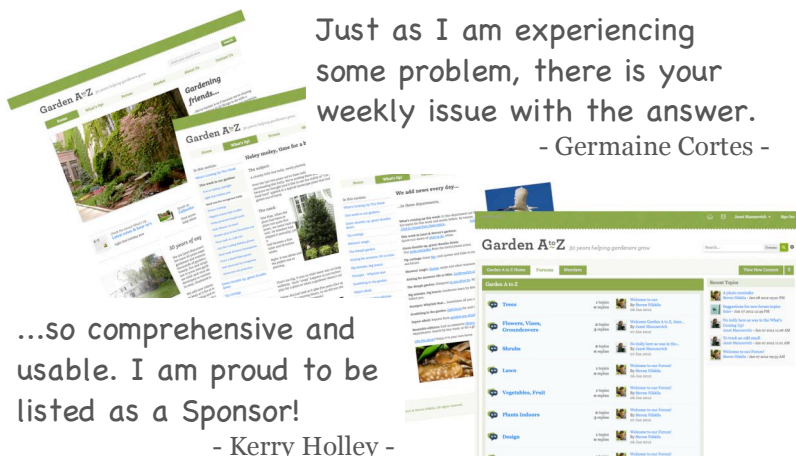
This week's news on GardenAtoZ.com

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Where to see us in-person,
<http://www.gardenatoz.com/about-us/invite-us-to-speak/where-we%27re-appearing/>
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<http://www.gardenatoz.com/about-us/invite-us-to-speak/>



Pretty, yes. But what does it mean?! See pages 9 - 10!

Grafting *What's Up* to www.GardenAtoZ.com



Just as I am experiencing
some problem, there is your
weekly issue with the answer.
- Germaine Cortes -

...so comprehensive and
usable. I am proud to be
listed as a Sponsor!
- Kerry Holley -

Tell us how we're doing

We're very glad you like the look, ease and depth of our website news and library. We have over 1,200 *new* photos and 900 articles on the site. We're writing more and adding more from the archives every day.

For the next few issues we'll continue modifying this newsletter to work with the website. Tell us how we're doing, and if we can make it easier for you to find what you need.

Tell-a-friend contest: 1 week left

Enter to win your choice from our Photo Gallery, framed or printed on cloth, value up to \$200.

How to enter? Tell a friend about
<http://GardenAtoZ.com> and to include your name when they subscribe to the *What's Up* weekly newsletter. Each time your name comes up, we put another ticket into the hat for you.

Winner drawn on March 7!

You can Sponsor us... Please!

Our site is like a garden: Endless potential. Help us keep it growing, and ad-free.

If our advice saved you time, money or plants, or our Forum entertained you on a glum day, sponsor our work. It's easy and the amount is entirely up to you. Email your pledge from our Sponsor page. We'll post your Sponsorship and send you a bill. Easy as that.

Peeks and highlights from the news

What's Coming Up this Week: **March forth with fresh eyes!**

The end of winter is the best time of year to go look at landscapes. Plants are down and out so you can see the garden's bones. What's there that's pleasing is a real gem. Open your designer's eyes and take a walk with Janet.

*If you like it in March,
it's a keeper. Build on it!*

- Janet -



*Color draws us out.
Rich red winter color of
dwarf Oregon grape
holly (Mahonia
aquifolium
'Compactum'). Some
winters it goes brown
but we risk that to see
this. It looks great
against a healthy yew's
dark green.*

*The brown at its feet is
forgiven; it's the straw
from groundcover
plumbago
(Ceratostigma
plumbaginoides) which
covers over the spring
bulbs in this bed, then
blooms blue in August.*

*We're suckers for an open grown red pine
(Pinus densiflora). Such grace, and with
the luminous light green that makes the 5-
needled pines so pleasing in the dark
months. The bark is gorgeous, too.*

*Wish both the bark and the tree's fluid line
was more visible!*

*Better walk on -- if we stand here and look
long enough we're going to start talking
about pulling on dark clothing to come
back by night and chop those sheared
shrubs right out of the picture.*



*We cannot have islands of excellence
in a sea of slovenly indifference. - John W. Gardener -*

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Chinese spicebush (Lindera angustifolia). Truly a four season plant. In sun or shade it brings to a landscape early spring bloom (yellow), versatility (grow it as a large shrub, or prune it as we have here to let it grow as a 12' "tree"), fragrant berries plus evergreen foliage that turns a spectacular orange in fall before fading to salmon and hanging on until spring.

Never heard of it? It's fairly new to the North American landscape. However, if you ask for it so garden centers will start to take note, they'll find it for you.

plantinfo.umn.edu, Minnesota Landscape Arboretum's plant-grower data base is a great way to find sources, for a single plant or to buy wholesale. Going to ask at your garden center for unusual plants? Take along wholesale grower information and leave it with the nursery manager to increase your chances.

Another big reason to support local garden centers and growers!



One of the biggest benefits of walking and looking in March is that you may find reason to appreciate ho-hum ordinary plants making extraordinary contributions.

As an example, there's this oh so common plant, showing patches of gold. Truly ordinary. So very common...

(Its name and more photos in the full article at GardenAtoZ, link below)

Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

- John W. Gardner -

More at: <http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/what%27s-coming-up-this-week/march-forth-peek-keepers/>

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It's probably true that the view into a woods is beautiful every day of the year. Yet what a delight to catch a flash of red and be drawn out to find a whimsy playing a solid citizen role.

Gardeners often focus exclusively on plants, missing the absolutely essential visual role played by structures, from paths to pavilions. - Janet -



When many plants are out of the picture in winter, it becomes clear that many of them should be pitched out. It's also much easier to do that before they come up and begin to talk to us. - Janet -

More photos and thoughts from this walk at

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/what%27s-coming-up-this-week/march-forth-seek-keepers/bones-can-star-too/>



Back 'round the block to the starting point, we see sun beginning to light the dwarf gold falsecypresses (Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Mops').

Perhaps it's the sun, exercise, air, or our deliberate attempt to take a fresh look, but it's like light bulbs have come on. We see this plant can answer a "something needed here" problem (see page 5). At the same moment we realize that it's the example we should use to answer M.R.'s pruning question (page 6).

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What's Coming Up this Week: Give way to a deeper foundation



I decided to move the walkway to give a Japanese maple more room, and just made the whole foundation bed deeper. I love it! - J.S. -

We're so glad you did, and invited us to take a look. We'd love to see everyone break out into deep foundation plantings, do less pruning and have more color. Most homes no longer need the extra insulation and windscreen that dense shrubs once provided, and most people are pleased to be able to walk along the foundation to wash windows or paint.

Above: Look how deep you can go, and hardly even notice from the street view. Right: Take this unusual angle and the roominess is very apparent. Everywhere, including where we imagine something new, there's room for a small shrub to have the five feet it needs to spread gracefully and have companion plants, too!



This week in our gardens Countdown to division

You gave away roots of queen of the prairie after your division demo at our Master Gardener class.

Thanks! I looked the plant up, liked what I read and mentioned it to my sister. She's now begging me for a piece. The root you gave me is about 6 inches long. Can it be split? - K.V. -

Maybe, probably. The 6" piece of root shown here (far right) can be cut smaller, like the bit in the photo above.

Below, more about: Too early to divide? Nope!

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/this-week-in-our-gardens/countdown-to-division/>

More about: Which small shrub we pictured for this design, and why, here on our website:

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/what%27s-coming-up-this-week/march-forth-see-keepers/upgrade-to-deep-foundation/>

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Tip cuttings

Highlights from the Forum

Are we Olympic material? Heck, yeah!

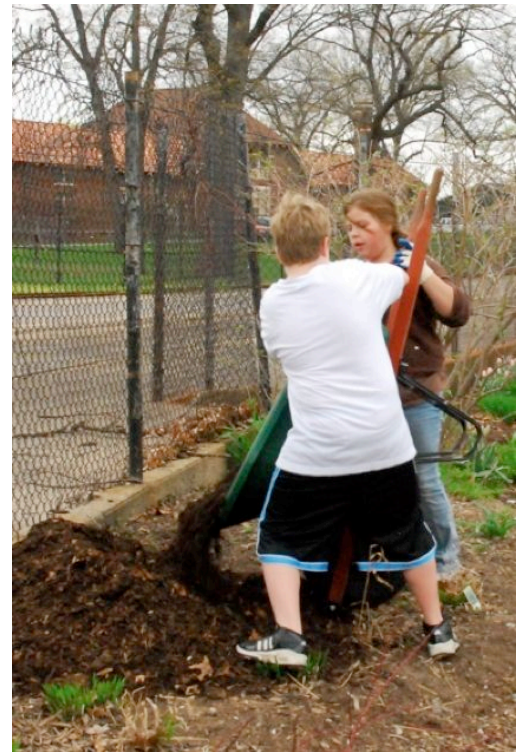
We didn't *start* this discussion but we did revive it recently at a dinner with several horticulturists and writers. They said, "What fun! We might run with this idea!"

We'd love to see it gardeners get some recognition for planting prowess, sowing savvy and so on. Perhaps our ingenuity can help one of those writers turn this into a TV show. Maybe we'd see teams compete, each captained by a celebrity. ("No, no, *you* take Prince Charles! We'll take Michelle!")

So we're asking, on the Forum:

Wouldn't it be fun to show off your skills, or cheer on a friend or family member skilled in precision wheelbarrowing, hose wrestling, speed weeding, pot put or other horticultural tasks? ... help us flesh out a line-up of Gardeners' Olympics events!"

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/tip-cuttings/gardeners%27-olympics/>



So why not wheelbarrowing as a competitive team sport? And if you aren't up to it, you can send in the kids as ringers!



Photo ©2012 M.R. c/o GardenAtoZ.com

The green shaggy critter in the background is a dwarf threadleaf falsecypress (Chamaecyparis pisifera). Tame it as described here. For more photos and contingency planning:

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/tip-cuttings/clip-that-cypress/>

Falsecypress truly in need of a clip

I need help identifying a shrub, how best to shape/prune it, and when. Please see the attached photo (left). It's about four feet tall and the goal is two feet. - M.R. -

That's a mop false cypress. Could be the green variety, or one of the gold forms (they don't develop much color in shade).

Cut it back as you would a juniper. That means you can cut as far down as there is green within -- falsecypress does not bud out readily from leafless wood.

Start by cutting everything down and in to the size you desire. Then cut to promote growth deeper within the plant. Cut about half the branches far enough back to give each cut limb one or two years to grow before it reaches the point where you'll cut it again. Reach in along each branch and cut to just above a side branch with decent

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foliage. If there is no greenery on a given branch that deep into the plant, then cut that branch all the way out of the picture.



Above: To manage an overgrown or undesirably shaped evergreen such as falsecypress, which won't break readily from leafless wood, we begin in early spring. These shrubs are the same species and variety as those on pages 4 and 6. They've lost their laciness and natural roundness to repeated shearing, which also caused all foliage to become concentrated at the top of weak branches. We treated them as we described here, aiming to keep a rein on the size but improve the shape.

The more drastic the reduction, the more noticeable the change will be in the first year. However, those that need the hardest cut also need to be done sooner rather than later.

When we want a plant to respond with lots of new growth, we prune shortly before budbreak in spring. You could do it any time.



Above: 16 months later, they're round and showing some fluff, but no bigger.

More photos and details at:

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/tip-cuttings/clip-that-cypress/>

Tip cut from the Forum: Plants dressed to kill

We told you about a computer game you may like -- if not to play yourself, as a gift to someone who will play while you have fun watching. In Plants vs. Zombies™ the player-gardener's plants are the heroes, fending off zombies all the better for bad habits like shooting out hard seeds, strangling and stabbing.

We've had fun dreaming up candidates for the next version of the game. How about you? Do you have a heroic plant in mind? Care to tell us about it, dress it up for a fight, or use ink, glue and a photo to explain its abilities? Want to see what others come up with and vote to award prizes to the best? It's at the Forum now: <http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/mentors%27-magic/mentor-saving-zombies/plants-dressed-to-kill/>

Right: Janet likes a bristly old coot of a Cacti-cop to chase off zombies. Steven's sticking with some plants that need no extras.



Big Mistake, Big Lesson

It's all downhill for fluffy soil on rock hard slope

Mistakes are learning experiences, so big blunders are great treasures. If only we didn't have to pay the price!

Let's avoid some pain and advance as a group by pooling our blunders. Here's a mistake we've learned to avoid -- the hard way! -- playing out on a much bigger scale and more visible place. Wonder how many motorists are noticing and learning?

Highway landscape crews do amazing things on steep slopes amid breakneck traffic and gut-churning noise. Much of their planting takes, successfully stabilizing the soil, eliminating mowing, buffering the noise and beautifying the ride. But when these big "gardens" slip, the fix is even harder than the initial

work.

We who have smaller areas and slopes less steep should watch, count our blessings and learn.

Many factors combine to cause or allow erosion. One major contributor is this week's featured mistake: Loose soil added over hard packed soil. Those embankments were graded with heavy machinery before being blanketed with a soil-compost mix, and mulch. Water that permeates the new layer slows and puddles when it reaches the underlying hard pan. It forms a slick a few

inches down that can move everything above it like water floats a boat.

Whether you're on level ground or a hill, it's important to loosen the original soil before adding new -- even if all you can do is to scrape across a hill to create long, transverse furrows. That rough contour provides a transition layer where water's absorbed a little better and the disparate soil types and roots have a chance to knit.

Another thing to avoid is an unbroken slope. Smooth can look better, and we all know that looks are often be-all, end-all in landscaping. However, terracing is ancient, simple and proven effective -- even without structure to reinforce it.

More photos and details at:

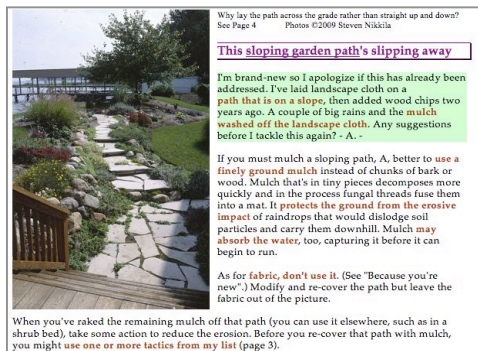
<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/big-mistake,-big-lesson/enabled-erosion/>

Grade A Issue needs a Sponsor!

Many slope erosion control measures are explained and illustrated in *What's Coming Up #43*. It's available on our CD, *Asking About Asters* but is not yet posted on www.GardenAtoZ.com. You can Sponsor it to come forward!

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Why lay the path across the grade rather than straight up and down?
See Page 4 Photos ©2009 Steven Nikkila

This sloping garden path's slipping away

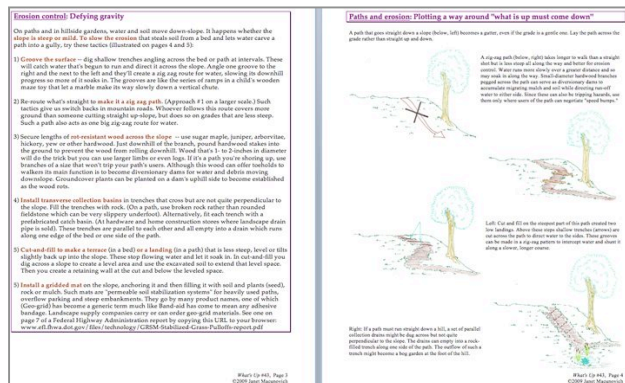
I'm brand new so I apologize if this has already been addressed. I've laid landscape cloth on a path that is on a slope, then added wood chips two years ago. A couple of big rains and the mulch washed off the landscape cloth. Any suggestions before I tackle this again? - A -

If you must mulch a sloping path, A, better to use a finely ground mulch instead of chunks of bark or wood. Mulch that's in tiny pieces decomposes more quickly and in the process fungal threads fuse them into a mat. It protects the ground from the erosive impact of raindrops that would dislodge soil particles and carry them downhill. Mulch may absorb the water, too, capturing it before it can begin to run.

As for fabric, don't use it. (See "Because you're new") Modify and re-cover the path but leave the fabric out of the picture.

When you've raked the remaining mulch off that path (you can use it elsewhere, such as in a shrub bed), take some action to reduce the erosion. Before you re-cover that path with mulch, you might use one or more tactics from my list (page 5).

We've posted about 20% of our 30-year library. We write new articles every day and continue to post from the archives, giving priority to articles which are unavailable on any other medium. However, we are happy to take direction from you. As a Sponsor you can point us at a particular article or a topic, such as, "I remember issue 120 and would like to see it again" or "I'd like to sponsor a native plant article." To be a Sponsor go to: <http://www.gardenatoz.com/market/become-a-gardenatoz-sponsor/>



Scrabbling in the garden

'Tis a quiz: When petal meets sepal, tepals tremble

We gardeners earn admiring murmurs when we display our garden's produce in vases and on plates. Why not stir up that admiration by tossing a nifty horticultural term on the table during the next Scrabble game?

Captions? Schmapions - we have a puzzle instead!

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/scrabbling-in-the-garden/tepal-sepal-petal-puzzle/>

Cyme: noun; rhymes with TIME; an arrangement of flowers on a stem where the individual peduncles (stalks) attach at various spots on the main stem and rise variously to create a broad, flat topped flower cluster; the cluster's central bud opens first;

*Many lace-cap flowers are arranged in **cymes**.*

Drupe: verb; DROOP; fruit with (usually) one single hard seed, such as in the Rose family: cherry, peach or the compound drupe raspberry.

*If you bite down on a cherry pit or a raspberry seed you understand why **drupe** is also called a stone fruit.*

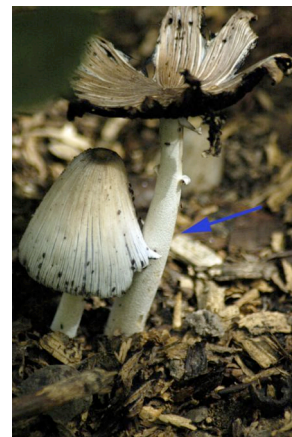
Raceme: noun; ray SEEM; arrangement of flowers in a cluster in which flowers are attached to the main stem by their individual peduncles and the stem tip continues to produce new buds above open and spent blooms;

*Many flowers that gardeners refer to as "spikes" are actually **racemes**, including snapdragon and delphinium.*

Sepal: noun; SEE pul; modified leaves which cover a flower bud, then remain beneath the flower after it opens;

*Many flowers have distinctive **sepals** which subtend the blossom; one example is the florist's carnation.*

Silicle: noun; SIL luh kul; flattened, round or oval, many-seeded pod peculiar to the Mustard family, it splits open along both margins when ripe; more disk-like than the elongated but otherwise similar silique; Compare papery, disk-like **silicles** that bear the seeds of weedy shepherd's purse to those of candytuft (*Iberis*), and know they are related.



Stamen: noun; STAY mun; part of the flower where pollen is produced; *The **stamen** is considered the "male" portion of a flower and consists of a filament which is topped by an anther where pollen grains develop.*

Stipe: noun; rhymes with PIPE; the stalk of a mushroom, also the stalk of a fern or seaweed frond; *Characteristics of the **stipe** are often useful in identifying mushrooms in the field.*

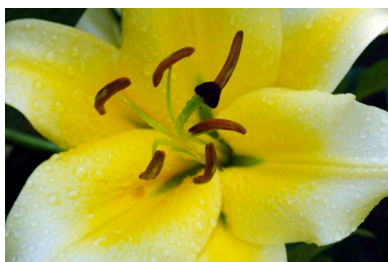
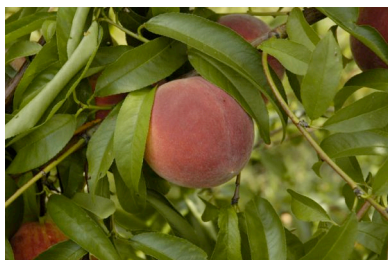
Tepal: noun; TEE pul; modified leaves that cover a flower bud (these cover are usually called sepals) which continue to grow and develop color as the flower blooms. *When the sepals are indistinguishable from the petals of a flower they earn the name **tepal***

Umbel: noun; UHM bul; a flower cluster arranged with florets' individual stalks (peduncles) arising from approximately the same point on the stem, and the center floret of the cluster youngest, blooming last *To picture an **umbel** flower, think of an umbrella with a flower bud at its tip top and one open flower at the end of each spoke.*

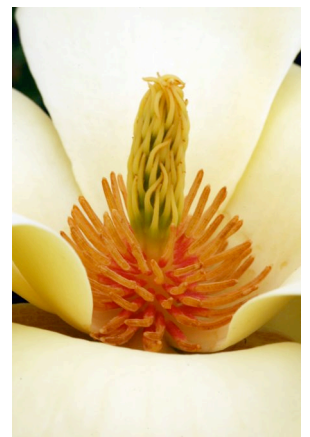
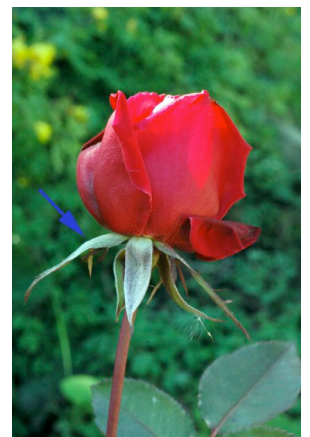
Which photo illustrates each term?

Try your hand at answering via interactive puzzle?

<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/scrabbling-in-the-garden/tepal-sepal-petal-puzzle/>



Or to cut straight to the answers:



<http://www.gardenatoz.com/what%27s-up!/scrabbling-in-the-garden/tepal-sepal-petal-puzzle/tepal-puzzle-solution/>