Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks (*and Gnome Tales*)
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The Plant Medic - Ricky D. Kemery, Allen County Extension Educator Retired, phone: 260-431-6893

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com stating: "Please add me to the email list for "**Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks**." (Or your own words to that effect.)

If you need a speaker for neighborhood association meetings, business groups, or other organizations, I will be glad to come and talk about gardening, landscaping or turf, the environment, sustainability. Just contact me at 260-431-6893. You can also email or text me with gardening questions, or pictures of poor sick and dying plants.

Community Gardening –

reprinted from ACH - 219 - Establishing a Community Garden – written by Ricky D. Kemery (retired)

Since this is an Extension article that I wrote from scratch several years ago…. I wonder – Am I plagiarizing myself? I will leave that question up to my extensive legal department – run by my cat Hoggles.

This is the time of year when folks become interested in establishing community gardens in their neighborhoods, or as a part of their school or church.

Community gardens are wonderful for many reasons. They allow folks who don't have the space, light, or resources to grow gardens on their own. Community gardens can bring people together from diverse cultures, can enhance neighborhood good-will, beatify otherwise blighted areas or vacant lots, and allow folks to grow healthy, fresh food that might otherwise be unavailable or not affordable. In certain cases, community gardens can provide a location for individuals to grow ethnic food not readily available at local supermarkets. Community gardens can sometimes be used as income opportunities for special groups, or be used to provide space to grow specialty crops otherwise unavailable

There are key factors that contribute to the success of community gardens.

Community Support: Citizens must support the idea of a community garden within their neighborhoods and be committed to a long term strategy for the contained support and maintenance of a community garden. This usually means a small group or organizers are needed to plan and direct community gardening activities, or a coordinator appointed by a larger group.

Location: Community Gardens are more successful when they are located near apartment dwellings or condos where folks do not have the space to garden. Community gardens are also successful if a nearby neighborhoods are densely shaded, or individual lots are too small for garden plots. Often community gardens are successful when vacant lots are used for gardens within an existing neighborhood. It is important that either an association or non- profit own the

property- otherwise one might develop a garden just to have it torn down if the property is sold or the owners decides that he/she wants to use the land for something else.

Accessible: Community garden plots need to be easily accessible within neighborhoods with parking nearby. These gardens need at least 6-8 hours of full sunlight a day. Soil testing is necessary with inner city plots to make sure lead or other pollutants have not contaminated the soil. It helps not to have noxious weeds like Canada thistle present on the property. The site needs to be reasonably well- drained. There also needs to be room. Most individual garden plots range from 4 feet in width (this is the optimal width for any garden plot) to 8- 12 feet in length for a small family; but can be as long as 25 feet in length for larger families. Garden aisles need to be at least 4 feet in width for proper access with tools and hoses. One can quickly fill a small open space with just a few plots. In general one would need at least ¼ acre (10,000 square feet) to provide enough space for several families.

Water: The number one reason community gardens fail is a lack of water availability. You cannot establish a successful long term community garden without water availability. Many times neighborhoods can work with city officials to tap into existing wells that might be on the property, or from water lines located near a property. Sometimes a neighbor might offer water from an outdoor tap as long as that water is paid for by an agreement - with a neighborhood association - for instance. But it is better for all to have a garden with its own water source. One cannot depend on rainwater collection to water a community garden, and hauling water is at best only a short term solution.

Security: The garden must be safe and secure from vandals – both human and critters. It is important to have a fence -at least 5-6 feet in height- surrounding the gardens. ¼ inch hardware cloth is buried at least 12 inches beneath the soil to prevent the entry of rabbits and other burrowing creatures. If deer become an issue, then the fence can be extended upwards. There are special tape barriers that can be used to extend the height of an existing fence to create a jumping barrier so deer will hesitate to enter. Parking areas and gardens themselves must be well lit.

Guidelines: Every community garden needs guidelines for their use. It is very important to charge (even a small fee) for the use of the plots. This gives the gardens value.- otherwise folks will dismiss them. Applications for plots must be developed, along with rules about the use of facilities- water use, conduct, and guidelines for individuals who do not properly maintain their plots and guidelines for what type of pesticides (if any) that will be used for insect or disease issues. Liability issues must be addressed along with liability insurance for the facility. Excellent guideline examples are found at the American Community Gardening Association web site: https://communitygarden.org/.

Many community gardens consist of raised beds, but some gardens simply contain traditional garden plots that are tilled yearly. In our area, I prefer raised beds because our Allen County soils are generally poor. Raised beds also are better when the history of the site (with potential pollutants) is questionable. The main advantage of raised beds is that once they are established, upkeep costs are minimal. No tilling is necessary each season which brings up more weeds into the plots. Finally raised beds provide easier access for senior citizens or other special needs individuals.

Raised beds can be constructed of cinder blocks, bricks, pavers, aluminum roofing material, burlap bags filled with soil, hay bales, seasoned lumber or seasoned (never fresh) railroad ties – or anything else organic and non-toxic you can scrounge, If you must use treated wood (not my favorite) use treated made after 1999 from a reliable source. The beds should be a least 10 to 12 inches in depth, and never more than 3-4 feet in width Soil for the beds can be purchased in bags, or in bulk from suppliers such as Felger's or Bueschings in our area..

In recent years I have come to the conclusion that taller (3-5 feet in height) beds are best because they are easier to plant and harvest, less accessible to many critters, and provide a deep soil for vegetables.

I also prefer to establish beds using the lasagna bed style (layering various organic materials) to fill the beds. The result is better soil, less expense, and fewer weeds.
https://www.bbg.org/gardening/article/make_a_lasagna_garden_in_a_raised_bed

Compost may also be used to layer lasagna style in raised beds. Cheap compost can be acquired at various sites in Allen County. Municipal compost (Biosolids) is not recommended for vegetable gardens.

Raised beds are not a good choice if crops like corn, squash, pumpkins, and other large space crops are desired. Traditional beds are better for these crops. Sometimes community gardens contain raised beds and larger tilled area for folks with large families; or to grow crops which take up more space.

Community gardens can be a great addition to a neighborhood, church or school, provided one plans properly - with support from local citizens. There are many variations to successful community garden organization and design such as: work traded for produce, fish farming, CSA plots, and so on.

Breaking the Silence – by Ricky Kemery

Spring is coming – I can feel it approach – As I walk along this country road –
The snow- still covers the ground- but one knows- by the sounds- that break the silence- If only we all could listen- to the sounds - of winter ending.

A flock of geese- flying north – the twitter of a bird- in the dry grasses- the rustle in the forest- of a species unknown.

As we grow older- we can forget-a child's anticipation- of the spring – We are all so busy- with things- with the business of life- that has such little value.

Red Springs Woods – New York

I hope this road that I walk upon- here in the country - will never change. I pray that these venerable trees will stay- and not disappear- to spring up as strip malls- or castles for two – in the place where wilderness- once was- It makes me sad to know – that one day- maybe not so far away- this world- this empty space- will go away.

I wish that this stream - stays clear- and clean – and I will still strain- in the spring- to hear its movement – through the course- of my life.

Spring is approaching- If one will truly listen- and forget - all this noise –
One can hear it- The geese fly- the crows cry – the small birds sigh – One just knows – as we grow older -that spring is coming- if we just listen- to the sounds- that break the silence.

Dandelion Folklore:

The dandelion (Taraxacum officinale) is part of the Asteracea family. Some other names for the common dandelion are but not limited to endive, blow ball, lion's teeth, goats beard, fairy clock, and peasants cloak. The dandelion first got its name from Latin - *Dens Leonis* then to the Greek *Leotodum*. Once it traveled to France, it changed to the French name dent-de-lion and then the current name dandelion. The dandelion keeping true to its name has lion teeth like leaves that emerge from the taproot

Think about these dandy facts. Legend has it that the number of breaths it takes to blow off all the seeds of a dandelion globe that has gone to seed, is the hour number of the day. Dandelion flowers always open about 5 A.M. and shut at 8 P.M., so the flowers also serves as an old fashioned clock.

The dandelion is an excellent barometer. In fair weather the flower or seed ball extends fully, but when rain approaches, it shuts like an umbrella. If the weather is inclined to be showery it keeps shut all the time, only opening when the danger from the wet is past. Some folks believe that the tallest dandelion a child can find will be equivalent to the number of inches that child will grow in the coming year. Ask your child to find the tallest dandelion in a field or garden. Pick it and measure it. Write down the measurement along with the date, and post it on the wall or refrigerator. As you track your child's growth over the next year compare the number of inches to the length of the dandelion.

Some information and picture from: http://wesustainearth.com/natural-cures/dandelion/

Pesky Moles

This is the time of the year when moles forage for earthworms and insect larvae when the ground is no longer frozen. The mole "mom" will be feeding her young (called kits). The delightful mole family to the right can be purchased at Maple Town.

She will eventually banish the young moles from the den in late spring to find their own backyards to inhabit. Like is too short for the mole mom- things to do- kids are just in the way.

There are many myths regarding mole control in backyards, and so many products on the market that claim to work. In reality, the only research-based methods to control moles are trapping and worm-based poison baits.

Grain based poison baits: castor oil, electronic devices, whirligigs, chewing gum, gasoline, and other "cures" have no research to back their claims. Many folks try these products and believe they work when mole activity decreases in the summer. They don't know that mole activity naturally decreases in late spring and early summer.

This frustrates homeowners who are looking for quick easy fixes to rid the yards of moles. Moles actually do not damage or eat any plant material. The major issue is that their barrowing activity will result in an unsightly bumpy lawn that is difficult to mow. Sometimes the soil can be pushed up enough so that in drought situations - the grass could die.

Some homeowners just give up and accept the bumpy raised areas in the lawn. They might lightly roll the lawn occasionally to flatten things out a bit. Other folks seem determined to rid the lawn of the moles. To do so, one must invest time and energy to set mole traps or place Talprind baits in active runs - or hire a critter control company to trap or poison the moles.

If one has the resources; a registered and bonded critter control company may be a good option. They assume all the responsibility and liability to control moles; and have the expertise to do so more efficiently than you.

If you insist on doing the job yourself, then make sure to locate active runs (the ones the moles fix when stamped upon). Use traps that are easy to set and remove. One can also try the poison Talprind baits available at most garden centers. Moles can be crafty, so there is never any guarantee of 100% control.

Often the first sign of mole activity in the spring are these "cow patty" type of structures in the lawn. These result from the mole mom coming up from the den to feed-and then diving straight down back to the den. They are not – I repeat- they are not caused by renegade cows.

I want people to avoid spending money and resources on products that have no chance of working. For more information follow this link to more information from Purdue University regarding moles.
http://www.ppdl.purdue.edu/ppdl/expert/moles.html

Hoggles'

To my Caregiver:

I am embarrassed by your behavior and workplace performance over the last 2 years. Little did you know of my law degree obtained from the highly prestigious Oxford School for Felines. For a lifetime supply of cat treats-I would have gladly represented you – Hoggles the Fatcat Legal Service - there is never a fee unless we win, so you need to call – right now.

The Real Poop about Dog Poop

Quick Statistics: The average dog produces 152 pounds of solid waste per year. In a city of 100,000 people, dogs can generate 2 ½ tons of feces per day. 1 gram of dog feces contains over 20 million E. Coli bacteria.

America's 83 million pet dogs produce some 10.6 million tons of poop every year.

That's enough to fill a line of tractor-trailers from Seattle to Boston. Add in litter from our more than 90 million cats, and you've got enough pet waste to fill more than 5,000 football fields ten feet deep, according to another poop-scooping company. Indeed cleaning up after our pets has spawned an entire industry with its own professional organization, the Association of Pet Animal Waste Specialists.

The risk from poop can be more than just a mess on your shoes. Dogs can harbor lots of viruses, bacteria and parasites — including harmful pathogens like e coli, giardia and salmonella. Studies have traced 20 to 30 percent of the bacteria in water samples from urban watersheds to dog waste. Just two to three days of waste from 100 dogs can contribute enough bacteria, nitrogen and phosphorous to close 20 miles of a bay-watershed to swimming and fishing - according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It also can get into the air we breathe: a recent study of air samples in Cleveland, Ohio, and Detroit, Mich., found that 10 to 50 percent of the bacteria came from dog poop. Some of the hard-to-pronounce parasites your lawn that dog poop contains could harbor Cryptosporidium, Giardia, Salmonella, as well as hookworms, ringworms and tapeworms. Infections from these bugs often cause fever, muscle aches, headache, vomiting, and diarrhea in humans. Children are most susceptible, since they often play in the dirt and put things in their mouths or eyes.

How can you get rid of pet waste and help keep our waters clean? There is disagreement among experts on this issue.

Some municipalities suggest flushing dog feces down the toilet. However community sewage treatment plants contend that they are ill-equipped to handle pet waste added to their system.

The option that most responsible pet owners take is to seal the waste in a plastic bag (preferably a compostable bag) and throw it in the garbage. Some opponents of this practice claim that this only adds to the problems facing landfills with space and that the poop in landfills can also add to methane production and water contamination.

Another option (if you have a small pet) is to bury the waste in several different locations in your yard and keep it away from vegetable gardens.

Some experts suggest creating a separate compost bin for dog waste- and only use the compost in landscaped (not garden) areas.

Other garden experts such as the author Gene Lodgsen contend that we use the poop to add nutrients to the garden- as the people in the Far East have done for centuries. I think most of us would be very uneasy using dog feces in the vegetable garden; especially since using fresh manure of any kind in a food garden is not recommended by experts.

Regardless - it is better NOT to leave the dog feces uncollected. Only about 60 percent of dog owners pick up after their pets, according to surveys. Uncollected dog waste in parks, neighborhoods, and trails that people use for recreation, for instance, is a real nuisance and public health issue.

Owning a dog or dogs can bring great joy to a household. Like anything else, pet owners must be responsible for their pets, and the waste they create

Condensed from: The Poop Problem: What To Do With 10 Million Tons of Dog Waste (Op-Ed)
By Susan Freinkel, OnEarth Magazine |

Pet Waste Fact Sheet City of Carmel, Indiana

What Trees to Plant this spring?

Late march into Aril is a good time to plant trees in our area. Planting early can help a transplanted tree establish a healthy root system before the heat and drought of summer. It is also important to plant the right trees for our area. The following is not an all-inclusive list, rather a few of my favorites, Remember to check underground utilities before you plant, and plant correctly (see ACH-162 https://api.ag.purdue.edu/api/depotws/File.ashx?t=f&i=6826)

Shade Trees:

Sugar Maple: A native tree with great fall color. Several cultivars such as "Legacy" are more adapted to urban sites.
Chinquapin Oak: a faster growing oak tree with smaller acorns. Seems to be well adapted to urban sites.
Gingko: A non-native tree with great fall color and few insect and disease issues. Make sure to obtain male cultivars from a reliable nursery source.
American Linden: A faster growing shade tree that would be a good substitute for the embattled Ash trees in our area.
Red Maple: Many cultivars of red maple exist that are small to medium trees, but just a plain ole red maple makes a wonderful shade tree. Some nurseries carry just species red.
American Elm: Several cultivars of disease resistant elms are available for homeowners to plant. A native tree well adapted to our climate.
London Plane Tree – this non - native relative to sycamore is widely used as a street tree in urban areas. If you have a large property with plenty of acreage- then plant native sycamore in wet areas.
State Street maple: this larger tree with Asian parentage grows quickly and is great for tough sites.
Hackberry: Grow this tree in places with poor compacted soil where nothing else will grow. Several new cultivars are being released that have better qualities that the straight species.

Evergreen Trees

White Spruce/ Black Hills Spruce - both of these species are better to plant than the problematic Colorado blue spruce.
Norway Spruce: Probably the best tree for a windbreak in our area.
Bald Cypress: A great semi-evergreen tree with great russet gold fall color for wet to medium sites.
Douglas Fir: This western U.S. Native does well on medium to dry sites. The bracted cones are useful for holiday decorations.

Trees to Avoid:

Ash – Emerald ash borer has decimated this species with no real hope for the near future.
Colorado Blue Spruce: Many insect and disease problems with this tree – especially as the tree becomes older.
Scots and Austrian Pines: Short lived in our area due to numerous disease and insect issues.
Pin Oak: Needs a woodland acidic soil – does poorly in urban areas.
Silver Maple: Week wood, poor branch architecture, aggressive roots make this tree a real liability in urban areas.
Magnolias: I really love magnolias. But scale insects have made it tough to grow this species in poor soils found in urban areas.
Flowing Pear / Norway Maple: Both tree species have become very invasive and should not be planted.

As I mentioned previously, read ACH-162 - Landscaping for Homeowners (written by yours truly) for a more complete list. Happy planting this spring!

Donations to support the cause are accepted – any amount in the form of checks is fine to cover some expenses. Send to Ricky Kemery 5929 Lorman Court Fort Wayne, Indiana 46835. Ads for businesses are also accepted a small fee / donation will be gratefully accepted.
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