Home Horticulture - Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

– January 2021

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Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks / Home Horticulture is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture and home issues, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com.

Realistic Gardening

Time is important in different ways to folks whose lives are filled with work, sometimes children, and other aspects of life that take away our free time.

Some of us decide that growing plants for food or beauty is important to us and decide to devote "time" to this endeavor. My advice – be realistic. Gardening takes effort and time. The more efficient you garden, the more time you will have to enjoy your results, and other activities that fill our lives. Karaoke night, for example. No one is going to save a spot for you to sing "I Will Survive" by Donna Summer if you tell them you still have to weed around your asparagus before you can come.

Over the next several issues, I will present information on how to be a realistic gardener, taking advantage of several gardening methods to save time and effort in the landscape and garden.

What Type of Vegetable Garden do You Want?

Gardeners basically have three choices when it comes to how to grow and maintain vegetables.

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Conventional gardens are vegetable gardens established at ground level on existing soil.

Pros: You can grow vegetables like squash and corn and pumpkins that take up a lot of space or grow lots of vegetables for a very large family or a commercial operation.

Cons: The soil requires amendments each year. Usually those amendments are tilled or spaded in each year, which requires either equipment or back-breaking work.
Various critters can view your easy to reach vegetables like a suburban salad bar, and expensive fencing is required to keep them out. To keep out creatures like racoons or deer one must install very tall and sometimes even electrified fencing to keep them at bay. Fences must be buried below ground level to keep ground hogs at bay.

Disturbing the soil will bring up weed seeds each season, which must be dealt with. Some weed seed can remain dormant for 15 years or more in the soil, so the weed problem never goes away.

Raised bed gardens are just that, raised beds filled with different types of soil or other additional components.

Pros: Vegetables are much easier to reach – especially for seniors or folks with other health issues.
Weeds are easier to reach and pull, and generally there are fewer weeds to deal with each year.
One can control the type of soil that goes in a raised bed, and generally it doesn't have to be completely amended each season.

Higher raised beds make it tougher for common critters to access the veggies, and cages made out of PVC or wood with netting or hardware cloth can keep out other more problematic creatures.

In general, one can plant raised beds earlier in the season - especially in wet years.

Cons: Veggies that take up large areas are usually not an option, unless one finds cultivars that take up less space. For instance, some squash varieties have been released that take up little space, compared to traditional varieties.
Depending on the soil in your raised bed, and how tall it is, the bed can dry out faster than conventional gardens.

Container gardens are large or small containers that are more appropriate for small areas like patios or hanging baskets.

Pros: Can work when there is only a very small area to garden, like a patio in a high-rise apartment or condo..

Cons: Watering! Last summer I found that I had to water daily to keep my plants from dying.
Soilless mixes in container generally need changed every 2-3 years. Some experts want to soil changed every year to reduce the chance of disease and or insect infestation.

Try to find professional growers or Metro mixes to fill containers. Many commercial greenhouses sell to the public the mixes they use to grow plants.

I vote for **raised beds** every time. One can combine some areas of conventional garden if you plan to grow corn or a pumpkin patch for instance, with raised beds for common veggies that take up less space.

Emerald Ash Borer Update

EAB was first detected in summer of 2002 in Michigan, near Detroit, and in the winter of 2003 in Ohio, outside of Toledo. It has since made its home in 36 states.

The "big" news is that on December 15, 2020 USDA-APHIS published in the Federal Register a final rule that removes the federal domestic EAB quarantine regulations. The rule changing the approach to fight EAB will become effective on January 14, 2021. Here is the release distributed by USDA-APHIS last month.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is changing its approach to fight the emerald ash borer (EAB) infestation that has spread through much of the United States. The Agency is publishing a final rule that removes the federal domestic EAB quarantine regulations that have proved ineffective and will redirect resources to more promising methods.

APHIS has been transparent about the challenges associated with controlling the emerald ash borer and that the domestic quarantine has not proven effective in stopping its spread. The Agency has worked to identify more effective and less intrusive methods and will now direct available resources toward non-regulatory options for management and containment of the pest, such as rearing and releasing biological control agents.

Removing the quarantine regulations ends APHIS' domestic regulatory activities, which includes actions such as issuing permits, certificates and compliance agreements, making site visits, and conducting investigations of suspected violations.

Ricky's observations: It was apparent from the beginning that by the time the ash borer was discovered – it had already spread beyond the capacity to control it. Early efforts to remove all ash trees in a "perimeter" to stop the advance failed miserably. Quarantine efforts also were ineffective. The best that could be accomplished was to slow the spread – treat valuable ash trees - cull the rest- and replant areas overplanted with ash.. That is what Fort Wayne did to slow the spread and reduce the immediate cost of replacement.

I was proud to serve on the Mayor's commission to determine the strategy for the ash borer invasion, and work with Fort Wayne city arborist Bill Dietrich and Purdue entomologist Cliff Sadof to identity trees with ash borer and release biological controls. Biological controls and existing "native" insects, birds, and diseases have reduced emerald ash borer populations.

Soil – Dirt 101

Many folks wonder why it is necessary to "fix" soil to grow vegetables in our area. It is because the soils in our area in general are …well …crappy. In general, our soils contain high amounts of clay because most of our area was at the bottom of a huge lake long ago, or the soils in your neighborhood were disturbed, compacted, or even removed during construction of the home – so only the clay subsoils reman..

Our soils tend to be highly alkaline because they were formed from limestone bedrock. Most plants prefer soils that are slightly acidic, formed from granite bedrock - like on the east coast.

Heavy clay soils hold tons of water in rainy years, and they harden and crack in dry times. Plants struggle in these soils because their roots struggle to penetrate the compacted clay. Roots also need oxygen to flourish, and waterlogged clay can become anerobic, and roots die. Many clay soils in subdivisions where the existing topsoil has been removed or buried are very low in nutrients and organic matter, both very necessary for plants to grow well. In essence, growing vegetables in compacted alkaline wet clay soils is like trying to grow vegetables on a flooded bowling ally that is also covered in limestone. It is a recipe for disaster.

To "fix" heavy clay soils in a conventional garden requires yearly effort because plants use nutrients each season, and organic matter and other amendments diminish over time. In addition, pH levels in soils tend to "buffer" over time, meaning the tendency is for soil pH to return to alkaline levels.

Not all soils are terrible in our area. Forest-derived soils in northern counties are better to work with. Sometimes getting a soil test is warranted. A& L Great Lakes Lab in Fort Wayne is a professional Soil testing facility. Don't waste your time on do-it yourself soil test kits sold on the Internet or at box stores.

My Recipes

Here is my general recipe for fixing heavy clay soils in northern Indiana for a conventional garden..

For every 10x10 foot (100 square foot area)

2 bales of Canadian Sphagnum peat moss. It must be sphagnum peat moss from Canada.
1 or 2 pounds of pelletized sulfur sold on the Internet or at Garden centers.
1-bushel basket of composted cow or horse manure- composted means the manure has sat around for at least 6 months.
1-bushel basket of compost.

The above ingredients are mixed into the soil each year by shoveling or tilling into the soil. I know tilling brings up weed seeds and disturbs earthworms. It is the price that is paid for improving soil. Knowing a farmer really helps out a lot.

Any substitutions of inferior materials (composted manure in a bag for instance) greatly reduces the overall result. Most folks know using fresh ingredients in a recipe makes the whole dish taste better and more nutritious. Same goes for soil- well except for the tasting part.

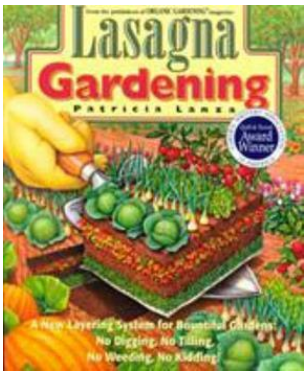
Raised Bed Soil Recipe

Do you like Lasagna? I adore its rich goodness. Some folks remark after eating my lasagna that 23and me is wrong. I should have 60 percent Italian blood instead of the Irish blood of my ancestors.

Regardless, it is why I prefer the lasagna style layering of materials to create inexpensive wonderful soil in raised beds.

In general, raised beds should not be over 4 feet in width because it becomes difficult to reach across them to weed or harvest. I think most seniors should have raised beds about 3 feet in width.

I would build the beds at least 2 ½ to 3 feet in height. Using the lasagna method to fill the beds is easier and cheaper compared with shoveling bulk dirt or bags of materials to fill the beds. Lasagna layering produces much healthier soil.



Ricky's Raised Bed Recipe: This recipe uses tricks from a wide variety of garden methods such as permaculture, hugelculture, biochar, and biodynamic – just to name a few.

Starting from bottom to top:

Layers of newspaper or cardboard

Layer of ¼ to ½ mesh hardware cloth to keep critters at bay.

Layer of small twigs and branches from or any tree except a walnut. This is a version of hugelculture,

4-6-inch layer of leaves of any tree except walnut- maple leaves are best.

Scatter charcoal from a wood fire or scrape charcoal from burned wood over the leaves. Biochar method.

If you have access to any cow bones- throw a few of those on the leaves. Biodynamics method.

Then alternate 4-6-inch-deep layers of compost, peat moss, composted manure, shredded paper or clean straw, or untreated grass clippings until you approach the top of the bed. Finish with 6-inch layer of compost. Better to do this in the fall, but you can prepare and plant the bed in the spring. Over time everything will turn into rich wonderful healthy soil. Each year in the fall put wet leaves and/or compost on the tops of the beds.

You can tailor mix your layers based on what you have. The cow bones, charcoal, and branches are less traditional methods to improve soil, but are included to try if you want.

I would recommend not using treated wood for raised beds unless there are no other choices. Bricks, cinder blocks, seasoned wood or logs, or metal and galvanized roofing materials work well.

Walipini *article condensed from Mother Earth magazine.*

Walipini is an Aymara word that means "place of warmth. "Walipini are essentially greenhouses dug into the ground with earth walls similar to a very large cold frame. They were developed in the 1990s by the non-profit Benson Agriculture and Food Institute in Bolivia as a low-cost sustainable method for citizens in Bolivia to grow food.

Walipinis use passive solar energy to bring light and heat into the growing space and the thermal mass of earth to retain that heat. The result is a greenhouse that can keep relatively stable temperatures all year long without using additional energy sources. Keeping conventional greenhouses in our area at stable temperature all season long requires expensive heating and cooling.

Growing food in earth-sheltered spaces has a long history. I can remember one Master Gardener in Allen county who grew vegetables and flowers in an earthen greenhouse near Madison Wisconsin 25 years ago.

A walipini is constructed by digging a rectangular greenhouse between 6 and 8 feet deep.
The roof of the greenhouse is angled to take maximum advantage of daylight hours, so the taller wall is typically built to face the winter sun (i.e., south, if you're in the northern hemisphere; north if you're the southern hemisphere).

In areas where the soil can't be compacted enough to be structurally sound, the walls of these sunken greenhouses can be supported by stone, earthbags, bricks or concrete blocks.

Many growers use rain barrels filled with water to support the walls and to increase heat absorption. Since water is denser than soil, it has better heat-storage capabilities.
The roof is usually made from a double layer of plastic sheeting of some kind. Some folks use windows or plexiglass. The roof lets light and heat in, while the layering keeps heat from escaping too quickly overnight..
Ventilation is provided by some combination of doors, windows and/or roof vents.
Constructing a walipini in the upper Midwest offers unique challenges. Walipinis need be constructed so the bottom is at least 5 feet above the water table to avoid flooding. This might be difficult to achieve in our area as water tables are high. The earth walls of a walipini must be made of soil that is stable (like clay) that won't

collapse. The other issue is sunlight and sun angles. Unlike Bolivia, we go for weeks during the winter with little sunlight. Our low sun angles during the winter make it difficult for sunlight to penetrate all parts of the walipini.

If you are really sold on the idea of a walipini, then create a "hybrid" walipini by only partially digging out the structure. Keep most of the walls above ground level and make sure the roof is angled to keep snow loads off the roof and allow more sunlight to enter during the winter. This may require heavy equipment to bring in soil to build the walls-making the project more expensive. More information about walipinis can be found here: Walipini Greenhouse: How to Build One, How's it Different? (greenandgrowing.org)

I find the name "walipini" very interesting. Somehow the name seems too exotic to describe an earthen greenhouse. I think a mistake has been made. Here are some examples of better uses for the word "walipini"

At a restaurant: *"I 'll have the pasta walipini with extra breadsticks, please.*

Produce section of grocery store: "Fresh walipinis – two dollars a pound".

Tavern: *"I'll have a walipini on the rocks, please"*

Real Estate: *"Not only does the house have granite counter tops, but it also features a really adorable walipini"*

Westminster Kennel Dog Show: *A new addition to this year's dog breeds is the Walipini – a complex mix of Chihuahua , European Plott hound, Pit Bull terrier, Weimaraner, and a rabid ankle biter of unknown origin.*

Filling Raised Beds - Options:

Filling raised beds is not as easy as one might think – especially if you have raised beds that are deeper. Irt is more expensive the deeper the beds. It takes about 25-30 bags of soil to fill a 4 foot in width, 10 foot in length, and 10 inch in height bed. It is a lot of bag hauling. The soil from the bagged mixes I have found is inferior because most are based on muck. Muck does nothing for soil pH, holds too much water, and decomposes rapidly over time.

One can have **bulk soil** delivered from a bulk soil supplier in the area. They offer different blends of muck, sand, or topsoil. Some offer items like duck compost. Delivery costs are high, and one still has to move the soil from the pile to the beds. It is a lot of work. Ringgenberg Garten House in Leo does deliver manure-based compost that is made on site. It would be my first option for bulk "soil" for raised beds. With all bulk soil mixes, even Mark's compost – numerous weeds are often an issue.

Filling raised beds using the **Lasagna method** is the least expensive way to get quality soil with the least effort involved. All one has to do scrounge around for the various materials One doesn't have to move a ton of soil, and weeds are much less of an issue.

Asian Money Tree

"*Pachira aquatica"* or Asian Money Tree is an unusual tropical foliage plant that is supposed to bring its owner great fortune, financial prosperity, and positive energy, according to ancient Asian folklore. The genus name is derived from an ancient language native to Guyana, where it translates to "sweet water nut".

According to legend, a poor man was praying for money and found a rather odd-looking plant. Thinking this was an omen, he took the plant home. The poor man became rich from selling new plants grown from the seeds.

Asian Money Tree is actually not native to Asia at all. It is commonly found growing in swampland and along wet riverbanks in Central and South America, from Mexico right down to Costa Rica.

Money tree became popular as a tropical ornamental first in Japan and later much of the rest of East Asia. Supposedly, a truck driver from Taiwan cultivated five small trees in a single flowerpot with their trunks braided.

The Japanese loved the plants, especially Japanese businesses who display the plants in their businesses hoping for good fortune. The trees play an important role in Taiwan's agricultural export economy.

Money Tree flowers are large, showy, and especially fragrant when the sun goes down. Their bright yellow, long, narrow petals gradually peel open like a banana. Once open, they reveal their lengthy, golden yellow and orange-tipped bristle-like stamens. They are reportedly some the largest tree flowers in the world.

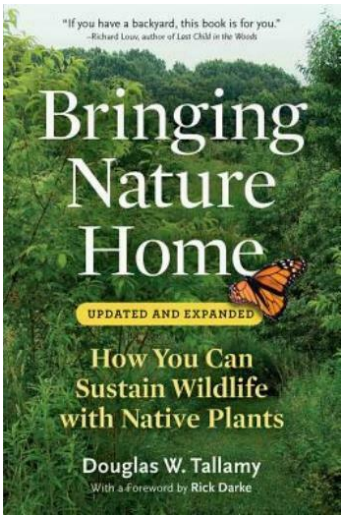
These nuts of Money tree are brown and reach an impressive 12 inches long and up to 2.5 inches in diameter. Inside these pods grow the edible seeds, which look a little like chestnuts, but taste more like peanuts. These nuts can be eaten fresh or roasted, and even ground into flour to make bread.

Money Tree is often sold as a braided stem version, rather than a solitary trunk. Many plants sold as *Pachira aquatica* are actually a similar species, which develops a thick base at a younger age and has a smaller growth habit, less showy flowers, and smaller nuts.

Money trees prefer a well-drained soil. Use a slow-release fertilizer once a year. They prefer indirect filtered sunlight as direct midday sun in the summer can scorch the leaves.

Avoid placing the plant over heat vents and drafty areas. Ideal temps for this plant are 65-75 degrees during the day. Mist the plant often or place on a tray of moist pebbles. Sometimes moving the plant can cause Money tree to drop its leaves, just like a fig tree.

Allow the plant to dry out between watering, as the plant is susceptible to root rot.



The Home Landscape - An Ecological Approach

I first heard of Douglas Tallamy's work around 2006/2007 just before the release of his classic book *Bringing Nature Home.*

Dr. Tallamy is an entomology professor at the University of Delaware who was - among other things-researching how the use or absence of native plants affected insect and bird populations. I had already studied native prairie perennials during my years at Purdue in the early to mid-nineties and noticed that many birds and insects were attracted to prairie plantings. Tallamy's research revealed a one-to one relationship between native plants and the presence of insects who feed upon those plants. If there were no natives present, then insects, birds, and animals who needed those plants disappeared.

I thought his work was fascinating, and quickly adapted the principles of his idea of using and promoting native plants instead of exotic plants in our home landscapes. I recommended that Master Gardeners read the book for a different point of view compared with traditional landscapes using mostly exotics.

The research-based book offered a way to promote the idea of using native plants to more skeptical folks. Before the book, there was no definitive way to support the idea of using natives except that "it was a good idea."

It was similar to the organic gardening movement. Before the Rodale Institute began to actually conduct scientific research on the benefits of organic gardening techniques, many organic gardening enthusiasts were considered "kooky" by University researchers and Extension services- even though the interest from consumers was rapidly growing.

Over time, based on research and consumer demand, Universities began to conduct their own research on organic gardening techniques. Companies began to develop and promote organic pest and disease controls. Our government began to examine more closely the use of conventual pesticides and their safety.

Consumers demanded that organic food be available, and organic sections began to appear in grocery stores. Today organic food is common, and the demand continues to grow.

Both the organic gardening movement and the native plant movement show that consumer-driven change is possible, backed by research to support those goals.

Tallamy's research is great, but there are still many obstacles. It will be a tough sell for those who have been brainwashed onto thinking that large lawns and the use of non-native plants are the "norm" for landscapes in the U.S. Real change can take time to happen, but already many nursery and garden centers offer sections that promote native plants, and many businesses now exist that only offer native plants.

Here are a few examples of the Tallamy philosophy for ecological landscapes.

"The ecological approach to landscaping that I have described here is nothing more than basic earth stewardship, but it is stewardship that empowers us all to become forces in conservation. Today's environmental challenges are so enormous that it is easy to feel helpless, as if one person can't make a

difference - despite the cliché that suggests you can. In this case, however, the cliché is right on: by choosing ecologically-effective plants for your landscape, by shrinking your lawn, and by removing your invasive ornamentals – all actions a single person can take - you will be able to make a difference that you can see, and enjoy, almost immediately. Life will return to your property!"

"For over a century we have favored ornamental plants from Asia, Europe, and South America over those that have evolved right here. If all plants were created equal, that would be fine. But every plant species protects its leaves with a species-specific mixture of nasty chemicals.

With few exceptions, only insect species that have shared a long evolutionary history with a particular plant lineage have developed the physiological adaptations required to digest the chemicals in their host's leaves. They have specialized over time to eat only the plants sharing those particular chemicals. When we present insects from our local area with plants that evolved on another continent, chances are those insects will be unable to eat them."

"We used to think this was good. Use "pest free" plants, and our insects will disappear! But an insect that cannot eat part of a leaf cannot fulfill its role in the food web. We have planted Kousa dogwood, a species from China that supports no insect herbivores, instead of our native flowering dogwood that supports 117 species of moths and butterflies alone.

On hundreds of thousands of acres we have planted Asian golden rain trees, ginkgo, burning bushes, barberries, autumn olives, privets, bush honeysuckles, Callery pears, Miscanthus, and dozens of other foreign ornamentals instead of our beautiful oaks, hickories, cherries, basswoods, elms, and others, and we have thereby lost the chance to support thousands of species of caterpillars, the most nutritious bird food available. "

"The four ecological functions that all landscapes need to perform are: 1) support a diverse and complex food web; 2) manage local watersheds; 3) move carbon from the atmosphere to the soil; and, 4) provide food and housing for as many species of native bees as possible. Lawn does none of these things well, so reducing the area we have in turf grass is a logical first step.

"But plants vary a great deal in how well they achieve ecological goals, so we must choose very carefully the plants we use to replace lawn. A handy tool to do just that can be found on the National Wildlife Federation website. Select 'Native Plant Finder' and enter your zip code; a ranked list of ecologically productive woody and herbaceous plants for your county will pop up."

Even Tallamy's home landscape has some lawn. His land is mostly forested, which in my opinion is easier to remove invasive plants and exotics and replant. It is much more difficult to completely redo a traditional landscape of extensive lawn and exotic and invasive plants. Not everyone has resources, willpower, or motivation to do this.

News Flash! Prince Charles Infatuated with Squirrels!

Prince Charles has had a long history of fascination with the environment and endangered species. He recently wrote a letter to the Red Squirrel Survival Trust, of which he is patron. He expressed his admiration for the efforts of volunteers fighting for the survival of the red squirrel and native British trees that provide their natural habitat.

"As you will all know so well, these charming and intelligent creatures never fail to delight," Charles, 72, wrote. "I take enormous pleasure in having them around – and in! – the house when I am at home in Scotland. They are such inquisitive and delightful characters; they have even been known to hunt down a few of their favorite nuts left out in an unguarded jacket pocket."

Clarence House shared some photos of Prince Charles with his favorite animal on Twitter, including a shot of him admiring a squirrel outside his country home in Scotland. Red squirrels are categorized as an endangered species, with less than 140,000 across the U.K.

In another article on the animals, Charles notes, “They come into the house at Birkhall and we get them chasing each other round and round inside. If I sit there quietly, they will do so around me. Sometimes, when I leave my jackets on a chair with nuts in the pockets, I see them with their tails sticking out, as they hunt for nuts — they are incredibly special creatures.”

As an avid watcher of “The Crown” series on Netflix, I am surprised this love of squirrels didn’t come up during the miniseries about the royal family and their shenanigans. I will remedy that now.

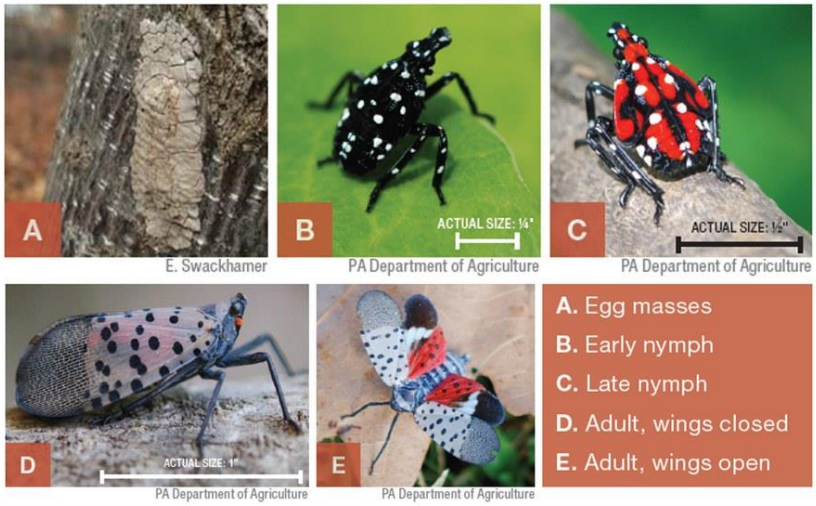
Charles to Camilla: *What is wrong my darling?*
Camilla: *It is your squirrels! They are everywhere! I can’t sleep! I caught one trying on my royal jewelry!*

Queen: Charles, your squirrels are tormenting my beloved Corgis – they constantly taunt them- it must stop, or I will declare war!

Kate Middleton: Of that’s a lovely hat Princess Anne – I love the feather plume- Oh my word- It’s a Squirrel!

Highgrove: Just a quaint country estate

Spotted Lanternfly



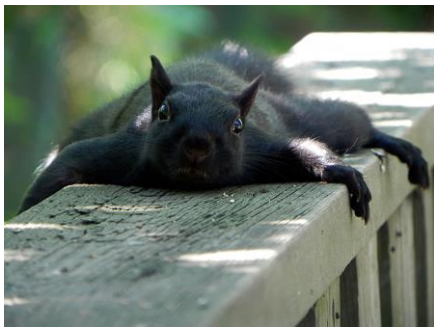
The Spotted Lanternfly (*Lycorma delicatula*) is native to China and was first detected in Pennsylvania in September 2014. So far the pest has not been found in Indiana, but it is only a matter of time.

Spotted lanternfly feeds on a wide range of fruit, ornamental and woody trees, with tree-of-heaven being one of the preferred hosts. Spotted lanternflies are invasive and can be spread long distances by people who move infested material or items containing egg masses. If allowed to spread in the United States, this pest could seriously impact the country's grape, orchard, and logging industries.

Facts About Spotted Lanternflies

1. **They haven't been in the US for long.** They were discovered in Berks County, Pennsylvania in 2014.
2. **They come from Asia.** They are native to China, India, and Vietnam.
3. **They have favorites.** The lanternflies will seek out a favorite tree that they take over and eventually kill. These trees are usually: Willow, Maple, Poplar, Prunus trees, Apple, Pine, Grapevines
4. **They have surprising relatives.** Spotted lanternflies might look like moths, but they're not related to that flying, winged pests. They are planthoppers and related to cicadas and aphids. They act like a combination between a gypsy moth, and a scale insect.
5. **They are safe here.** Spotted lanternflies don't have any natural predators in the United States.
6. **The adults stick around for one season.** You will see adult lanternflies from June until August. They then lay eggs in the fall that don't hatch until May.
7. **Winter is the best time to fend off an infestation.** Because they lay their eggs in the fall, you can spend wintertime finding the mass of eggs and getting rid of them because the eggs hatch in the spring and cause trouble.
8. **Their life cycle is one year long.** The eggs lay dormant from fall until spring. They spend late spring as nymphs until they reach adulthood during the summertime.

9. **Flying isn't a strength.** They aren't great at flying, even though they have two sets of wings. While some can fly better than others, you're more likely to see it hop around than fly. Lanternflies attack the bark and twigs of their favorite ornamentals and suck the sap of the trees much like a scale insect. Plants that ooze or weep and have a fermented odor, and the buildup of sticky fluid (honeydew) on plants and on the ground underneath infested plants. Sooty mold can also appear on the leaves ,trunk, or twigs, and on the ground underneath the plant. Lanternfly has a strong preference for economically important plants including grapevines, maple trees, black walnut, birch, willow, and other trees. The feeding damage significantly stresses the plants which can lead to decreased health and potentially death.



Black Squirrels

Lots of people are curious about black squirrels. These squirrels were abundant in North America before the 16th century before the removal of their dense and shaded forests led to their decline. When the forests were dense and dark, it was easier for them to hide from predators. The forests were thinned out as forests were converted to agricultural use. Then the gray-colored squirrel and/or fox squirrels became dominant.

Nowadays, the black squirrel's population is on the rise and where they are abundant, they tend to drive out the gray squirrels. One reason experts try and explain the rise in numbers of the black squirrel is that they have the best qualities for survival. According to an article published by the Daily Mail, black squirrels are faster and more aggressive than their parent gray and red squirrels. They have inherited the gray squirrels' ability to adapt well in dense population, superior hunting ability, as well as their immunity to certain diseases.

The areas with the largest population of these critters are Ohio and Ontario, Canada, but they are spread throughout the Midwest with a large population in Iowa. They were introduced in Kent, Ohio, in 1961 when ten were (legally) imported from Canada by the groundskeeper at Kent State University.

They were also introduced in Battle Creek, Michigan, in the 1930s by one of the Kellogg family (yes, the cereal people). Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, also has a large population of these squirrels. In addition to the Midwest, they have also been spotted in Washington State.

The population of black squirrels in the United Kingdom (England) can be attributed either to escapees from a zoo where they had been sent from America, or descendants of gray squirrels that were sent there in the late 1800s.

Black squirrels black color is just simply a product of genetic mutation between the gray squirrels and fox squirrels. When an eastern gray squirrel interbreeds with fox squirrel, the fox squirrels which has the predominant color of fur gets to pass their genes to grey squirrels; resulting in the change of the fur color to black. It may seem that black squirrels are rare; however, they are fairly common.

There is also a mutant gene that causes a squirrel to be all white, but not an albino (which is really, really rare). Depending on its parents it can be either jet black or a brown black. There are also reports of champagne – colored squirrels.

There are several towns in the US that take special pride in having a large population of black squirrels. In addition, several universities and colleges promote this squirrel as either an unofficial or official mascot. Among these include Haverford, Kent State, Albion, and Fordham University. Princeton University has a Squirrel Spotting Society on campus.

The black squirrel is considered the unofficial mascot of Kent State University..

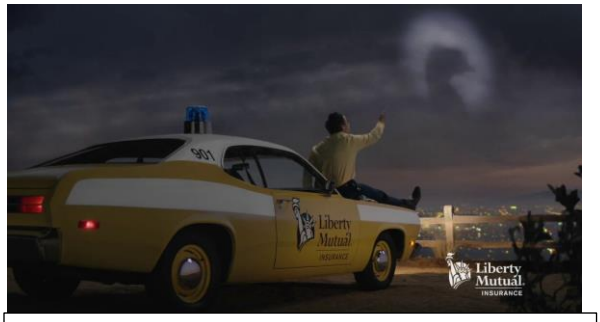
"The Black Squirrel Festival is only the beginning of black squirrel pride in Kent. There is Black Squirrel Radio, a Black Squirrel Triathlon, Black Squirrel Books, Black Squirrel Music, Black Squirrel Gallery, Black Squirrel Brewing, bumper stickers, t-shirts, stuffed animals, and the campus police have even adopted the black squirrel as part of their emblem. All of these are clear indications that black squirrels are a staple both on and off campus."

Some people actually think black squirrels are good luck. At Kent State, it's supposed to mean good luck to rub the squirrel statue in the student center.

Sciurophobia is the term that describes a fear of squirrels as portrayed in the movie "National Lampoons Christmas vacation". The use of the term "Squirrel" can mean a distraction.

LiMu Emu

Using humor and animals is big business for insurance companies. The "LiMu Emu," featured in ads for Liberty Mutual Insurance, has been a big hit for the company, which has gotten requests for emu-themed merchandise and has plans for more emu commercials later this summer. "LiMu Emu is a mix of a real bird and CGI. Live emus were used during the initial shoot on set. The final images of the emu in the commercials are a blend of footage captured from the live emus and a digitally created emu.



In this commercial, the emu is distracted by a squirrel running across the fence and runs off after it.

The schtick goes like this: LiMu Emu and Doug (played by actor David Hoffman) act like goofy cop partners from a 1970s TV show, chasing down unsuspecting people to remind them that they shouldn't pay for coverage they don't need, that insurance shouldn't be one-size fits-all. This is why either an early 1979's Plymouth Duster or a Plymouth Satellite (folks don't agree) are used in the commercials.

Photos

Here is yours truly in the early days of the development of the Display Gardens at the Extension office. I am planting perennials in the area that would one day become the Pastel Pathway / Monet Garden. You can see the beginnings of the Ruth Ehle Prairie Garden that I had planted a year – maybe two- before. I thought if I asked Master Gardener volunteers to develop and maintain the Gardens, then it was important for me to set an example and also work in the gardens. I would often go out in the gardens later in the day to spend time there, and I loved working along with volunteers on scheduled workdays.

An early plant sale at the Display Gardens. Many volunteers helped plan the sales, and over time, we became really good at it. The goal from the start was to provide quality plants at reasonable prices to consumers, draw people to the Extension office and gardens, and educate citizens about plants and gardening practices.

A very early Master Gardener volunteer recognition event – probably some of the first advanced Master Gardeners in the Allen County program. Pictured from left to right. Allene Tew, Glen Voris, Donna Bragg, Joy Snyderman, Sandra Stackhouse, Pat Wittekind, Nancy-Miller-Parker, and Howard Zimmerman. They became the core leadership (along with others not pictured) of the program in Allen County. As their volunteer coordinator, I thought it was important to treat Master Gardeners as a family, so I would memorize their names before each training session. I wanted to know them as people, not just volunteers.

Hoggles' Demented Cat Logic

To My Caregiver: *Can you please pot a good word for me with the insurance companies? I believe Hoggles, the Demented Cat, can be the next star to sell auto insurance nationwide. With my sidekick Ricky we can travel the nation exploiting my natural beefcake physique, my cat demented sense of humor, along with my never-ending quest for quality gourmet cuisine and personal care.*

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