

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

September 2021 Issue

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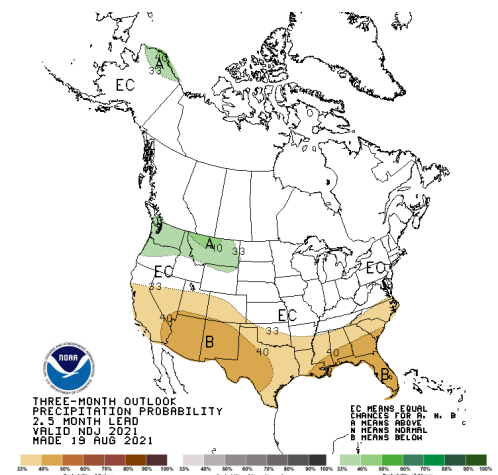
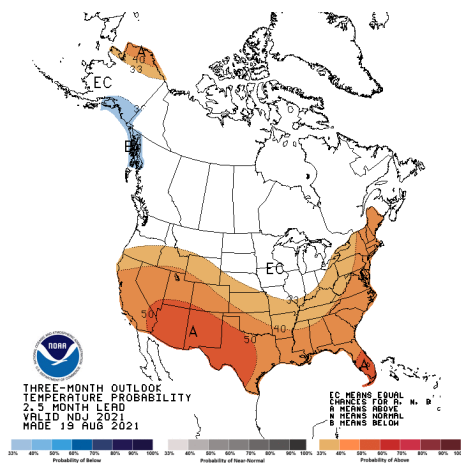
Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture and home issues, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com.

Once Again, Disagreement Over Winter Weather

Long ago, before the pandemic, the biggest disagreements that occurred in local coffee shops, family gatherings, and radio shows was about whether the winter weather would be nasty or tranquil. "Saw a black squirrel dressed in a Christmas sweater gathering nuts the other day" ... "Yep" Sips coffee... "Gonna be a hard winter I reckon"" Yep" ,, Silence... "Then again, I saw a yellow finch dressed in a bikini at the birdbath the other day" "Looks like a mild winter" ... Silence... "Yep" ...

We're in for a chilly winter. At least, that's what is being predicted in this year's "Old Farmer's Almanac."

The newest edition of the 230-year-old series projects the 2021-22 winter as a particularly cold one, dubbing it the "season of shivers." The almanac's editor, Janice Stillman, says it could even be "one of the longest and coldest that we've seen in years." The almanac, which has often stirred up debate about its accuracy, once again suggests this winter will deal an icy combo of above-average snowfall and below-average temperatures in the New England area, as well as parts of the Appalachian region, the Ohio Valley and the northern part of the Deep South. Much of the western U.S should expect more dryness, the almanac projects. Nearly all of California, is pegged for a mild and dry winter, along with most of Arizona and parts of western Washington and Oregon.



On the other hand, the Climate Prediction Center from The National Weather Service predicts the opposite with above average temps forecast for most of the U.S and wetter weather in the Pacific Northwest.

Signs of a Hard Upcoming Winter

Use these signs from nature based on folklore to impress your friends on Facebook. Don't be surprised if the police are called when you are observed rubbing cow's necks to see how thick the hair is – or if pigs ever gather sticks for any reason ---on a farm that is not yours.

- Thicker-than-normal corn husks.
- Woodpeckers sharing a tree.
- The early arrival of the snowy owl.
- The early departure of geese and ducks.
- The early migration of the monarch butterfly.
- Thick hair on the nape of a cow's neck.
- Heavy and numerous fogs during August.
- Raccoons with thick tails and bright bands.
- Mice chewing furiously to get into your home.
- The early arrival of crickets on the hearth.
- Spiders spinning larger-than-usual webs and entering the house in great numbers.
- Pigs gathering sticks.
- Ants marching in a line rather than meandering.
- Early seclusion of bees within the hive.
- Unusual abundance of acorns.
- Muskrats burrowing holes high on the riverbank.
- "See how high the hornet's nest, 'twill tell how high the snow will rest."
- Squirrels gathering nuts early to fortify against a hard winter.
- Frequent halos or rings around the sun or moon forecasts numerous snowfalls.
- According to folklore, if the Woolly bear caterpillar's orange band is narrow, the winter will be snowy; conversely, a wide orange band means a mild winter. Fuzzier-than-normal woolly bear caterpillars are said to mean that winter will be very cold.
- If the first week in August is unusually warm, the coming winter will be snowy and long.
- If a cold August follows a hot July, it foretells a winter hard and dry. (Yes, the rhyme is part of the saying.)
- Beaver lodges have more logs, and the north side of a beaver dam is more covered with sticks.
- A tree will produce more pinecones before a severe winter to ensure some of the seeds will make it through.



A persimmon's seeds are thought to foretell the type of winter expected. Carefully cut the seeds open lengthwise.

A spoon-shaped pattern is said to represent a shovel for all the heavy wet snow to come. A knife pattern signals a cold, icy winter with cutting winds. If a fork is visible, it means that a generally mild winter with only light powdery snow can be expected.



Japanese Barberry and Deer Ticks

Recent studies reported by Cornell University have documented a relationship between Japanese barberry and deer ticks. Since barberry is a low, dense shrub, it creates a microclimate habitat favored by ticks, buffering extreme temperature and humidity fluctuations in comparison to relatively taller and less dense native vegetation. Animals, including the primary reservoir of Lyme, the white-footed mouse, also find refuge under or around barberry, creating a higher density of Lyme-infected ticks. Additionally, the low stature of barberry provides abundant opportunities for ticks to come in contact with humans or other animals.

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) is an over-planted invasive, non-native woody plant that was introduced in the United States as an ornamental plant. However, like many invasive species, it escaped from managed care and is now naturalized in some areas. This plant can dominate deep in the woods and along woodland edges. This crowds out native plants and disrupts these ecosystems. Red fruit develops and can persist into winter. Birds and other animals feed on the fruit and then deposit seeds as they move.

Annoying Tree Identification Tips and Dry Humor

Harrison Flint – my instructor of tree identification at Purdue University - once remarked with a deadpan face to his students that you could always tell a dogwood tree by its bark. He was from New England...hence the dry humor.

One **can** identify trees just by their bark. Take the tree to the right, for instance. I know it is a red oak by observing the wide silver-white vertical strips on the bark of the tree. This characteristic of the bark only becomes more pronounced as the tree becomes older, so one can point out the tree from a fair distance. If you are with a group of hikers for instance – you can impress them with your superior knowledge – or convince them never to hike ever again with an annoying tree hugger.



Let Your Roses Rest

There are many types of roses – hybrid teas, grandifloras, floribundas, hedge roses, shrub roses, ramblers - climbers, etc. Many roses take extra care when planting or maintaining them. One thing is always the same – roses need rest before years end. Don't fertilize or prune roses in late summer in our area. If you do, you can encourage new growth that is much more susceptible to winter damage. Many folks want to mess about with "hardy" shrub roses such as "Nearly Wild" or "Knockout" in late summer and autumn. My advice is to simply leave them alone until next spring. Sometimes there can be winter damage to these plants, but freezing weather rarely does any permanent harm. Cut back any dead wood in the spring, apply a slow-release fertilizer, and walk away.

It's a much different story for what I call the "fancy" roses like hybrid teas, floribundas, and grandifloras. They need winter protection, or they will die in harsh winters. However, one still should wait until early winter, before temperatures dip below 15 or 20 degrees before using rose cones, or other protective measures.

Fall Armyworms

Compiled from Ohio State University

Tiny troops are marching — and munching — through lawns across the country, leaving grass and plants dead in their wake.

Experts say a particularly widespread and intense outbreak of armyworms is overtaking fields and lawns, leaving masses of Styrofoam ball-like eggs stuck to patio furniture and the sides of houses. But when they hatch, the pests can turn a lush green lawn or farm field into a brown, barren wasteland seemingly overnight. OMG! We are doomed!

Ohio State University Extension County offices have reported the highest number of armyworms in decades.



Fall armyworms are semi-tropical species that are known for destroying or damaging turfgrass and crops.

The fall armyworm will travel via the jet stream and other weather patterns during their moth stage.

Because of the cooler air in the upper layers of the atmosphere, these moths will go dormant while traveling before reaching the warmer surface where they will continue their life cycle. The caterpillar-like critter will then feed on crops or any turf in its sight.

Armyworm caterpillars grow up to two inches long and can be green, brown or black in color. They can be identified by an inverted white "y" on their head capsules.

Armyworms can feed on numerous crops, including grass pastures and lawns. They can defoliate everything in their path, moving through just like an army on the move. Some folks report sidewalks and roads covered by the invading caterpillars. The caterpillars are so voracious that sometimes the larger armyworms eat smaller armyworm caterpillars if the food source runs out.

The good news is that frosts and freezes will ultimately kill them off.

It is difficult to predict if or where armyworms will cause severe damage to fields and lawns in our immediate area. There have been sporadic reports of armyworm damage in northern Indiana.

"There is also a lot of luck involved in whether you will be 'hit' or not by these caterpillars," remarked David Shetlar, Ohio State University Extension Specialist. Out of 50 to 60 properties in his Ohio neighborhood, he noticed about five lawns that had some armyworm activity.

"Homeowners and lawn maintenance professionals just have to keep on the alert for signs of an infestation, like a sudden thinning and browning of the turf and/or visible egg sacs," he said. One can try dumping a jug of soapy water (one tablespoon of dish soap per gallon) onto the eaten grass. This will force feeding armyworms to the surface where they can be seen. If you see many birds feeding in your yard, they may have found a significant infestation of armyworms.

Quick action is needed once activity is detected because the caterpillars quickly eat the turf canopy. That results in the turfgrass plant crowns being exposed and the crowns can "cook" in the direct sun.

Shetlar recommends lightly irrigating during the day to cool down the canopy until new leaves emerge and shade the plant crowns. Cooler temperatures will help the damaged turfgrass plants survive. Fertilizer

applications can also help turf recover. Insecticide sprays can also be used to control fall armyworms. These recommendations vary widely depending on different sources of information, but the following link provides in my opinion, the best organic and conventional options for control. [Controlling Fall Armyworms on Lawns and Turf - Alabama Cooperative Extension System \(aces.edu\)](http://aces.edu).

If you do hire a pest control service to control an infestation, make sure they are licensed and bonded. There have been a few cases of price gouging in certain areas. Reports of damage to lawns has been sporadic. Alfalfa seems to be their favorite this season.

Also keep in mind that mature armyworms are much more difficult to control, even using pesticides. Experts are also concerned about multiple generations of armyworms doing damage if warm weather continues well into the autumn season.



Monk Parrots Some material compiled from Cornell University

Several Home Horticulture subscribers have reported seeing colorful parrots in their back yards this summer. These parrots are probably Monk (or sometimes called Quaker) parrots. Quaker parrot is called ‘Monk Parakeet’ in the United States. It is believed that the word ‘monk’ is inspired by the monk’s hood. The parrot’s green feathers on the head part strikes a similarity with the monk’s hood. Some folks call the parrots Quaker parrots because they appear to have a white apron on, similar to the ones worn by the religious sect of the same name. If one meets a feral parrot, just offer it some wine. If the parrot drinks all the wine and then offers to make more from the grapes in your backyard – it is probably a monk parrot.

Monk Parakeets are an interesting, hardy bird from South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay) noted for its intelligence, sociability, creative approach to nest-building, and general resourcefulness. They were first detected in the wild in New York City in the late 1960s, and continue to be seen around Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and occasionally in Manhattan. In the 1950s and 60s, tens of thousands of monk parakeets were imported from South America as pets. Inevitably, many of them escaped or were released. The original parrots in New York City are thought to be escapees from JFK Airport in the 1960s. Another theory is that Hurricane Betsy destroyed a pet store, allowing them all to escape,

Now these feral parrots can be found all over the U.S., especially in urban areas. Chicago has a Monk parrot population centered near the University of Chicago campus. New Orleans also has a large population of Monk parrots.

Monk Parakeets are capable of very precise work. Their small zygodactyl feet (2 toes front, 2 toes rear) lets them grip objects, cut them precisely, and move them into place. Monk parrot is the only kind of parrot that can build free-standing nests almost anywhere. Several years ago, a storm blew down a Monk Parakeet nest from a high tree. The nest was completely intact where it had fallen, and no birds had been injured. It was as if a giant Brillo pad had landed. Hurricane Sandy, which devastated New York in 2012, had no effect on the parrots, nor did a tornado which blew through Bay Ridge in 2007.

In the wild, they build on cliff faces, but in the urban landscape they often choose electrical poles, which becomes a big problem for everyone. The nests are very heavy and between the weight and overheating they cause, there's a very real danger of fire and blown transformers. As a result, most cities will have the nests removed before they're far along. Their nests are built to last. These parrots work very hard — from sunup to sunset if the need calls, building structures meant to be enduring. Nest-building and maintenance appears to be a family activity and young birds are encouraged to join in the construction tasks as early as possible. "Starter nests" large enough for one pair can be built in as little as two weeks. Larger nests represent years and years of hard work.



The insulation these nests provide may be one reason why Monk Parakeets are able to survive cold winters. A single nest structure typically contains up to 20 nest chambers, and in extreme cases can house more than 200 nests. Monk parrots eat grass, leaf buds, nuts (they seem to have a particular yen for horse chestnuts and acorns), and occasionally, food left behind by humans. They can be observed eating leftover pizza when given the opportunity.

Monk parrots have a distinctive sound that takes some getting used to. Detractors have called them "the most raucous of birds" whose calls are akin to "a big fan blade badly needing oil." Others find their Stockhausen-like chatter oddly musical. When alarmed (say, by the sudden appearance of a hawk), whichever parrot happens to spot the threat will issue a strong, five or six "note" cry, which, if spelled phonetically, equals "Ack-ack-ack-ack-ack!" This cry, travelling at the speed of sound, instantly alerts the other parrots in the flock that an emergency condition exists. Monk Parakeets kept in captivity can learn to mimic human speech. The parrots primarily want to be left alone to enjoy a private "sphere of anarchy" carved into the stone urban jungle. Once the parrots locate a neighborhood that meets their needs, they'll hang around and make the best of it. The birds' general attitude seems to be "if we're causing a nuisance get over it."

Maybe they like internet access and a wide variety of take-out food options. They are sometimes visitors to backyard feeders in urban areas. Monk parakeets aren't the only parrot species thriving in the U.S. as a result of the pet trade. A recent study found that there were 56 different parrot species spotted in the wild in 43 states. Many of these species are perfectly happy living here and they've established populations. Wild parrots are here to stay.

Roadside Yellow

In recent weeks, a low growing plant with yellow flowers has popped up along roadsides and waste areas. Birdsfoot trefoil was introduced to the United States from Europe for livestock forage and erosion control. It grows well in the Midwest especially in northern states like Minnesota and Wisconsin and is considered very invasive there. It is most problematic in prairies and disturbed open areas, such as roadsides, where it forms dense mats that shade and chokes out native vegetation. In northern Indiana, this plant has not spread rampantly as in other states, even though it is listed as invasive. So don't dig it up and plant it in your backyard.



Cowabunga – Stuck in a Tree

Workers in Louisiana rescued a cow that got stuck in a tree after Hurricane Ida made landfall.

The rescue workers found the cow stuck in Florissant, Louisiana, located east of New Orleans.

Reporters and other social media users shared their disbelief at the situation that was strange for humans and animals alike.

When asked how it became stuck in the tree the cow replied “I thought I was a cat”



Meanwhile In Great Briton

When asked how became stuck in this large tree, this cow in Great Britain remarked “I was chasing a squirrel”.

Friendly Sumacs — Some material from the University of Guelph

Staghorn Sumac and its relative Smooth Sumac are often observed along roads and open undisturbed areas. These sumacs are in the cashew family and related to poison sumac. Poison sumac is similar in appearance (the leaves) but produces clusters of white berries instead of red berries and is found in wet swampy areas.

Staghorn and Smooth sumac produce clusters of decorative red fruit and are found in dry sunny areas. They are one of the first plants to turn a brilliant scarlet in late summer and early fall. The bark, leaves and fruit are all rich with tannin and thus used to tan hides. The leaves and fruit were boiled down to make ink and dried leaves were used for smoking. The sap was also used as a treatment for warts. One can find sumac “lemonade” recipes made by native Americans and early settlers online.



Sumac near the Pufferbelly Trail



It is important to note that the fruits contain tannic acid and should not be boiled for excessive periods of time. Sumac thickets provide shelter and food for many birds and mammals such as deer, moose, rabbits, grouse and pheasants.

Fruits of the Staghorn Sumac (left) are 3-5 mm across and red and juicy when mature. They are covered with glandular reddish hairs and are located in large cone shaped clusters at the tips of the twigs. They also persist through most of winter. Photo by Chris Earley.

My Fairy Garden – Who Tipped the Cows?

Recently, mischief has occurred in my backyard Fairy Garden. Someone – or something - having a bit of fun – tipped over the cows hanging out near my mushroom house. The fairies naturally are very upset and vow revenge on the perpetrators. It may get ugly.....



Zinnias in my Garden

I have grown all sorts of flowers over the years. At the Purdue Horticulture Gardens I designed and maintained areas where we trialed different flower varieties – comparing old standards with new introductions. The zinnias I grew in my backyard gardens this year are the finest zinnias I have ever grown. That is saying a lot, since I trialed zinnias like Oklahoma Mix, State Fair, Border Beauty, and many other varieties touted for flower longevity and powdery mildew resistance. Many were disappointing.

I seeded the mix obtained from High Country Gardens in May, and the flowers began blooming in June. The plants are still mildew free, and the blooms are almost as fresh and colorful as they were months ago.

The only description of the High Country mix was that “the flowers were long lasting” and the plants were tall. Maybe it was just a good year for zinnia, though I have seen other zinnias planted elsewhere that didn’t look as good. Who knows? It cost me about \$13.00 for a ¼ pound of seed - which is a good quantity of seed. Butterflies and hummingbirds absolutely loved these zinnias. I was surprised that finches also loved to eat the flowers and sepals of these plants. My two raised beds were a blaze of color all season.

I moved the areas where I planted my **Mexican Sunflowers** this year. This area was roomier, and the soil was amended with an organic garden soil that also contained worm castings. The flowers almost reached about 15 feet in height. Last year, many plants had leaves that curled over times – almost as if the plants had a virus. No leaf curling this season. Again, hummers and butterflies loved these plants. Recently I counted approximately 10 Monarchs on the flowers at one time – feeding on the pollen in a frenzy along with my two hummingbirds.



I remember first tending **Sweet Autumn Clematis** at Purdue long ago. It is difficult to find a plant that provides such a dramatic impact so late in the season, and the flowers are also intensely fragrant. One can cut back the plant literally to ground level every year, and it just grows right back with little to no care. Nowadays, some gardeners report it can spread invasively in a landscape. My plant has not done so – but there is no bare soil for the seeds to take hold.

Three-Step Turf Care



I recently saw a television news report where the groundskeeper at Parkview Field discussed maintenance of the turf there. Maintaining a high-quality athletic field can be a real challenge because of the constant wear and tear, and the need to provide a smooth, quality surface for the players.

His fertilizer regime was right out of the playbook. They fertilize the field three times a year – once in the spring (I recommend slow-release fertilizer), once in early fall, and a final application in late fall. As he explained, the turf uses the late fertilizer application to produce a strong root system that makes a healthier grass that greens up earlier the following year. Athletic field

managers also oversee fields a lot based on wear, but they also core aerate at least once or more a year to reduce soil compaction. Homeowners can also core aerate their lawns at the second (early fall) step.

Most homeowner lawns don't need a 12-step program to do well. In fact, over-fertilized and over-watered lawns sometimes have more issues than the three – step program. It is important for lawns to be healthy. The three-step program provides minimal inputs for a decent lawn – and that is what many folks want nowadays.

A Cynical Look at Spotted Lanternfly

Compiled from Penn State and APHIS



Spotted lanternfly is an invasive plant hopper that is native to China and likely arrived in North America hidden on goods imported from Asia. Juvenile spotted lanternflies, known as nymphs, and adults prefer to feed on a wide range of crops and plants, including grapes, apples, hops, walnuts and hardwood trees. The insects suck sap from stems and branches which can weaken and damage the plant. This feeding also leaves behind a sticky, sugary residue called honeydew that attracts other insects and promotes the growth of sooty mold.

Spotted lanternfly is a hitchhiking pest. It lays eggs on almost any surface, including vehicles, trailers, outdoor equipment, and patio furniture, and can be spread long distances when people move infested material. If allowed to spread in the United States, it could impact the country's fruit, ornamental, and forest industries. Early detection is critical to prevent economic and ecological losses. The public has played a key role in detecting spotted lanternfly and the success of stopping its spread depends on help from the public to look for and report signs of the pest.



This pest has now been found in southern Indiana. Folks from the Indiana Dept. Of Natural Resources are spraying the area in an effort “to eliminate the pest and prevent further spread.”

I say “Poppycock” This is one of many invasive and damaging insects that has entered the country via shipping containers. The bottom line is there are few inspectors to prevent the introduction of invasive insects to this country.

Efforts to “contain” or “eliminate” other invasive insects like Gypsy Moth, Japanese Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, Murder Hornets, invasive worm species, or weeds such as Canada Thistle have failed. My cynical mind tells me that spotted lanternfly is already in other areas of the state. Based on past efforts, IDNR will spray, set traps or rely on the public to tell them where the pest already is, and then give up after a few years when efforts to stop the spread fails.

This pest is particularly nasty- think of a cross between a leafhopper, a scale insect, and an aphid which can travel faster over longer distances and gather in huge numbers to attack and kill plants. Of particular concern are vineyards because this pest loves grape vines. For now, keep an eye out next year for this pest, then call the IDNR to report the end of the gardening world as we know it.

Invasives on The Roadways



I will continue my rant by reporting two species that are taking over roads everywhere.

The first is called in Latin - *Loudest muffleritist* - which is either a very large truck with one or two huge mufflers poking out the end or top of the cab as the picture shows, or some sort of



small to mid-sized car of various species with a muffler sticking out the back that is 10 times too large for the vehicle. One can see and hear these vehicles

at all hours – revving their engines and taking off in a cloud of noise and dirty exhaust. Many come adorned with LED lights, and loud music of all types with a bass that can shatter windows at 30 yards. Sometimes I wake at 3:00 AM to hear them out somewhere - revving their engines to hear the intense muffler noise echoing in the lonely night. Long ago it was against the law to have a muffler that was too loud - “twinked” - or in disrepair.



The other creature infesting our roadways is *Cyclilus buzzerinus* ‘Ignore any road sign’ – which includes a motorbike ridden usually by a teenager speeding at 80 mph in a 40-mph zone – weaving in and out of traffic in reckless abandon – putting their and others lives in danger. They sound like a buzzing bee on steroids, especially at 3:00 AM. Both species need to be eliminated from our roadways. Perhaps spotted lanternflies can be trained to attack and destroy these noxious invaders.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: I like many, was saddened by all the destruction from the hurricanes so far this year. So, I hope you don’t mind that I called my BFF cow Bessy during the hurricane and told her to climb a tree to avoid drowning. Being a cat, I know it is unusual to have cow friends, but I do.....

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Ricky Kemery will not knowingly discriminate in any way based on race, gender etc....