

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

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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.

Weather and Plants:

The Climate Prediction Center predicts a continuation of La Nina conditions into late 2022. This means above average temperatures for northern Indiana with an equal chance of above average or below average precipitation which means: It might rain a lot, or not much at all.

Dry conditions are expected to continue in the west and extend to the deep south – thus increasing wildfire chances for most of the U.S.



Red Volunteer Daylily

I will say for the most part – this year has been a wonderful year for planting – which is good since I have planted extensively (with help) this year.

Many plants are doing well. The Oso Easy shrub roses planted earlier are doing extremely well – and already producing vibrant flowers.

Daylily fans purchased from Oakes Daylilies are also doing very well and some have already produced flowers this season. I am particularly fond of Red Volunteer, and Wayside Americana – both with beautiful red flowers.

Chicago Star and Hyperion are two relatively inexpensive yellow daylilies.

Perennial Massing

I have been converting my backyard garden to a low-maintenance sustainable garden over the past two years. To accomplish this, I have converted many landscape areas by mass-planting sturdy perennials such as Dwarf Catmint, Day lilies, Black-Eyed Susan, and Prairie Bee-balm. Mass planting means just using one species of perennial in distinct areas that were once more of a hodgepodge of different



Day Lilies Mass Planting

flowers. Mass planting doesn't mean I can't use different colors

or heights of the same species. For example, I planted taller orange day lilies in front of a taller yew hedge. In front of the orange day lilies, I planted red, shorter orange, and bi color red and yellow daylilies – each in distinct areas. I planted the daylilies closer together – with two feet of space between the tall varieties, and a foot and a half apart for the shorter varieties. Very little if any weeding was needed in the second year of the planting.



Mass Planted Catmint

Gardening in the U.K

It is interesting to visit other countries and see different cultures, gardens, food, and nature. Here are a few photos from a visit to the U.K in 2007.



In the U.K. anything that is green in the landscape is called a "garden" . Most regular folks have small plots, and so the garden tends to be very small, and packed with plants. If you are lucky there is a bit of turf



I mentioned the Brits value faries and some landscapes incorporate fairy structures in the garden. Many spaces are constructed in concrete or stone areas with no surrounding turf.



A typical front garden – Hydrangeas of all types are common. Flowers on one shrub vary from blue to red because the ph. of the soil varies even in the same location.



Photo from the lake district of England. There are not huge areas of forest since many trees were cut to make masts and ships. Now development is very limited, and trees are planted in reforestation areas.



Our hosts, trip planners and drivers Michael and Annette who lived in Blackpool – a Beatles hangout. We are on a ferry that crosses the Irish sea from England to Ireland.



Me hugging a eucalyptus tree at Kew gardens. The Gulf Stream moderates the climate so even plants from sub-tropical regions can be grown.



The main conservatory at Kew Gardens in London – A fantastic place.

Rose- of – Sharon

Rose - of – Sharon shrubs are flowering in my backyard at the beginning of August. This shrub is native to India and China. It is hardy to Zones 5 – 8. The scientific name *Hibiscus syriacus*, suggests that the plant came from Syria, but that is not the case. Rose – of Sharon is the national flower of South Korea. Its Korean name, mugunghwa, means immortality

Its flowers resemble hollyhock flowers. This shrub is popular because it does flower later in the season here in northern Indiana.





Rose-of-Sharon is a bit unusual in that it can be a small – to – mid-sized shrub or a larger tree depending on how it is pruned. If one forgets about pruning, then the shrub develops more woody growth and quickly becomes a small tree. It is better to prune back the shrub each or every other spring to about 2-3 feet above ground level. Rose - of-Sharon produces flowers only on new growth produced each season, so cutting back the shrub will produce more visible and numerous flowers on the new growth – rather on just the top of a larger tree.

The plant also tolerates browsing by deer, is drought tolerant, grows fine in clay soil, and can be grown near Black Walnut trees. It is attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Rose – of –

Sharon is very tolerant of summer heat, humidity, and urban conditions.

In my experience, the plant can be susceptible to root and crown rot and decay if mulch or soil is piled up around the base. Japanese beetles in some areas can be an issue, but I have not noticed this in my backyard.

I have noticed in certain years delayed or reduced flowering – especially after cool springs. Sometimes flower buds appear but never open. This remains a mystery with garden experts who postulate all sorts of reasons why this happens.

There are diseases such as botrytis blight and insects such as thrips that can adversely affect flowering. Sometimes drought conditions can affect flowering, so try to keep the soil evenly moist. In my opinion, based on my own observations, the shrub appears to run out of energy. The flower buds are produced, but there are not enough resources available to allow the flowers to open in certain years. Fertilize the plant with compost, rotted manure, or a conventional fertilizer with a higher second number (the percentage of phosphorous) on the bag. Cut back the shrub if it has become overgrown. Even though the flowers might not be produced, usually the shrub is just fine and will produce flowers the following season.

Rose- of - Sharon can produce seedlings especially on bare soil and spread in a landscape and is listed as invasive in certain states. In my experience, the young seedlings can be easily removed so spread can be easily controlled – if one pays attention.

Late Summer Doldrums



Fall is absolutely my favorite season of the year. The days are cooler, and I love the color of leaves before they “fall” to the ground. In the long ago “olden” days when I was young, fall was when I went back to school, which always began after Labor Day. This was also when all my summer friends returned to their hometowns after leaving their summer cottages. Everything became so quiet. I would roam the woodlands and fields enjoying the stillness and exploring the countryside near our home on Hamilton Lake.

Fall was and still is a time when I personally become very melancholy. Maybe it is because it is the transition between summer and winter – a season I have never enjoyed. Maybe the melancholy persists because I miss growing up on the lake – fly fishing, swimming, hunting for frogs and turtles, riding my bike all the way around the lake – playing sandlot baseball, shuffleboard, golf, hide and seek, red light green light. I really miss kayaking in the fall. Sigh....Enough doldrums...

In my backyard garden, things begin to wind down. There are not many plants that flower in the fall. I have some plants – the previously mentioned Rose - of - Sharon. Some daylilies will rebloom later in the season. Some native prairie perennials such as Blazing star, prairie dock, and tall coreopsis flower late in the season. Native prairie grasses are at their best in the fall. There is nothing like the stillness of a native prairie with masses of butterflies feeding on the nectar of goldenrod in autumn. I used to collect prairie seed in autumn as a student and later when I might take a group of Master Gardeners to tour prairies and collect seed.

Last year I planted a Golden Rain Tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) in my front yard. This non-native tree produces unusual clusters of yellow flowers in August in our area. There are spectacular specimens of this tree planted at the Indiana University campus in Bloomington.



F *Golden Rain Tree*



Sweet Autumn Clematis

I also have a Sweet Autumn Clematis planted on a fence in my backyard. This vine produces

intensely fragrant small white flowers in late summer. It is also much tougher than its fancy flowering clematis cousins.

Both plants can spread - especially if they are planted near bare soil – so I plant in areas surrounded by turf where they are extremely unlikely to spread.

Many panicle hydrangeas, oakleaf hydrangeas, and Annabelle type hydrangeas have flowers or seed pods that persist into early fall. My “Limelight” panicle hydrangea begins flowering in early June, and still has flowers which have turned from chartreuse to red/pink this year.

I have in the past planted fall veggies such as carrots, lettuce, and spinach to add interest and food to the garden. Even tomatoes and peppers planted earlier in the season can persist into fall. I plan to seed more poppies this late summer because they flourish in cool weather and add bright color to a fall garden. The idea is to produce a sustainable garden with flowering interest from spring into late summer and fall to decrease the fall doldrums then can occur with the most sensitive of gardeners – not that I am pointing fingers at anyone sigh..



Limelight Hydrangea



Farmer's Almanac Winter Forecast

The Farmer's Almanac winter forecast was released earlier than usual this year amid "growing concern over the rising costs of heating oil," and warns that this winter will have people across much of the country "shaking, shivering, and shoveling."

Now, if you're wondering how the Farmers' Almanac can produce long-range forecasts so far in advance, the editors' note that they have accurately published long-range weather forecasts since 1818. The key to those forecasts is a set of astronomical and mathematical rules developed by David Young, the Almanac's first editor. Since then, those rules have been refined and turned into a closely guarded formula.

The Almanac predicts a "hot chocolate warning" for people in eastern and southern states. That's because "a cold December and a very cold January might make readers in the northeast shake and shiver," the Farmers' Almanac notes. The good news is that milder temperatures will arrive in February.

Winter will feel unreasonably cold for readers in the Great Lakes region, especially in January," the Almanac explains. In particular, "the north central states are forecast to experience extremely cold temperatures during mid-January; possibly 40 degrees below zero!"

Farther south, into the southern Plains, temperatures will also average colder than normal. The first major storm will pass through the Rockies and across the Plains during the first week of January. "During this time, we see good potential for heavy snow that may reach as far south as Texas and Oklahoma, followed by a sweep of bitterly cold air," the Almanac notes.

Then, between January 16 and 23, "we'll raise another red flag for bouts of heavy rain and snow across the eastern two-thirds of the country followed by what might be one of the coldest outbreaks of arctic air we have seen in several years," according to the Almanac. That's when the Almanac predicts temperatures of 40 degrees below zero will arrive in the north central States, requiring extra flannels and hot chocolate.



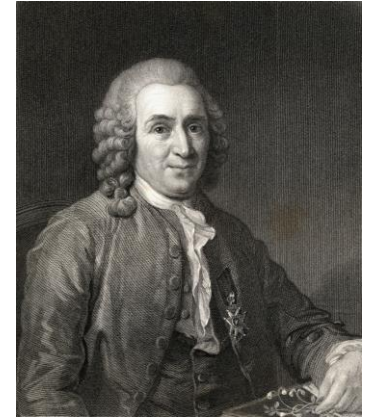
Honestly, the almanac predicts colder nastier weather every year since I have paid attention to their forecasts. One generally can assume they have as much ambiguity and accuracy as predicting when the ground hog will predict an early spring (almost never) or whether the ground hog will ride with Bill Murray over a cliff in a movie (very rarely).



Too cold.

Realistic Plant Names

Linnaeus – the Father of Plant classification – was a Swedish botanist who came up with the modern day plant classification we still use today. Before Linnaeus came up with his system in the 1700's, plants just had common names that might be different based on different regions of the world. To reduce the confusion Linnaeus used Latin – a dead language that would never change - to describe plants and group them based on common characterizes – mainly flower structure. This way, anyone the world would know *Acer rubrum* is Red Maple – regardless of language or other common names that might be used.



It was brilliant – and for developing this system – Carl Von Linne was named a saint with the name Linnaeus at the ripe age of 23. Impressive.....

Taxonomy is the classification of organisms. Plant and animal taxonomy is arranged in a hierarchy, from the broadest level of phylum down to the most specific, species: Phylum or Division - Class - Order - Family – Genus – Species With plants, genus, and species are used moat often.

A genus is a group of closely related species. A species is a group of individuals that do not successfully interbreed with individuals of other groups.

A scientific name has two (or sometimes more) parts. The first part is the genus name, and the second part is the species. For example, *Potamogeton floridanus* is the scientific name for a species of pondweed from Florida. *Potamogeton* is the genus and *floridanus* is the species. *Potamogeton illinoensis* is a different species of pondweed from Illinois. By using scientific names containing both genus and species, people can be very sure of the species they are referring to. Naming may become even more complex by further classifications such as subspecies, hybrids, varieties, and cultivars. Scientific names are usually based on Latin or Greek words and are written in italics or underlined.

Almost everyone pronounces the Latin and Greek scientific name differently. Professional botanists are usually considered the experts. These experts by the way will fuss about the correct enunciation and use of any scientific name. Sometimes experts change the Latin names – makes that have been used for decades-hundreds of years. It creates even more confusion. Plant classification experts must argue a lot- Drama—word...



Red Sunset Maple

A cultivar is the last destination of grouping plants – it is the most specific way of naming a species. Cultivars are usually described in classification by using the letters cv after the species or more often by using an apostrophe before and after the name. *Acer rubrum* 'Red Sunset' is a very specific red maple tree with orange red fall color and a rounded form developed by Princeton nursery in New Jersey which took cuttings from a tree with the amazing shape and color described previously. One characteristic of cultivars is that are all genetically identical and propagated by methods of asexual propagation – meaning they are not developed from seed. With trees, it is usually by taking softwood or hardwood cuttings from the tree.

I will not mention hybrids, pure lines, ecotypes, ecovars, and varieties in this article. Plant taxonomists are very Type A folks and have names for everything. They argue a lot.....word.....

I believe a **newer system** needs to be developed that is more reality – based when it comes to giving plant names. Here are several examples.

Coreopsis ‘Fizzles Away Completely’

Realistic Description : This coreopsis was supposed to be hardy to zone 5 but disappeared from the garden after one cold winter. Sadness and a loss of hope for any garden success follow.

Houttuynia cordata ‘Big Bully’

Realistic Description: Looking for a decorative groundcover plant guaranteed to completely take over a garden area and then be literally impossible to get rid of unless one excavates the area with a bulldozer? Then this wildly invasive Chameleon plant (still available on the Internet) is just for you.

Echinacea ‘Feel the Weirdness’

Realistic Description: This Purple Coneflower is not purple at all, in fact peach colored with a fuzzy strangeness located where the central disc of the flower used to be. The ray flowers look like a brightly colored mutant parrot.

Petunia ‘Feed me Feed me’

Realistic Description: This modern petunia of complex origin from the Amazon jungles needs fed constantly with copious amounts of fertilizer – otherwise it throws a tantrum, becomes scraggly and does not flower. Picture a hungry two-year old.

Broccoli ‘I don’t Know who I am’

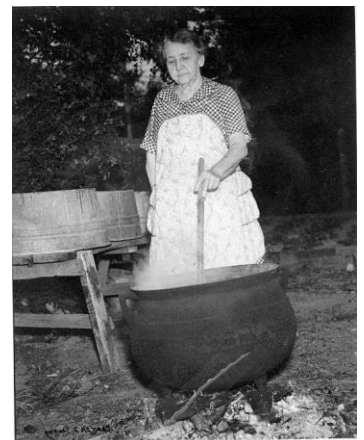
Realistic Description: I am a broccoli at the big box store. My tag reads “Broccoli”. That is all folks. I could be a great flavorful broccoli, or a weak specimen that never produces any floret of merit. Based on my experience, the latter is more probable.

Wood Ashes

Lots of folks ask about spreading wood ashes in a garden. One might have wood ashes from a campfire or a wood fireplace used for heating during the winter months. One needs to dispose of the ashes somewhere, so why not just dump them in the garden?

Early settlers took care of the ash disposal issue by mixing water with ashes in a large pot or kettle over a fire to make soap. There were no neighborhood drugstores around every tree in the woods or mega groceries located on the outskirts of every town (usually with about 100 people max). No, the pioneers made soap themselves in their version of “tiny homes” made from hand hewn logs and mud to fill in the cracks.

Anyway, the pioneers used their leftover ashes from soap making in their gardens and noticed the crops grew much better than crops grown sans ashes. As it turned out, scientists discovered that wood ashes contain good



stuff for plants, calcium, potassium, and a few other micronutrients. The settlers named the ashes “potash” because the ashes containing potassium were used to create soap in a large “pot”. Clever folks....

The potash was very useful in gardens on the east coast (New England especially) because their soils were derived from granite rock- which is acidic, so that the alkaline calcium carbonate also in the ashes did not adversely affect the overall pH of the soil.

It is a different situation here in northern Indiana, where our soils are derived from limestone, a very alkaline material. Adding alkaline wood ashes to soil already alkaline just makes the soil more alkaline. Plants generally prefer soils slightly acidic, so very alkaline soil makes it difficult for most plants to absorb nutrients properly. It is our curse in the Midwest to have alkaline soils. – bites knuckles.

Better to “friend” an individual on Facebook that lives on the east coast and send all your ashes to them. I’m sure they won’t mind – especially if they are an obscure previously unknown relative from 23 and me or Ancestry with common pilgrim parentage.

Cremation Ashes - Speaking of ashes, recently I was contacted by an individual wanting to know if they could spread a loved one’s ashes on a nearby golf course because the deceased person loved golf – and on a garden in their backyard.

There are few existing laws regarding the spread of ashes from cremated loved ones – except for the spread of ashes over large bodies of water. For the most part, it is against the law to spread cremation ashes less than two miles from any sea coast.

Even though it might not be against the law to spread the ashes on a golf course, it is better to obtain permission to spread ashes on any property other than your own. Some cemeteries have strict regulations against spreading cremation ashes or leaving urns with ashes by gravestones.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic To my caregiver

After my death, please cremate me and distribute my ashes in a sealed container tied to a cinder block to be dropped at the site of the Titanic sinking in the north Atlantic Ocean. I wish to be reunited with my favorite Hollywood star and close friend – Leo – who went by the name “Jack” in the movie. Shame on Rose for not making space on the floating door so they both could survive...such selfishness....

Ricky’s Written a Book! Oh Boy! Oh Boy!

Just a heads up that I am in the final stages of completing a new book on sustainable gardens and landscapes with the help of my daughter Jessica, who is a bestselling author of sci-fi – fantasy books. She convinced me that I should compile my material written for newspapers and Home Horticulture – and so for the last month or so – that is what I did. I am not sure when the release date will be, but I will keep you posted. And yes, Hoggles will once again be a star! Info on my famous daughter and her books is here: [Jessica Kemery \(Author of The Paladin's Sin\) \(goodreads.com\)](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/Jessica_Kemery). I love the fact that she now tells her kids “I am too busy now building my publishing empire” .

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