

# 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](mailto:kemeryr7@frontier.com).

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## My Garden and the Freeze/Frost

Its amazing but I lost nary a plant to the most recent bout of freeze/frost weather. I did cover my tomatoes and pepper containers with a sheet. I did take my container annuals indoors. Other tender plants such as zinnias and some veggies interplanted with my massed perennials survived just fine. I think mass planting does help to protect tender plants more effectively – but it is just speculation based on observation on my part.

One tender plant that survived quite nicely was a clump of pineapple sage planted near my Golden Rain tree. One reason I like pineapple sage is that the scarlet flowers are gorgeous and also because it flowers later in the season when other plants are fizzling out.



Pineapple sage is an herbaceous perennial in the mint family grown as an annual in colder regions. It is native to Mexico and Guatemala and grows 3 to 5 feet high and 3 to 4 feet wide. The genus name *Salvia* is derived from the Latin term *salveo*, which means ‘be well’ and refers to the plant's medicinal properties.

Pineapple sage will grow best in full sun in moist, well-drained soil. Although somewhat drought tolerant, leaves will begin to drop with insufficient moisture.

Pineapple sage is a hummingbird favorite, blooming in late summer to early fall when food sources may be less abundant. The edible flowers have a sweet, fruity flavor with a hint of mint and spice and smell like pineapple when crushed

According to the Nerdy farm Wife ([7 Things to Make with Pineapple Sage \(thenerdyfarmwife.com\)](https://www.thenerdyfarmwife.com)) there are many uses for pineapple sage. As always be careful when making homemade concoctions as some folks could be allergic. Also there are several look-alike sages that are not edible. Make sure the leaves smell like pineapple.

### Pineapple Sage Flower Vinegar

This beautiful jewel-toned flower vinegar can be used as:

- **Hair Rinse** – dilute with water before using
- **Salad Dressings & Marinades** – try using in place of balsamic or red wine vinegar
- **Vinegar Bath** – for tired, achy muscles

- **Fruit Dip** – we like 3 tbsp vinegar, 3 tbsp honey, 1 cup plain yogurt (adjust honey and vinegar amounts up or down to taste)
- **Chigger Bites** – vinegar is one of the best remedies I've found for those pesky critters that leave you itching for days

Fill a jar about 1/3 way with fresh pineapple sage flowers. Cover with apple cider vinegar and cap with a plastic lid. (Vinegar will corrode metal lids over time.) Tuck away on a shelf or cabinet, shaking occasionally. The vinegar should start turning color within a week or so. Infuse for about 2 or 3 weeks, then strain.

### **Edible Flower Ice Cubes**

Pineapple sage adds a gorgeous pop of color in floral ice cubes. Here, they're shown with fresh borage and calendula flowers.

Instead of water, another idea is to freeze the cubes with pineapple juice or lemonade.

Drop into drinks to add a pretty color and taste!

### **Flavored Sugar**

Pineapple sage flavored sugar is a subtle sweet treat to add to your tea, or to sprinkle over toast.

To make it, blend some leaves with sugar, just as you would for the pineapple sage sugar. Only use leaves instead of flowers. Air dry overnight, then grind again to a smooth texture. Plan to use this up sooner rather than later, because the pretty green color eventually fades down to a brown green.

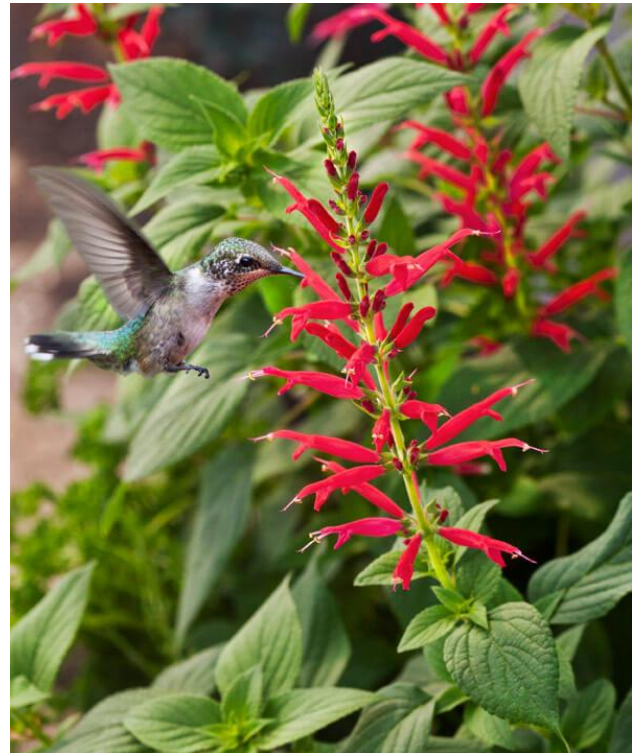
### **Pineapple Sage Tea**

Tea is super easy to make with fresh leaves. It may be helpful to sip on when you're feeling stressed and anxious.

To make, just pick about 1/4 cup of leaves (packed), bring inside, and pour 1 3/4 cups of boiling water over them.

Cover the steeping container with a saucer to keep the aromatic vapors in, and steep for around 20 minutes, or to taste.

Sweeten with honey, if you'd like.



# He Shed / She Shed

I decided that I need a He Shed. I am tired of sitting in a small room with no view of anything but a driveway. I need a break = I need a He Shed.

It used to be a backyard shed was for storage. You open up most sheds, you see some boxes, maybe some lawn equipment. Occasionally a workshop for a woodworker, mechanic, or hobbyist.

While the term “man cave” has been around for decades now, the terms “She Shed” and “He Shed” are fairly recent additions. Rather than transform a basement or garage into their own personal fortress of solitude, many men and women choose to transform a custom backyard shed into their special hideaway.



Perhaps the idea of hobby sheds was introduced by a 2019 State farm commercial. Cheryl is on the phone with her State Farm agent, Zachary, explaining that someone burned down her She Shed. As her husband gazes blankly at the flames he tries to convince his wife that no one burned down the shed -- it was struck by lightning. But no matter how it happened, Cheryl is

just happy that her shed is covered by State Farm and she'll be getting a new, improved shed soon. Victor can hardly contain his enthusiasm.



Whether it's turned into a media and game room, a retreat to relax and hang out, a health club, or a crafting room, in today's fast-paced, always-plugged-in kind of world, more people than ever are finding the need for a quiet escape from everyday life. What better way to escape than right into your own backyard? These custom hobby sheds, personalized to each person's own interests, hobbies, and loves, are the



perfect place to relax and let off steam after a busy day or week.

From "offices" that could double as a pub or tasting room to state-of-the-art media rooms, and from quilting corners to meditation dens, the possibilities for a dude or dudette-only enclave are endless. And couples agree, both men and women benefit from a He or She Shed sanctuary that provides them with a place to de-stress, indulge in their hobbies or generally "do as they please" without upsetting their partner.



Another perk of building a hobby shed in the backyard is that it is a less costly option than adding on to a home.

There are many ways to construct an outdoor hobby shed and costs can vary greatly. Some folks convert existing sheds. One can also convert outdoor storage structures. There are also hobby shed kits that can be assembled in less than a week.

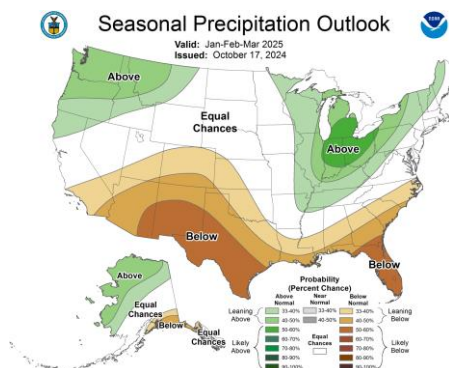
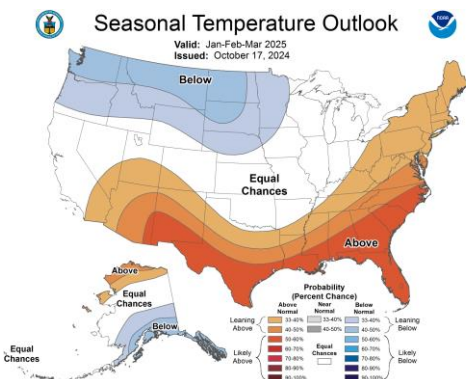
One must also consider the location- a level area that does not collect water. Power to the structure can be costly. What sort of heating or cooling might be needed and any appliances like mini fridges, microwaves, and internet access are all important points to consider. I would always recommend a hardware cloth barrier around the shed to deter critters. Windows and wide doors and security lighting are also important to enjoy the plantings near the shed. Finally handicapped access is something important if you have issues or potential guests might need access. Costs can really escalate depending on your individual needs.



A hobby shed can be a wonderful way to escape the noise and complexity of everyday life and create an area that is a sanctuary away from our crazy world.

## Weather

- The long range forecasts from the climate prediction center still are predicting above average precipitation for the next three months for our area. Do the forecasters know of the severe drought conditions we are experiencing? The forecast is based on an emerging La Niña which is expected to persist through January–March 2025



My water bill last month was over \$300.00, but one cannot ignore perennials and small recently planted trees and shrubs during the drought. If one doesn't water then expect winter damage and potential death of your flowers and ornamentals. That is my doom and gloom outlook.

## 2025 PERENNIAL PLANT OF THE YEAR

*Pycnanthemum muticum* -Clustered mountainmint = Photography Credit: Chicago Botanic Garden



Clustered mountainmint (also known as blunt mountainmint or short-toothed mountainmint) is a tough and adaptable perennial native to meadows and open woodlands across much of the eastern United States west to Texas. It is not a true mint but belongs to the same family and has similarly scented leaves. A must-have for pollinator gardens, heads of tiny white to light pink blooms attract butterflies, wasps, and bees from July to September. The inconspicuous flowers are upstaged by surrounding silver bracts, which give the illusion of frost in summer and persist for months. Clustered mountainmint has no serious disease issues, and its aromatic foliage is unpalatable to deer and rabbits.

Branched, vertical stems grow two to three feet tall and form a dense, weed-suppressing clump. Clustered mountainmint spreads by underground rhizomes and can be aggressive in moist conditions, though it is not invasive to the degree of true mints.

Plant clustered mountainmint in an area where it can freely naturalize and mingle among other plants. Its silver sheen plays well with other flower colors and contrasts wonderfully with dark foliage. Companions include black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia* spp.), bee balms (*Monarda* spp.), blazing stars (*Liatis* spp.), Joe Pye weeds (*Eutrochium* spp.), and native grasses such as little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) and switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*).



### Plant data

#### Hardiness

USDA Zones 4 to 8

#### Light

Full sun to part shade

#### Size

24-36 inches (60-100 cm) tall; spreads widely by rhizomes

#### Origin

Eastern United States, west to Texas

Prefers medium to high moisture, fertile, well-draining soils.

Tolerates clay soils. Less tolerant of drought than most other mountainmints.

### **Maintenance**

Clustered mountainmint can spread aggressively, especially in wet soils. Rhizomes are easy to control by cutting them to the desired size with a spade and pulling the shoots by hand in spring. Seed heads may be left until early spring for winter interest. Tolerates heat and drought once established. No serious pest or disease issues.

**Ricky's Comments** I am familiar with a few mountain mints, but not this one. Anytime I hear the words “can spread aggressively” my guard is up. Having a native plant that fills in an area of partial shade could be beneficial.

## **A Few Proven Winners 2025 Introductions**

Proven Winner introductions fill garden center aisles in prominent displays out front and in the center of the store. The different varieties chosen as Proven Winners generally perform well in landscapes. The name Proven Winners is basically a marketing strategy to convince the general public that they should purchase these superior varieties. I have noticed that these varieties are not cheap and they rarely if ever are discounted = even at the end of a season. If ignored or damaged winners end up on a discount rack one should pick them up quickly. Following are a few interesting annual introductions.

### **Emerald Isle™ *Elephant Ears***



This regal selection of elephant ears forms a tall, multi-stemmed, upright arching clump of massive, bright green, glossy, undulating leaves held on green petioles. Tolerant of both sun and shade, it is magnificent in large containers and landscapes.

### **ColorBlaze® Mini Me™ Chartreuse Coleus**

This wonderful new coleus for sun and shade features golden chartreuse foliage, forming a very well-branched plant that works well in landscapes and containers. Like all ColorBlaze® coleus, it is bred to take the heat and bloom very late in the season, if at all, extending its garden performance into the fall. ColorBlaze Mini Me Chartreuse is a bright blast of color in a small package.



### **Aromagica® Purple *Heliotrope***



If you've been disappointed with heliotrope in the past, it's time to take another look. While others can look tired and sparse by midseason, Aromagica™ Purple heliotrope remains full and covered in large, fragrant, purple blossoms. They attract pollinating bees, butterflies and hummingbirds all summer long, especially with a little deadheading now and then. Expect the flower color to be most intense in high light conditions. This plant's rugose, dark green foliage and fragrant blooms are typically not attractive to deer.

### **Stardiva® Blue fan flower *Scaevola aemula***



Meet the first-ever series of *Scaevola aemula* with star-shaped rather than fan-shaped flowers. Though both types have five petals, those of the new Stardiva® series are arranged in a perfect star formation, lending a larger, fuller appearance to the blossoms. Pollinating bees are quick to find the tiny white bullseye that rims the throat of each violet blue flower. These plants form a compact, densely mounded to semi-trailing mound that is smaller overall than Whirlwind® *Scaevola*. They are extremely durable in sun, heat, humidity, rain, drought and wind.

### **Mojave® Mango purslane *Portulaca oleracea***



Need more plants that can tolerate extreme heat and drought? Try the Mojave® series of *Portulaca*. With large, vividly colored flowers that pollinators adore, they bloom non-stop from spring until frost. Mojave® Mango is a novel variety that shines with large, bright mango blossoms with a narrow scarlet ring around the center that creates a bullseye for pollinating bees and butterflies. Like others in the series, its blossoms are self-cleaning and the plant delivers a stellar garden performance all season.

# A Few Favorite TV or Cable Shows

## A Chefs Life (PBS)

Vivian Howard is the star of the PBS show, "A Chef's Life."

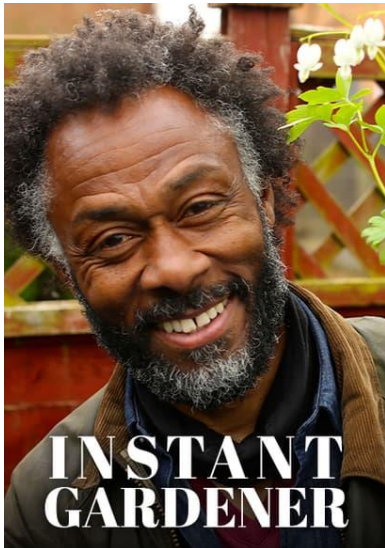


Born in Deep Run, NC, to tobacco and hog farming parents, Vivian Howard learned early on to appreciate the ebb and flow of eating with the seasons. Still, it took 23 years and a start in the advertising business to convince her a career in food was feasible. After college, Vivian moved to New York for work, but found the City's food and restaurant scene far more intriguing. A server position at the Voyage in Greenwich Village made it possible for her to begin trailing under Scott Barton, the restaurant's chef. She later went on to learn from creative, cutting edge chefs Wylie Dufresne and Sam Mason at WD-50 and later, as a member of the opening team at Jean Georges Vongerichten's Spice Market.

In 2005, Vivian, and her now husband Ben Knight decided to return to Vivian's roots to open a farm to fork restaurant in the small town of Kinston, NC. They opened Chef & the Farmer in the summer of 2006 serving local, seasonal, creative cuisine. Over the past four years, Chef Howard has developed strong relationships with local farmers making it possible to source over 70% of the restaurant's foodstuffs from within 60 miles. Chef & the Farmer was beloved by locals and a destination for diners all over the state.

**Rickys Comments:** I really like this show because it is interesting, intriguing, funny, heartfelt, and poignant. The show really provides an in-depth look at how ingredients for the show are grown and used by folks in this small community – from broccoli, tomatoes, collards, beets, potatoes and more. Also the theme song is performed by the famous Avett Brothers – also from North Carolina.

## The Instant Gardener



This is a gardening show from Great Britain that one can access on cable channel TUBI or Britbox. It features gardener Danny Clarke who in one day rescues naughty English gardeners who have let their "gardens" - usually the backyard lot – turn into weedy junk filed disasters. His knowledge of plants is extensive and his garden transformations are extraordinary.



## Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

*To my caregiver: I have written the folks at Proven Winners and have requested I be chosen as the first Proven Wimmers feline – based on my superior intelligence, humor, and breeding. I truly deserve this honor....*

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