

Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

November 2024 Issue

Written and compiled by Ricky D. Kemery, Allen County Extension Educator Retired, phone: 260 - 431- 6893

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.

Austrees



In our area Austrees are commonly seen planted around golf courses as barrier trees and windbreaks- especially near roads to intercept any wayward golf shots that could potentially damage nearby vehicles or people.

Austrees were actually created in New Zealand. The New Zealand Department of Science and Industrial Research created this tree by genetically crossing several types of willows common to that area of the world. Nine clones, all believed to be male, were released over three decades in the latter 20th century and imported into Australia for use as windbreaks.

Australians called this tree "New Zealand hybrid willow" while North Americans know it as its

trademark name Austree. I first became aware of the tree over 20 years ago when only certain growers were given exclusive licenses to sell Austrees as shelter belt and windbreak trees.

The tree is a fast grower that grows to massive heights of 60 feet or more and is touted as a willow with wood that is not as weak and messy as other willows. Its root systems are extensive and can clog nearby sewer lines.

Their branches are so dense the trees can also act as windbreaks even in winter when they have no leaves.

There is no reason to ever plant an Austree in a normal suburban landscape because of its rampant growth and aggressive root system. It would be like planting a silver maple on steroids.

Austree needs a moist site to grow well - some universities in other areas of the U.S. report that Austrees can be short-lived, weak wooded and in dry soils can be susceptible to fungal cankers and branch die-back from very cold winters.

However other sources report that the branches of Austree are very flexible and not brittle like other willows so that there is rarely any branch breaking in high winds or ice storms.



I planted a row of about 5-6 Austrees at the Extension office to screen the garden areas from a new walkway that led from the suspension bridge over Crescent Ave. to the main campus. The trees grew quickly and everything was fine – the trees even survived an ice storm with little damage (the limbs just bent but did not break). Then a severe storm hit the area (I forget the year). The dense branching of the trees caught and trapped the wind and the trees were literally pulled out of the ground by their roots. It is not a good thing when 50 foot trees are pulled out of the ground. The removal costs were huge. Needless to say I did not replant Austrees in that area.

Norway spruce is a good replacement windbreak tree for this area as long as the area is not too wet and there is room for them.

Some developers planted Austrees near subdivisions to serve as windbreaks and privacy screens. The trees provided a cheaper alternative than planting more expensive evergreens such as a Norway or Blue spruce.

Unfortunately the trees were so huge that they were determined to be more of a liability than an asset for the community. If planted on too dry of a site, the trees developed fungal cankers of the trunks and branches and dropped limbs over time. Bummer.

Removal of Austrees can be very expensive, as the stumps of the trees must be ground or treated with herbicide by an arborist to prevent rapid regrowth. If one just cuts down the trees and leaves the stumps, the tree will grow back quickly and in no time at all will be 20 feet in height.

2025 Gardening Trends

Gardeners are adapting to the challenges of a changing world by embracing new approaches to gardening: traditional methods are being updated, along with a fresh perspective on the role of gardens in daily life. Prioritizing the needs of wildlife and implementing sustainable practices that nurture local ecosystems (and ourselves!) are all coming together to create deeply personal and more environmentally friendly gardens that are a true joy to behold. Following are what's hot in gardening for 2025.

Native Plants and Ecovars



From the industry perspective, native plants and the conversation about the utility of native plants continues to be a hot topic. We probably get the most requests from our customers for literature, messaging, and information on this topic.” — Andrew Jager, Marketing Manager for Walters Gardens

To meet this demand, breeders and growers are offering a wider variety of natives, including 'nativars,' which are cultivated native plants specifically designed to thrive and fit into residential gardens. While native plants are typically defined as growing in nature without human intervention, 'nativars' are created by selecting and crossing native plant seedlings to produce desired traits such as compact size or brighter colored flowers. In many cases, they provide food and habitat for pollinators and wildlife, just like their wild counterparts, but with the added benefit of being more adaptable to home gardens—thus attracting more home gardeners to use them.

There are some gardeners who disagree with the concept of Ecovars. I have discussed this issue before as “trends” tend to be adopted by obsessive gardeners eager to shame others who do not use anything but native plants – here before colonists occupied the U.S. I have seen individuals try to install native plants in home

landscapes with disastrous results – the landscape ends up being a weed patch. I prefer using natives when I can - blending useful non native such as day lilies and shrub roses with natives in a mass planted garden to reduce weeding.

The Less Tidy Relaxed Garden

I feel like people are more willing to accept the aesthetics that may be a little less tidy looking. There are still those who are looking for the perfect lawn and not a leaf out of place, but they are fewer and farther in between. Most people have decided that, if there's a lawn, there can be some clover and that's ok. Megan Wade, Founder of Fieldwork Design Group

This less tidy approach really annoys some folks who spend thousands of dollars yearly to have a pristine barren landscape that took pounds of herbicides and conventional fertilizer to create.

Landscapes That Use Less Water

Replacing lawn with low-water plants in drought-prone areas is not a new idea. What is new is that designers and gardeners are moving beyond succulents and rock gardens and recognizing that any garden style can be reinterpreted with a lower-water palette. My clients are excited to learn they can have the flower-filled cottage garden they crave while still using water responsibly.

Look at where we are currently – our area is classified as being in extreme drought. This trend will continue to be an issue as we deal with hotter temperatures and periods of drought.

Fire Resistant Landscapes

“I know this isn't new to the West, but here in the Midwest, I'm beginning to hear more about fire-resistant plants and what makes a good, fire-resistant perennial. Perhaps going hand-in-hand with concerns about fire resistance is an ongoing desire for plants with good heat and drought tolerance.” — Andrew Jager, Walters Gardens

We are beginning to see wildfires in areas of the country where wildfires were not so common. New Jersey, areas of Canada, and other states are becoming more vulnerable to wildfires. Designing a landscape to help protect a home from wildfire damage just makes sense.

Developing Park Strips

This certainly is a growing trend where homeowners want to convert the turfgrass park strip in front of the home into an area with plants that can attract pollinators and add to the beauty of a landscape. One has to be careful in my opinion as there are rules to follow and one can be cited and fined if plants are too tall and the strip is messy. In addition a city can come in anytime and tear an area up if utility work is needed- for example. This year we are planting the park strip in front of our house with low growing plants designed to be in flower most of the season. Individual neighborhoods sometimes have very specific rules limiting or excluding planting of park strips.

Gardening for Mental Health

Given the increasing challenges of gardening (as shown by the above trends!), there's a growing trend to create intimate, quiet spaces within the garden that offer peace and purpose while cultivating mental well-being. Gardens are being designed with relaxation in mind, incorporating spaces for meditation, reading, or intimate areas for gathering with loved ones. These tranquil spaces serve as sanctuaries where gardeners can recharge, blending the therapeutic power of nature with personal well-being. The concept of personal garden sheds to get away from the house fits in this category.

Gardening for Nostalgia

With their informal charm, cottage-style gardens are also resurging, evoking cherished memories while bringing a sense of unbridled joy, peace, and continuity. And while it's always fun to try the latest and greatest plant introduction, gardeners are looking to add plants that remind them of their mother or grandmother's garden often including classics like peonies, bearded iris, and hydrangeas.

Education

With the rise of virtual technology and online education, gardeners can now connect with world-class designers and fellow gardening enthusiasts from anywhere, with the flexibility to learn at their own pace. Still, many are also enjoying a return to in-person events, which offer immersive, hands-on learning and the chance to experience gardens firsthand. Both options provide unique ways to grow and connect, bringing a sense of inspiration and shared passion for gardening.

Both Minimalism and Maximalism have been trends – whether or not one follows either of these trend is based on personal preferences – and both have advantages and disadvantages. Turning outdoor space into distinct entertainment and leisure areas continues to be trending in the gardening world.

The Wonders of Organic Matter



Organic matter is crucial for gardening by enhancing soil structure, fertility, and moisture retention. Incorporating organic matter into your garden supports plant growth by providing essential nutrients and improving soil health. Regularly adding organic matter can transform your garden into a thriving, productive space. Most gardeners underutilize adding organic matter to their garden or overuse mulches so sometimes it can be feet deep in a foundation planting. Organic matter is not permanent – it is used up constantly and must be replenished to continue to utilize its benefits. That takes work – one can't avoid it.

Adding organic matter to soil not only improves its physical structure but also enhances its biological and chemical properties. Here's how:

- **Physical Benefits:** Organic matter increases soil porosity, which enhances air and water movement. It also helps in root penetration and moisture retention, crucial for plant health.
- **Biological Benefits:** As organic matter decomposes, it feeds soil microorganisms, which play a key role in nutrient cycling. This bioactivity also helps suppress diseases.
- **Chemical Benefits:** Organic matter acts as a buffer, moderating soil pH and making nutrients more available to plants. It also binds with heavy metals, reducing their availability and toxicity.

Organic matter is crucial for maintaining high soil fertility. It slowly releases essential nutrients such as nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K), and a range of micronutrients that plants need to thrive. This release happens through the process of mineralization, where microorganisms break down organic matter into elements usable by plants. Organic matter provides a more stable nutrient release compared to synthetic fertilizers, which can lead to nutrient spikes and troughs, stressing plants and potentially leading to nutrient runoff.

Incorporating organic matter into soil does more than just supply nutrients; it enhances the overall ecosystem within the soil. It boosts the population and diversity of beneficial microorganisms, which are instrumental in decomposing organic material, suppressing pathogenic microbes, and maintaining healthy soil structure. This biological activity is critical for nutrient cycling and disease suppression.

To maintain optimal soil health, it's important to replenish organic matter regularly. Over time, as organic materials decompose, their levels in the soil decrease, necessitating annual additions. This not only sustains the nutrient levels but also keeps the soil structure ideal for plant growth. In gardens, a top-up of compost or leaf mold in the planting season can invigorate the existing plants and prepare the beds for new plantings.

When applying organic matter:

1. **General Beds:** Spread a layer of 2-4 inches of organic matter over your garden beds. Work it into the top 6-8 inches of soil to integrate it fully and avoid disrupting root systems.
2. **Potted Plants:** Mix a handful of compost or leaf mold into your potting soil to boost nutrient levels and improve moisture retention

Monitoring the soil's organic content is also crucial. A simple soil test can reveal the organic content and help gauge when additional matter is needed. Consistently maintaining organic matter not only enriches the soil but ensures it remains vibrant and productive year after year. In general based on soil tests – one should try and shoot for about 5% organic matter content in a soil. Any more can be detrimental – robbing too much nutrients or making soil hold too much water.

Clay soils benefit from organic matter that improves aeration and drainage.

Sandy soils will retain water better with the addition of organic matter.

Loamy soils, being well-balanced, require less organic matter but benefit from periodic enrichment to maintain their structure and fertility.

Types of Organic Matter and Their Benefits

Type	Nutrient Content	Benefits
Compost	High in N, P, K	General soil improvement
Manure	High in N	Fertilizer for growth
Leaf Mold	Low in nutrients	Improves soil structure
Grass Clippings	High in nitrogen	Quick nutrient release
Mushroom Compost	Low in nutrients	Constant nutrient release

2025 Color of the Year



As revealed by Garden Media's 2025 Garden Trends Report, the color of the year is ... drumroll please ... teal!

Bringing to mind tropical waters and the Gen Z beloved Frutiger Aero aesthetic, the blue-green hue is a decidedly fresh addition to the garden palette. And it makes sense. With increased interest in blue- and green-blooming flowers, blue-tinted grasses, and aqua-toned succulents, teal already has close friends in the garden. Not to mention that it's a serene and surprisingly versatile color.

It aligns with evolving wellness trends, offering a calming effect that is as sophisticated as soothing. Whether applied sparingly or used as a bold statement piece, this color complements a modern palette that includes shades of blue, green, brown, orange, and gold, making it a versatile choice for any setting,

Frutiger Aero, sometimes known as Web 2.0 Gloss, is a retrospective name applied to a design trend observed mainly in user interfaces and Internet aesthetics from the mid-2000s to early 2010s. It succeeded the Y2K aesthetic, which was popular from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. The term Frutiger Aero is derived from Windows Aero, which exemplifies the style, and Adrian Frutiger, a Swiss typeface designer who was responsible for many of the humanist typefaces that were often used in older computing interfaces.



The style is characterized by its heavy use of shiny and glossy skeuomorphic features along with computer-generated renderings of nature, air and water shown alongside modern technologies. Skeuomorphism is a term most often used in graphical user interface design to describe interface objects that *mimic* their real-world counterparts in how they appear and/or how the user can interact with them. A well-known example is the recycle bin icon used for discarding files. The design style was popular in the 2000s because its skeuomorphic nature was intended to

make it more accessible to consumers, but was displaced during the 2010s by a shift towards minimalism in user interface designs.

The term "Frutiger Aero" was coined in 2017 by Sofi Lee of the Consumer Aesthetics Research Institute, an online community dedicated to developing terminology to describe consumer ephemera from the 1970s onwards. Lee retrospectively devised the term to refer to skeuomorphic tendencies in design prevalent roughly from 2004[or 2005 to 2013. During this period, touch-screen devices started entering the mainstream, and skeuomorphic and friendly designs were used to acclimate new consumers to touch-based technology. Popular products incorporating what would later be called Frutiger Aero include technology such as the first-generation iPhone, the Samsung Galaxy S, and Windows Vista, as well as video games such as The Sims 3 and Fruit Ninja. In addition, the popularity of the aesthetic spread beyond technology, and the design language can be found in packaging for other products of the time, such as air conditioners, laundry detergent, and furniture.

The aesthetic has since seen a revival among online communities, with videos analyzing a variety of interfaces being posted on TikTok and YouTube under the #frutigeraero hashtag in 2023. Consequently, a subreddit, Frutiger Aero, was established to discuss this aesthetic. It has gained popularity among Generation Z, partly due to nostalgia and because it serves as a maximalist alternative to modern minimalist corporate styles such as Corporate Memphis. In addition, Brennan stated that modern interest may arise from Frutiger Aero's nature-focused imagery and optimism, corresponding to increased environmental consciousness among Generation Z

Rick's Comments: Only in today's world would we worry about, name, or follow this concept and only Wikipedia would actually cite a source to explain to users the word "nostalgia". I am nostalgic- for the year 1964.

Overwintering Canna and Dahlias

In today's warmer world, one wonders if we need to dig and overwinter Cannas and Dahlias like we used to do in the "olden days". Many times these plants can be left out – especially if they are located next to a warm brick wall that is south or west facing.

If one doesn't want to gamble – then go back to the "olden days".

Let the plants endure a few frosts, and then dig the plants as gently as possible. Sometimes digging using a blunt tipped garden fork works well. After digging, place the plants on a tarp and leave outdoors in a sunny area for a few days to "cure".

After curing, cut back the foliage of the plants to the tuberous root (canna) or the tuber (dahlia) and brush off any excess dirt. I store my plants in a cardboard box such as a box the size of a box used to store printer paper.



Use newspaper to wrap each plant root and place them side by side in the box. Discard any root that looks diseased or rotten. If one fills a layer of the box, place a sheet of cardboard or newspaper over the layer and begin building the next layer.

Some gardeners use sawdust or peat moss to pack the roots in.

After the box is filled, cover the top. The boxes can be stored in an unheated garage crawl space or basement. If you have a beer fridge with room, place the boxes in there.

They should be cold and not freezing.

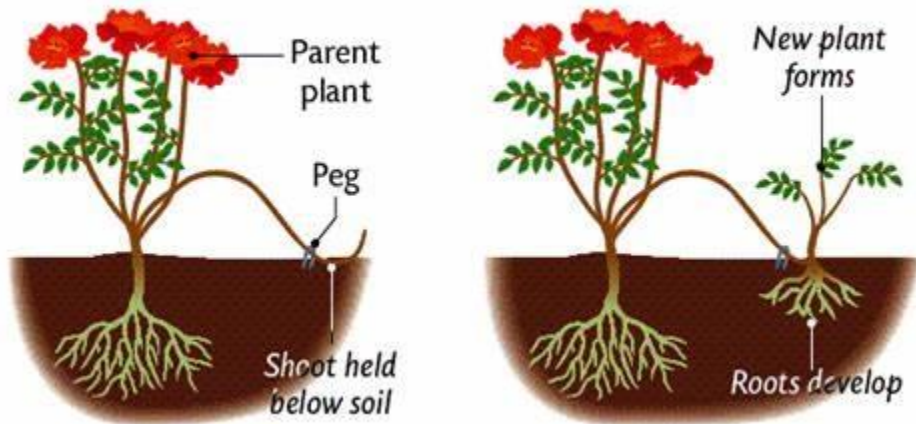
I would sprinkle a very small amount of water over the paper in the box twice during the winter months so the roots did not dry out completely. It is tricky because you do not want the roots to become soggy. Many folks skip this step.

One can bring out the plants in early spring after the danger of frost and plant the roots and be rewarded with lovely dahlias and cannas for the rest of the summer.



Winter Layering of Shrubs

Simple layering works well with plants that have long flexible stems. The propagule is formed by pinning and/or burying a portion of the stem, waiting for new roots to form, and then cutting it from the parent plant. By bending and burying the stem, it slows and interrupts the downward translocation of carbohydrates and other compounds. The accumulation of these compounds at the bend promotes rooting.



- Bend or stretch a stem or branch down to the soil
- Bury the stem 2-4 inches deep, bending the tip of the branch up out of the soil. Make sure at least one (if not more) node is buried.
 - Do not bury leaves. Remove any leaves that would be buried in the rooting media
- If needed, pin the branch with landscape pins or bent wire to help hold it in place

- Try wounding the branch and dusting it with rooting hormone powder before burying it for faster root development

- New roots should form in 6 to 12 weeks (maybe longer, depending on the species)
- When adequate roots have formed, the stem will be firmly rooted into the soil. Cut or separate it from the parent plant, dig up the propagule, and transplant it to its new location. The following plants work well for winter layering.

- Forsythia
- Climbing Roses
- Honeysuckle
- Azalea
- Rhododendron
- Boxwood

Winter Sowing Using Milk Jugs

This is a nifty technique to collect and plant seeds in very late fall so the seeds are exposed to winter cold and outdoor conditions so they will germinate next spring with hardly any effort at all. The best part of this method is that the seeds are protected from critters, and one is using the plastic containers sustainably. In terms of materials, all you need are recycled



plastic milk jugs, your seeds, potting mix. Plus, you'll need a few tools such as a utility knife or scissors, a drill or screwdriver, duct tape, and a marker for labeling.

1. Collecting Milk Jugs - The main thing is to start collecting milk jugs! Once I have enough jugs saved, I remove the lids and wash them well with soap and water and just a drop of bleach. This step is really a quick clean to make sure that nothing will grow once the soil has been added and temperatures heat up.

2. Cut Open the Jug & Add Drainage Holes

Use scissors or a boxcutter to cut an opening underneath the handle, about 4 inches up from the bottom and a bit over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way around the jug.

Leave about an inch of attached plastic to create a hinge that serves as a lid to keep the top and bottom connected for ease of covering up and moving the jugs about. Be sure to also poke a few holes into the base of the milk jug for drainage



3. Fill Base with Seed Starting Mix

Then fill with slightly damp, soilless seed starting mix or an indoor potting soil of your choice. Just be sure there is no added fertilizer within your mix that might burn your baby seedlings.

4. Sow Seeds & Tape Closed

Sow your seeds on top of the soil. Pay attention to any specific seed requirements as some seeds require darkness to germinate.. If necessary, sprinkle a small bit of vermiculite or thin layer of potting soil on top to cover lightly. The milk jug sowing method is basically mimicking nature and allowing the natural freeze and thaw and day-light hours to do what it does best in early winter- prepare seeds to grow!

Once seeds are sown, close down the lid of your jug. Tape a long piece of duct tape and secure around the middle to seal it closed. This creates a semi-greenhouse effect for germinating the seeds. You will need to open and vent the seedlings after they have germinated, and the spring temperatures really start to warm things up.

5. Tuck Into Crates & Let Nature Nurture

Once you have sown your seeds, tuck them into a crate or somewhere where they will be safe from wind but still receive good sunlight and element exposure. The natural cycle of the late winter and early spring temperatures, and snow or rain will automatically germinate your seeds and begin the process of seedling growth.



As the day temperatures begin to warm, be sure to check on your seeds and open the lids during days with temperatures of 50°F or above. Cover again at night. Once the day and night temperatures are both well above freezing, you can leave the lid off entirely. If the soil feels dry to the touch, lightly water.

When they have 2 or 3 true sets of leaves and you are able to work your soil, you can plant your already hardened-off seedlings directly into pots or the garden to enjoy.

Which Seeds Can You Sow in Milk Jugs?

Hardy Annual Flowers

- Bells of Ireland- Bachelor's Button-Delphinium-Feverfew- Poppy- Snapdragon- Yarrow-
- **Hardy Annual Vegetables**



Cold-weather greens such as chard, kale, spinach and lettuce can also be started in milk jugs by early March.

Purple Coneflower is a perennial that works well for winter sowing. In fact many prairie perennial seed can be collected for winter sowing. One can collect the seed in late summer, store it in the fridge, and then winter sow in November or early December. At the time of this writing, I still have seed heads of purple coneflower in my garden that can be harvested for winter sowing because mature seeds still can be harvested by using my fingers to loosen the seed form the mature flower. Use gloves as the seed heads are sharp!

Rare Roots Nursery

Rare Roots is a perennial plant mail order company owned and operated by women. This family has been growing perennials for over 30 years in central Virginia. What started as a small, front yard family business has now expanded into a successful perennial nursery that sits on over 30 acres. I am quite pleased by the selection and health of plants, superb packaging, and better pricing than other perennial nurseries I have tried.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver:I have decided that I would like my litter box and feeding dish to be the color teal – the 2025 color of the year fits in with my vision of being the most trendy and with it cat of the year. Please continue being my slave and keep maintaining my social media pages. I expect huge follows and likes – of course.

To subscribe to this electronic newsletter, ask questions, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com - or text 260-431-6893. I will not share information with others. Ricky Kemery will not knowingly discriminate in any way based on race, gender etc

I hope everyone has a happy and healthy holiday season!