

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.

Christmas Memories

My best memories of Christmas were not the presents – but of my parents and sisters. My father would be playing his newest musical recordings. He liked all types of music – but jazz and blues were his favorites – Billy Holiday, Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck, Dinah Washington. But he also played boogie music – John Lee Hooker, Savoy Brown – and he also loved Brenda Lee – when we were younger he would play Brenda Lee songs as my sisters danced in the middle of the living room. I really loved it when my father would get out his old acoustic guitar and play songs he had learned long ago when he worked for the CCC program near Lafayette, Indiana. His parents had put him in the CCC program to earn income for the family. My father grew up in a very poor family and he was proud of the fact that he had worked hard to break the cycle of poverty he had endured when he was young.

I don't remember how exactly how my parents met, but they would meet at a cemetery near West Lafayette by the river. My mother was the oldest girl in a family of 11 kids raised by their single mom who worked two jobs to earn enough to survive. Anyway, my parents met and fell in love, married, then my father went off to war in the Pacific. When he returned, he began working for Dana corporation – where he worked for almost 30 years.

My mother spent most of her life tending to family – every day she would pack lunch for my father and cook supper for us kids in the evening. I am afraid our diets were not great as quick meals like French fries and fish sticks were common. Sometimes though there would be a pork chop, hamburger, or minute steak. I spent nights after school eating with my Mom, who loved to read as she ate. We often would spend those times sitting at a table reading. It is where I developed my love of reading. I read at supper, and then before I went to bed. I became a very fast reader. Mom read many Agatha Christie paperbacks. I tried to read one once and thought it was very tedious. Later on however, I tried another and was hooked. I have read all the Agatha Christie novels over and over again.

My mother outdid herself at Sunday dinner – one of the few times where the entire family sat down to eat. Her specialty was fried Chicken and mashed potatoes that were so smooth, silky, and flavorful. When I was older, I asked her how she made those potatoes. She simply replied, “lots of milk and butter”. She never gave anyone her exact recipe.

My mom loved to have fun and she loved to play games of all sorts. She would spend time playing card games like rummy and Euchre and many board games. with us kids. Her laugh was infectious, and many a long winter evening was spent playing cards. My mom bought me special cards that taught me the state capitals and other facts about each state. To this day I know all the state capitals.

I was living near Lafayette Indiana and going to school at Purdue University when I heard my mother was in the hospital in Angola, Indiana. She had fallen down a flight of stairs and injured her shoulder. This is what I was told. I traveled to Angola driving my beat up car on the four hour trip to the hospital. I was taken to her room.

My mom was lying on the bed. She was gasping for breath. I found out that cancer had developed and a tumor was blocking the airway to her lungs. She was being transferred to Fort Wayne as the hospital in Angola did not have the facilities to treat her.

She had been in the hospital for 2-3 days – alone. She could not speak clearly. It was bad. A nurse brought some broth and set it on the table by the bed. I found out later my mom had not eaten anything in the time she was at the hospital. I asked my mom if she wanted the soup and she nodded vehemently. I fed my mom the soup. She ate it like a starving child. A nurse came into the room and looked at the empty bowl. “You shouldn’t have given her that,” she remarked.

I am glad I fed my mom that soup. It was a way I could give back the care I had received for so many years. My mom was transferred to Fort Wayne and spent the rest of her time in the ICU. She was given radiation and chemo – which gave her a little extra time. My sisters came and two of my aunts from Lafayette.

We had time to say goodbyes. My sisters had to return back to their homes. I was the last to leave. My aunts convinced me to go back and told me they would call if anything changed. I began the long drive home and was stopped by a policeman. One taillight was out on my car. The policeman came to the window. I was crying my eyes out. He sent me on my way when I told him my mom was dying.

When I got back to Lafayette, my wife told me my aunts had called. My mother had passed away. I was heartbroken. Our family was never the same.

I always remember my mother especially when the holidays approach. I remember the holidays we spent together – with both joy and sadness.

This year we had Gwendra’s family over for Thanksgiving. With help I prepared the meal. As we sat down to eat, I told the group that the homemade mash potatoes I made were in honor of my mother. It was a lot of work with my arthritis peeling 4 pounds of potatoes. I boiled the potatoes until tender. I added tons of butter in small chunks (like I remember my Mom doing) and used a hand mixer to slowly add milk until the potatoes were silky smooth. The potatoes were a big hit. It was an emotional moment to make and serve those potatoes. I was very proud to continue my mom’s legacy.

Amaryllis

Compiled from Garden Know How Bonnie Grant



Sometimes one receives an Amaryllis as a Christmas gift, They either come as a kit or as the already potted plant. The amaryllis flower is the highlight of the plant, although the tall stalks and strappy leaves are also attractive. The amaryllis plant is native to South America. They are found in parts of the Andes and Brazil in tropical to subtropical regions.

Indoors, place the Amaryllis in a bright location. A sunny window is ideal. However, once the flower forms, move the plant to a slightly less light location to prolong the bloom. Make sure the pot has adequate drainage holes. I prefer clay pots for Amaryllis.

Overwatering can cause the large bulb to rot. Water when the surface of the soil is dry to the touch.. Amaryllis prefers constant feeding with a liquid soluble fertilizer higher in phosphorous and potassium. The method I prefer is to mix a ¼ strength solution in a gallon jug of distilled water. This eliminates possible leaf scorch due to the high pH and additives in tap water.

Once the plant stops flowering most folks continue to grow the plant indoors as a house plant.

Many folks place the plant outdoors after the danger of frost and freeze. Place the plant in an area that receives morning sun and protection from direct afternoon sun. Continue to water, fertilize and care for the plant until September. This is when the plant needs a rest period to promote flowers before the holidays.

Many folks just kick over the pot containing the Amaryllis when it is still outdoors – or they bring the plant indoors and place it in a cool dark area like a basement.

The leaves of the plant will dry up and the plant will just look dead. It's not dead – its just taking a long nap.

In early November, place the Amaryllis back at the original spot where it flowered the year before. Hopefully it will once again produce its beautiful blooms for the holiday season.

It is worthwhile to mention that the stalks and leaves of amaryllis contain a poisonous toxin which is dangerous for cats and dogs. The bulb has the highest concentration of the toxin, but even browsing the leaves can have ill effects.

Christmas Trees – Folklore Compiled from history.com



The history of Christmas trees has many roots, ranging from the use of evergreens in ancient Egypt and Rome to the German traditions of candlelit trees that made its way to America in the 1800s.

Long ago plants and trees that remained green all year had a special meaning for people in the winter. Just as people today decorate their homes during the festive season with pine, spruce, and fir trees, many ancient peoples hung evergreen boughs over their doors and windows. In many countries it was believed that evergreens would keep away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness.

Early romans marked the solstice with a feast called Saturnalia in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. The Romans knew that the solstice meant that farms and orchards would soon be green and fruitful. To mark the occasion, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.

In Northern Europe the Druids, the priests of the ancient Celts, also decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a symbol of everlasting life. The Vikings in Scandinavia honored the evergreen mistletoe for its role in the death of the Balder, a god of light.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition—as we now know it—by the 16th century when sources record devout Christians bringing decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles

In Germany it was a widely held belief that Martin Luther first added lighted candles to a tree. According to a common version of the story, walking home one winter evening, Luther was awed by the stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles. The legend is true, but Christmas trees were also offered at Christmas tree markets before Luther's revelations. The oldest Christmas tree market is thought to have been located just over the southwestern German border in which was back then part of the Rhineland, now in present-day France, where unadorned Christmas trees were sold during the 17th century/ The trees were decorated with roses, apples, wafers and other sweets. Demand for Christmas trees was so high in the 15th century that laws were passed cracking down

on people cutting pine branches. Ordinances throughout the region of Alsace limited each household to one tree in the 1530s.

Most 19th-century Americans found Christmas trees an oddity. The first records of Christmas trees being cut for display comes from the 1820s in Pennsylvania's German community, although trees may have been a tradition there even earlier. As early as 1747, Moravian Germans in Pennsylvania had a community tree in the form of a wooden pyramid decorated with candles. But, as late as the 1840s, Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols and not accepted by most Americans.

It is not surprising that, like many other festive Christmas customs, the tree was adopted so late in America. New England's first Puritan leaders viewed Christmas celebrations as unholy. The pilgrims' second governor, William Bradford, wrote that he tried hard to stamp out "pagan mockery" of the observance, penalizing any frivolity.

In 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25 a penal offense; people were fined for hanging decorations.



In 1846, Queen Victoria and her German Prince, Albert, were sketched in the *Illustrated London News* standing with their children around a Christmas tree. Unlike the previous royal family, Victoria was very popular with her subjects, and what was done at court immediately became fashionable—not only in Britain, but with fashion-conscious East Coast American Society. The Christmas tree had arrived.

By the 1890s Christmas ornaments were arriving from Germany and Christmas tree popularity was on the rise around the U.S. It was noted that Europeans used small trees about four feet in height, while Americans liked their Christmas trees to extend from floor to ceiling.

The early 20th century saw Americans decorating their trees mainly with homemade ornaments, while many German Americans continued to use apples, nuts and marzipan cookies. Stringed popcorn was added to trees' decoration after being dyed bright colors and interlaced with berries and nuts. Electricity brought about Christmas lights, making it possible for Christmas trees to glow for days on end. With this, Christmas trees began to appear in town squares across the country and having a Christmas tree in the home became an American tradition.

The Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree in New York dates back to the Depression era, with the first tree placed in 1931. It was a small unadorned tree set up by construction workers at the center of the construction site. Two years later, another tree was placed there, this time with lights.

These days, the giant Rockefeller Center tree is laden with over 50,000 Christmas lights. The tallest tree displayed at Rockefeller Center arrived in 1999. It was a Norway Spruce that measured 100 feet tall and hailed from Killingworth, Connecticut.

Christmas trees have been sold commercially in the United States since about 1850.

In 1979, the National Christmas Tree was not lighted except for the top ornament. This was done in honor of the American hostages in Iran.

Between 1887-1933 a fishing schooner called the Christmas Ship would tie up at the Clark Street bridge and sell spruce and pine trees from Michigan to Chicagoans.

Franklin Pierce, the 14th president, is often credited with bringing the Christmas tree tradition to the White House in the early 1850s.

In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge started the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony now held every year on the White House lawn.

Since 1966, the National Christmas Tree Association has given a Christmas tree to the President and first family.

In 1912, what were likely the first major community Christmas trees in the United States were erected in Boston, New York City and Hartford, Conn.

Christmas trees generally take six to eight years to mature.

More than 1,000,000 acres of land have been planted with Christmas trees.

Other types of trees such as cherry and hawthorns were used as Christmas trees in the past.

Thomas Edison's assistants came up with the idea of electric lights for Christmas trees.

In 1963, the National Christmas Tree was not lit until December 22nd because of a national 30-day period of mourning following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Teddy Roosevelt banned the Christmas tree from the White House, possibly for environmental reasons—but his young son snuck a tree into the house anyway.

In the first week, a tree in your home will consume as much as three quarts of water per day.

Tinsel used to be made with lead foil, but in the early 1970s the U.S. Food and Drug Administration convinced manufacturers to switch to plastic tinsel.

The best-selling Christmas trees include the Scotch Pine, Douglas Fir, Fraser Fir, Balsam Fir and Blue Spruce.

Christmas Specials



Every year I get into the Christmas spirit by watching Hallmark Christmas specials. Nowadays more networks have formed because of the commercial success of the original Hallmark series.

To maximize their \$2 million budget, most Hallmark Channel holiday features are shot in Canada, where tax breaks can stretch the dollar. Wintry Vancouver is a popular destination, though films have also been shot in Montreal and Toronto. One film, 2018's Christmas at the Palace, was shot in Romania to take advantage of the country's castles.

Most Hallmark holiday movies take just two to three weeks to shoot, meaning actors don't have to commit months out of the year to a project. Actors like Rachael Leigh Cook, who stars in this year's A Blue Ridge Mountain Christmas, have also complimented the channel on giving them opportunities to be with their families

while on location: Cook said that the production schedule allowed her time to FaceTime with family back home.

Because some of the films are shot in the summer, it's not always possible to achieve snow naturally. Producers use a variety of tricks to simulate snowfall, including snow blankets that mimic the real thing when laid out;

foam; commercial replica snow; crushed limestone; and ice shavings. Actors might also get covered with soapy bubbles for close-ups. The typical budget for snow per movie is around \$50,000.

Langley, British Columbia, located in southwestern British Columbia, Canada, near Vancouver and the U.S. border with Washington state. Langley is a versatile location that's been featured in several Hallmark Christmas movies

With a population of roughly 3,000 residents, Chester, Vermont, captures all the small-town charm of a Hallmark Christmas movie. Located just south of the Green Mountain National Forest, this picturesque New England destination is known for its beautifully preserved 19th-century architecture, cozy inns, antique shops, and inviting local eateries. The town's iconic village green and historic Stone Village provide a quintessential New England backdrop, while opportunities for outdoor winter fun including ice skating and horse-drawn sleigh rides transform Chester into an idyllic winter wonderland straight out of a holiday movie.

Not all Hallmark Christmas movies are set in snowy northern locations. The small North Georgia mountain town of Dahlonega — which averages just 3 inches of snowfall each year — is a Southern gem that's infused a number of movies with its unique appeal. With a population of 7,500, the town has doubled as the fictional Homestead, Iowa, in *Christmas in Homestead* (2016) as well as the picturesque Smoky Mountains town of Pine Valley in *Christmas in the Smokies* (2015).

The port city of Wilmington, North Carolina, is another Southern locale that's been a popular filming location for Hallmark movies. Known for its historic downtown lined with delightful boutiques and quaint cafes, as well as a scenic Riverwalk along the Cape Fear River, Wilmington has starred as a stand-in for a variety of film settings. It represented the naval town of Norfolk, Virginia, in *USS Christmas* (2020) and the historic town of Conway, South Carolina, in *Christmas in Conway* (2013), and it was converted into the fictional Harmony, North Carolina, in *Christmas in Harmony* (2021)

Early Christmas Memories



My earliest memories of Christmas come from when my family lived at Big Lake – located north of Columbia City where I was born. We lived in a small house right on the lake. When one entered the house one first encountered the small kitchen. A half wall separated the kitchen from the living room. A small couch was set against the half wall. A large arm chair was where my father always sat. A console TV was located on the far wall. An old radio was located in an alcove next to two bedrooms and a small bathroom. Across from the kitchen was a utility room with a washer and wringer to squeeze water out of the clothes before they were hung on a clothesline in the front yard. Stairs in the utility room led to the attic where I slept.

My earliest memories were when I spent most of my time in the kitchen. I was probably 4-5 years old. I would sit under the kitchen table (an old Formica table that would be worth a fortune nowadays) while my mom would cook and clean. Every once in awhile my mom would lift the tablecloth to hand me a snack or ask if I was Ok. I felt safe under the table. Usually we would listen to the old console radio for a few hours each day.

Every week a man would come a deliver a block of ice for the refrigerator to keep food cold. Every day or so the milkman in his large truck would leave a half gallon or two in glass bottles by the front door. Very rarely my mom would order orange juice delivered – it was so tasty.



Every Christmas, my father would bring home a tree from town – usually less than 5-6 foot in height. He would cut the trunk so the tree would be able to take in water. Then after placing the tree in a stand he would add the lights. There were no small twinkling LED lights – these were the large bulbs connected in series so if one bulb burned out the entire strand would not be lit. Then one would have to check and replace each light until the burned out bulb was located and replaced. It was tedious. Then the ornaments went on the tree – if my father was in a good mood – my sister and I could place a few on the tree. After the ornaments were placed us kids were allowed to place the tinsel on the tree – carefully so the tinsel was not casually clumped. I was a tradition that was wonderful. There were never any presents under the tree until Christmas morning. My sisters and I were up early and my sisters would cautiously enter my parents room to try and convince them to wake

up and open presents. Some years if my father worked extra hours there would be lots of presents. Other years the pile of presents was smaller. In those days we were grateful for anything and made do with the resources we had. Life was tougher, and life was much simpler. It was a wonderful time.

Our Christmas Tree

Each year we start from scratch and decorate our artificial tree. Folks disagree on which is more sustainable- a “real” tree or an artificial one.

For many years, the chopping down of real Christmas trees was misrepresented as detrimental to the environment, but that's not exactly right. These trees spend about eight years growing before they're harvested, and in that time they produce oxygen and serve as a home for local wildlife. When it comes time to toss the tree, a real tree is 100% biodegradable and recyclable. If one visits a nearby Christmas tree farm to purchase a tree, one supports the local economy rather than purchasing an artificial tree made elsewhere.

It's a myth that artificial Christmas trees are always the cheaper option—at least on a one-to-one basis. Based on data from The National Christmas Tree Association, the average price per real Christmas tree in 2018 was \$78, while the average price for a fake Christmas tree was \$104.

If your biggest holiday concern is budget, this might make your decision easier. A faux tree can be used again and again, letting you off the hook from buying a real tree year after year. If you plan to display your fake tree for five (or more) Christmases, it could end up being the more economical choice.

Real Christmas trees are fabulous—but they're high-maintenance too. It's one exceptional houseplant you'll need to tend to on a daily basis, and not everyone has the time or patience to commit (which is totally fair). One of the obvious reasons to get an artificial spruce is to eliminate the hassle of watering, sweeping, trimming, and worrying about the right placement for optimal freshness. And you won't need to lug it to the end of the driveway or a nearby recycling program after the holidays.

Most artificial Christmas trees are made with fire-resistant materials, potentially making them safer to string lights on and less to worry about. This may be top of mind if you've dealt with any sort of fire scare in the past or simply don't want to risk it. "Fresh trees shouldn't be on display for more than a month as they become brittle, but artificial trees can be kept up forever without a risk of drying out.

Artificial Christmas trees can be considered bad for the environment because they are made from non-biodegradable plastics. They are often manufactured overseas and end up in landfills

Fake trees can gather dust and mold if they are not stored correctly and they lack the scent of a real evergreen

Real trees can be repotted in your garden after Christmas (and reused the following year)

Real trees provide habitat for wildlife when they grow. They help fight climate change: one acre of Christmas trees produce enough oxygen for 18 people each day. They are biodegradable and can be reused in the garden as mulch/ They bring the fresh scent of pine inside the home.

Real trees can be expensive and you need to buy a new one each year

They can carry allergens that make people with allergies wheeze (I can cough and sneeze when around a real tree). They need more maintenance than fake trees, such as weekly watering

Our Christmas Tree

Our tree this year is mostly decorated with gathered or natural materials. We gathered hydrangea flowers as the main decoration, along with gathered teasel (its found everywhere along roadsides) that we spray painted gold to stand out more. I cut lavender from my garden for decoration and a pleasant odor, along with dried oranges purchased on the Internet. The tree smells wonderful. My fairy decorations are a favorite and we purchased a few decorations from hobby lobby which is sort of a traditional thing we do yearly.





Maestro Robert Nance



Robert Nance with Julia Meek of Meet the Music

I first met Maestro Robert Nance (Maestro and organizer of the Hoodier Heartland Choral Group) truly by accident. I was doing a radio program on public radio with Janice Furtner every week. She was the host of programming for everything classical music at the station. Her knowledge of classical music was legendary. Folks could tune in each day and listen to classical music. My second wife would have classical music playing every day as background music as she twittered about completing tasks from her extensive to do lists she worked on every day.

I was introduced to Janice after going to an interview on PBS radio about gardening with another host of a program. After the interview Jannette took me down the hall and introduced me to Janice – who also loved gardening. We did an on air interview on the spot. During the interview it was clear we really connected. Janice was an excellent interviewer. Soon

I would stop by every week to spend time discussing gardening topics for 15 minutes or longer. Eventually I would bring prepared material on specific topics to discuss. One of my most memorable moments was when I

asked Janice to read a passage from one of my favorite books – The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson. The passage was about the main character’s journey to Hill House after she took the family car and left secretly. It is a beautiful passage about her journey. While Janice read the passage I literally got chills. She did a wonderful job and I have tears in my eyes remembering it.

After time I knew that Janice has a beautiful soprano voice and she sang for the Heartland choral group. I was a musician myself and was just beginning work on a music CD- something that had been on a bucket list for a long time. I thought it might be a good idea to take voice lessons – something I had recommended to others – to improve and strengthen my radio voice – and perhaps my singing voice – as I was recording the CD.

The first person Janice recommended was unavailable. She thought a moment and said that maybe her friend Robert Nance might be willing to help-even though he mostly worked with singers interested in more classical types of music. After some haggling it was arranged that I would go audition for Maestro Nance at his home in Covington Creek. It is a beautiful community. Robert explained once again that he had never worked with a folk singer, but he asked me to play a few of my original songs for him. After I finished he said” I like your twang”. He agreed to give me weekly lessons. I learned vocal exercises to increase my power and range. We practiced those and more vocal exercises. Gradually we began working on individual songs to improve my diction and arrangements for the songs. Robert easily played with me on his piano. Sometimes he would pause and say, “I would have never guessed you would go that way” He knew all the common chord progressions, and sometimes I would surprise him with my chord choices. After about a year of lessons I finally completed my first CD and played it for him. I was proud of the way it turned out. It was so much fun to visit his studio for the lessons. I learned so much and the range and power of my voice was so much better.



Just recently I saw a recorded performance of the Heartland Chorale group at the Allen County courthouse. It was a wonderful performance. It brought tears to my eyes remembering my time working with Maestro Nance so long ago. My friend Janice also helped with the final mixes on the CD. I was very sad when downsizing and politics resulted in Janice leaving the radio station. I was with her at the end and I know how painful it was for her to leave. I experienced the same kind of loss when I was forced into early retirement after my 33 years at Purdue Extension.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: I am willing to be the first ever cat featured on Hallmark Christmas movies. I have the Christmas and star quality needed to be their first feline star. My vision for my first movie is “A cuddly cat Christmas” about a cat so busy trying to enhance his cat popularity in the world that he loses the true meaning of Christmas. It takes meeting a poor cat from rural Indiana with deep family tradition to convince him to return to his humble Hoosier roots.

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I hope everyone has a happy and healthy holiday season!