

# Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

March 2025 Issue

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

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## The Ides of March



In Act I, Scene II of *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare introduces a soothsayer to offer a stark warning to Caesar: “Beware the ides of March.” Caesar did not take the warning to heart and was assassinated by a group of senators. The plot, led by enemies-turned-friends Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus, was carried out in the Senate House in Rome. As it turns out, March 15<sup>th</sup> the Ides of March has turned out to be a rather monumental date in history. Here are a few examples:

The Romans considered the Ides to be the time to settle any outstanding debts.

Andrew Jackson, the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. president, was born March

15, 1767.

Maine became the 23<sup>rd</sup> state on March 15, 1820.

In 1917, Czar Nicholas II of Russia abdicated his throne, ending a 304-year royal dynasty. which led to the firing squad deaths of him and his entire family a year later—to Nazi troops seizing control of Czechoslovakia in 1939.

A severe blizzard struck North Dakota, Minnesota, and areas in Canada in 1941. Wind gusts surpassed 70 miles per hour in Duluth, Minnesota, and reached 85 miles per hour in Grand Forks, North Dakota. **Ricky's notes:** I once stopped in Grand Forks North Dakota on the way to a job interview – it felt like the ends of the earth.

A world record rain fell on the Indian Ocean island of La Réunion in 1952. Over a 24-hour period, beginning on March 15, more than 73 inches of rain fell.

In March, 1971, news leaked that CBS would cancel the Ed Sullivan Show, ending its 23-year run on the network.

Symbolics.com became the first internet domain name registered on March 15, 1985.

In early Rome, the Ides of March marked the beginning of the new year, tied to the first full moon, symbolizing rebirth and the end of winter. The day was celebrated with feasts and picnics honoring Anna Perenna, the goddess of the year, marking the arrival of spring.



March, named for Mars, the Roman god of war, was especially significant as it marked the beginning of the military campaigning and farming season. The Ides of March, therefore, held particular importance, not just for its military and agricultural connotations, but also because of its religious observances. It was a day dedicated to Jupiter, the king of the gods, and included the Anna Perenna festival, where Romans would celebrate the year's new cycle.

In the early Roman calendar, March (or Martius) was the first month of the calendar year. As March brought the first day of spring with the vernal equinox, it was the start of new beginnings.

March's full Moon, the Worm Moon, reaches peak illumination on the morning of Friday, March 14, 2025.

For many years, experts thought this name referred to earthworms that appear as the soil warms in spring. This invites robins and other birds to feed—a true sign of spring!

However, more research revealed another explanation. In the 1760s, Captain Jonathan Carver visited the Naudowessie (Dakota) and other Native American tribes and wrote that the name Worm Moon refers to a different sort of “worm”—beetle larvae—which begin to emerge from the thawing bark of trees and other winter hideouts at this time.

There are quite a few names for the March Moon that speak to the transition from winter to spring. Some refer to the appearance (or reappearance) of certain animals, such as the Eagle Moon, Goose Moon (Algonquin, Cree), or Crow Comes Back Moon (Northern Ojibwe), while others refer to signs of the season:

The Sugar Moon (Ojibwe) marks the time of year when the sap of sugar maples starts to flow.

The Wind Strong Moon (Pueblo) refers to the strong, windy days that come at this time of year.

The Sore Eyes Moon (Dakota, Lakota, Assiniboine) highlights the blinding rays of sunlight that reflect off the melting snow of late winter.

The best days for activities based on the Moon's sign and phase in March.

### **For Planting:**

Aboveground crops: 7-9

Belowground crops: 17-19

For Setting Eggs: 14, 15

For Fishing: 1-14, 29-31

You may have heard the weather proverb, “If March comes in like a lion, it will go out like a lamb,” meaning that if the month starts off stormy, it will end with mild weather. There is, however, a different interpretation: The constellation Leo, the lion, rises in the east at the beginning of March. Thus, the month “comes in like a lion,” while Aries, the ram, sets in the west at the end of the month, and hence, the month “will go out like a lamb.”

The March equinox occurs on **Thursday, March 20, 2025**. In the Northern Hemisphere, this is known as the vernal, or spring, equinox and marks the start of the spring season. In the Southern Hemisphere, autumn begins.



At this time, the Sun crosses the celestial equator on its way north. Also, on this day, the Sun rises exactly in the east and sets exactly in the west—a good thing to know if you get lost in the woods.

### **March Folklore**

A wet spring, a dry harvest.

On St. Patrick's Day, the warm side of a stone turns up, and the broad-back goose begins to lay.

March comes in with adders' heads and goes out with peacocks' tails.

Thunder in spring, Cold will bring.

So many mists in March you see, So many frosts in May will be.

A March Poem: Bleak winds assault us all around; Dances aloft, or skims the ground: See the school-boy—his hat in hand, While on the path he scarce can stand

## **Wisconsin Prairie Nurseries**

Part of my graduate studies at Purdue University involved the establishment of native prairies along Indiana highway rights of way. My major professor Dr. Michael Dana was a University of Wisconsin graduate. So he took me on a tour of the businesses in Wisconsin that offered native prairie seeds and plants for sale. At that time there were no online sales, and the companies were small and remote. It was extremely interesting to see how the small staff hand collected seeds and plants. There were valuable sources of information on how to propagate prairie plants and their cultural needs. The major companies are Prairie Nursery and Prairie Moon Nursery.

### **Prairie Moon Nursery**



and document native plants from Leopold and passed that knowledge on to their son, Alan.

In 1982, Alan teamed up with some of his neighbors to make a business selling native seeds out of his living room. These back-to-the-land hippies were members of Wiscoy Valley Community Land Cooperative. Wiscoy is an intentional community in rural Winona, Minnesota organized in 1976 around the principles of collective land stewardship, social justice and consensual decision-making. It was in this lively cradle where Prairie Moon was born. Our seeds and plants have been used by national parks, local municipalities, corporate planners, teachers, farmers, and backyard gardeners. authentic, wild-type native plants, not cultivated varieties bred by the horticultural industry.

I like Prairie Moon because they offer plants grown in deep cells that are perfect for planting. They also offer collections of plants such as pollinators, full sun, Mix and Match trays, Tallgrass prairies, or single species trays.

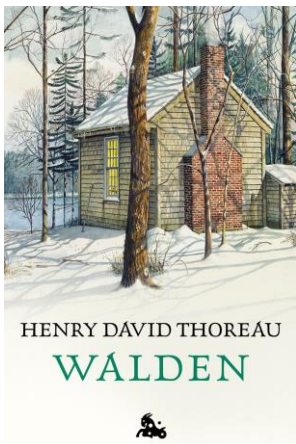
The prices are very reasonable in my opinion, but shipping costs are high unfortunately. However, considering how rare it is to find these plants, It might be worth the cost. I think establishing an area of prairie plants on your property is best accomplished using transplants as establishing areas using seed is riskier and takes much longer to establish. To me, I use seeds for much larger areas realizing it will take time and management. The good news is that these nurseries use seed collected from nearby sources and they grow it onsite.

Pick an area for your backyard prairie. Most prairie plants prefer sunny areas that are well drained. One can till the area before hand or simply mow the area short, and place layers of newspaper over the area. Then use lasagna style layers of compost, rotted manure, Canadian sphagnum peat moss, shredded paper, untreated grass clippings, leaves, clean straw and other organic materials to build your garden bed. The bed should be at least 18 – 24 inches in depth. Plant the transplants, mulch the first year, and water the planting when necessary. In other words treat the planting like a perennial garden the first year. Space the plants at least 3 feet apart. Try to keep taller plants in the middle or back of the garden. If you plant the tallgrass prairie collection, then scatter the species throughout the planting.

Prairie plants have roots that penetrate deep in the soil, so it will take a few years for the plants to establish, but as long as you maintain the area, the plants should fill in and weeding should be minimal.

**Prairie Nursery** also offers seeds and some plants, but not extensive collections like Prairie Moon. Their shipping costs are higher still. It operates with similar small staffing and is an extremely interesting place to visit.

## Phenology - Growing Degree Days and Insect Emergence



Phenology is the study of the timing and cyclical patterns of events in the natural world, particularly those related to the annual life cycles of plants, animals, and other living things. These events include the budding of leaves in spring, the arrival of migratory birds, the flowering of plants, and the onset of fruit ripening. Henry David Thoreau recorded the sequence of flowering plants events in nature in his time at Walden Pond.

Growing degree days (GDDs) are used in phenology as a measurement tool for tracking the accumulation of heat units, which are necessary for the growth and development of plants and insects.

One can find out how many growing degree days have accumulated at your exact location. Go to Michigan State University gdd tracker site (<https://gddtracker.msu.edu>) and punch in your zip code to find out how many growing degree days have accumulated at your exact location. Then use the chart below to find out what insect pests are emerging (degree days are listed on the right). Then you can scout your landscape to look for the pests. Controlling pests is much easier if you can find the pest early. Sometimes as is the case of gypsy moth (now called spongy moth) for example, control can be as easy as removing any egg masses from the tree. This is a very abbreviated list. Full lists are available at Ohio State's phenology web site.

**Silver Maple** - first bloom 34

**White Pine Weevil** - adult emergence 84

**Eastern Tent Caterpillar** - egg hatch 92

Bradford Callery Pear - *Pyrus calleryana* first bloom 142

**European Pine Sawfly - egg hatch 144**

**Smooth Crabgrass - first seedling emergence 155**

**Spruce Spider Mite - egg hatch 162**

Bradford Callery Pear - full bloom 164

Eastern Redbud - first bloom 191

**Spongy moth - egg hatch 192**

**Spotted lanternfly - egg hatch & first nymph (predicted) 200**

**Large Crabgrass - first seedling emergence 211**

Common Flowering Quince - full bloom 214

**Honey locust Spider Mite - egg hatch 227**

Common Lilac - first bloom 234

Flowering Dogwood first bloom 263

**Smooth Crabgrass - 25% seedling emergence 263**

Flowering Dogwood - first bloom 263

**Smooth Crabgrass - 25% seedling emergence 263**

Persian Lilac - full bloom 303

**Pine Needle Scale - egg hatch - 1st generation 305**

Common Ninebark first bloom 30-May 507

**Bronze Birch Borer adult emergence 2-Jun 550**

Black Locust full bloom 3-Jun 564

**Greater Peach Tree Borer adult emergence 3-Jun 573**

**Euonymus Scale egg hatch - 1st generation 3-Jun 575**

**Juniper Scale egg hatch 11-Jun 697**

Japanese Tree Lilac full bloom 20-Jun 860

**Cottony Maple Scale egg hatch 23-Jun 930**

**Ricky's Comments:** Here is how it works. About the time that star magnolia flowers in the spring, look for the loss of the top leader of spruce, white, and Austrian pine caused by this insect. Here is more information

[https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/control\\_white\\_pine\\_weevil\\_in\\_early\\_spring](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/control_white_pine_weevil_in_early_spring).



Not long after forsythia blooms in the spring, look for the emergence of tent caterpillars in the landscape. These caterpillars fashion webbing in the branch crotches of many trees and can do damage to the foliage.

<https://extension.psu.edu/eastern-tent-caterpillar>.

Around the time Flowering pears bloom, begin looking for damage from the Eastern Pine Sawfly – especially on Mugho pines and Eastern White Pines in the landscape. These green caterpillar-like creatures appear in large numbers, and sway back and forth when disturbed. It is creepy and they can do damage.

[Sawflies | UMN Extension](#)



Around the same time begin to treat spider mites on spruce, especially if you have had damage to Dwarf Alberta spruce last year in your landscape. Dust the foliage with Diatomaceous earth to reduce damage. Have a certified licensed applicator treat larger trees if you have had damage in previous years.

When Redbuds bloom in the spring, it is time to scout for Gypsy Moth (now called spongy moth) on oak trees in your landscape. Look for egg masses, and the actual caterpillar with red and blue markings.

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/dealing-with-spongy-moth-around-your-home-or-property>.



Also I hope you do not discover any spotted lanternfly larvae out and about in your landscape. This new invasive pest can do tremendous damage on all types of plants in a garden and landscape.

<https://extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly>.



About the time crabapples and lilacs bloom, one can look for spider mite activity and honey locust plant bug symptoms on honey locust. The plant bugs will make the foliage curl and distort, and the foliage will turn bronze then brown with spider mite damage

A bit later when hawthorns bloom one can treat the soil near the trunk of white birch with Bayer All Season Insect Control to prevent any potential damage from bronze birch borer, an insect related to emerald ash borer that can damage the conductive tissue of the tree and cause branch dieback. Sometimes one see actual holes in the bark caused by the beetle.



can



When the smaller oriental lilacs and horse chestnut bloom look for pine needle scale on Eastern White Pine. This unusual scale insect can cover needles. Most of the time control is not needed but the appearance of the scale can cause alarm.

When Black Locust blooms in the area begin to look for damage by the lesser peach tree borer to peach and cherry trees. First signs that something is wrong when sap exudes from holes in the bark-often near the base of the tree. If nothing is done then larger areas of damage appear on the bark with bleeding sap. Then severe branch dieback can happen. It's a nasty pest that has a couple of generations per year.

<https://extension.psu.edu/tree-fruit-insect-pest-lesser-peachtree-borer>.



This is also a time to begin to scout for scale insects on Japanese Euonymus and junipers.

Look for huge amounts of the white scale on Japanese Euonymus in your landscape. Juniper scale also has a similar appearance. Both scales can suck the life out of plants and are notoriously difficult to



control. <https://extension.psu.edu/euonymus-scaleScale>

**Summary:** I edited the Ohio State chart extensively. I only provided more detailed info for the most common insects that appear in our area. I left a few of the plants one might find in your landscape as mile points so if you have any of the species in your landscape you can determine where you are at in the big scheme of things in the phenology world. If you scout your landscape knowing when to look for peats based on phenology, then it is much better than the old days when insects appeared in your landscape as a complete surprise.

## A Senior Gardeners Eccentric Garden To Do List

As one becomes older, one has to be more creative in the tending and care of a garden. The tasks involved each year do not change. Conquering tedious work and boredom requires some creativity.

### Ricky's Late Spring To Do List

**Noon:** Have breakfast (a sausage cheese muffin with hollandaise sauce). Yes I know it's a late start, but sleeping in nowadays is required since I stay up until 3:00 AM watching episodes of Death In Paradise, Chopped, New Scandinavian Cooking, and other mindless television.



1:00 PM: Have a little after breakfast drinky poo. A Cosmopolitan sounds nice.

1:15 PM Its going to be a hot day, so I need to cover my body with one of those “entire body” deodorants advertised on TV. I will smell like a slightly rotting carp afterwards, but it will help draw cats to the garden. Cats can help deter rabbits and that is a good thing.

1:30 PM Think about Weeding and Mulching – I am already behind this year.

1:45 PM: A nice cool margarita would be great.

2:00 PM: Rest break: I usually just lay on the ground to feel the cool earth beneath me. One time my young single neighbor came over when she saw me lying on the ground. She thought I was unconscious and began giving me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

2:30 PM: I am thinking about a mint julep.

3:00 PM: Another neighbor comes over with cookies. Convince her to “help” weed and mulch while I encourage her to gossip about the neighbors: I feed the gossip by inventing rumors about my neighbors which include gambling, infidelity, and drug trafficking - while drinking more margaritas.. Make her feel sorry for me and how old and frail I am and how I am unable to take care of my own garden anymore. The longer we gossip, the more weeding and mulching is done – by someone else.

4:00 PM: My weeding and mulching are done for the day. Time to lay out on the ground again. Devise a system where when the neighbor kids come into my garden, I wait and then turn on sprinklers and laugh insanely as they run way.

5:00 PM: I am feeling like Mexican Food. Tequila shots after and then a long nap. After all, late night television awaits.

## Pussy Willow

Pussy Willow is one of the earliest spring bloomers and an important food source for emerging bees when the furry catkins appear in early spring. The name is most often applied to the North American native deciduous shrub or tree, *Salix discolor*, though European species *S. caprea* and *S. cinerea* are also sometimes called pussy willow.

The fluffy white blossoms of the pussy willow resemble silk, and they soon give forth young shoots the color of green jade. In Chinese tradition, this represents the coming of prosperity. Towards the Lunar New Year period in spring, stalks of the plant may be bought from market vendors or supermarkets.

When the furry catkins appear in early spring the stalks are frequently decorated with gold and red ornaments—ornaments with colors and textures that signify prosperity and happiness. Felt pieces of red, pink, and yellow are also a common decoration in Southeast Asia.

Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox; Ruthenian, Polish, Romanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Slovak, Bavarian, and Austrian Roman Catholics; Finnish and Baltic Lutherans and Orthodox; and various other Eastern European peoples carry pussy willows on Palm Sunday instead of palm branches.

While typically found in wild wetlands, you can grow this shrub or tree in your yard with the proper conditions and pruning. Pussy willows grow quickly. Some species achieve heights of 25 feet, so they make great windbreaks or privacy screen – especially in wet areas.



Salix discolor is the North American native plant to which the name pussy willow is most often applied. However, several other Salix species can carry the common name:

- S. caprea: This Eurasian pussy willow is also called goat willow.
- S. cinerea: Native to Europe and western Asia, this plant has a reputation for invasiveness. It has naturalized in wetlands across the Eastern United States but should be avoided as a landscape plant. Its best if you are interested in planting a pussy willow in your landscape to purchase the tree from a reliable source. Don't collect the tree from the wild as it could be the invasive European species.

Beyond being a harbinger of spring in gardens, pussy willows are used for:

- Cut branches – Popular in floral arrangements and spring bouquets
- Crafts – The fuzzy catkins can be used to make decorative wreaths and ornaments
- Habitat – Provide an early source of pollen for bees and food for birds
- Erosion control – Extensive root systems help stabilize stream banks and slopes.

A branch stuck into the soil will sprout a fully developed plant in a few months, and a branch in a vase makes a lovely spring decoration.

All willows have invasive roots, so plant them far away from septic tank fields, sewer lines, and water lines.

You can tell the difference between male and female pussy willows by appearance. Pussy willows are dioecious, - meaning there are separate male and female trees. Male pussy willow trees produce attractive white catkins, while female trees produce dull greenish catkins.

The catkins of male plants yield numerous tiny, pollen-filled flowers later in spring. The female catkins bear flowers that receive the males' pollen via flies and bees.

Preserving pussy willow branches entails depriving them of water at the right time. If you harvest branches with catkins, don't place them in water and let them sit—they'll "go by" (flower out and lose their beauty). In late winter or early spring (depending on where you live), you can pick branches with catkins that haven't fully opened yet and force them to open inside.

1. Watch for swelling at the nodes along the branches of pussy willows. This is the first indication of budding catkins. Pick a day with temperatures above freezing, if possible, to harvest.
2. Cut the length of a branch about two feet long. Repeat for as many branches as you desire. Place the bottoms of the branches in a vase filled with lukewarm water.
3. With their ends submerged, cut about one inch off the bottoms. This second cut, performed underwater where air cannot act as a drying agent, will promote water intake into the branches. Add a floral preservative to the water, if you can.
4. Wrap the exposed areas of the branches in damp newspaper or cloth to preserve humidity. Place the vase in a cool, dark spot for a day or two, until the stems begin to show color.
5. Remove the newspaper or cloth. Place the vase in a cool spot (60°F to 65°F) in indirect sun. Mist the branches occasionally until the catkins appear.

After the catkins open, you can remove them from the water and preserve them for use in dried flower arrangements.

- Do pussy willows attract butterflies?

Yes, these plants are known to attract viceroy and mourning cloak butterflies.

- How long do pussy willows live?

Pussy willows last from 20 to 50 years if they're taken care of correctly.

- Why are my pussy willow catkins so drab?

Only male plants have showy catkins. If your plant has rather small, drab green catkins, it is probably a female plant. If you are growing pussy willows to harvest branches for decorative arrangements, buy male plants, which have larger, pearly white catkins.

The best time to prune your pussy willow tree is in late winter or early spring, right after the catkins have finished blooming. This encourages healthy new growth and ensures that the tree stays compact and tidy.

One folk story suggests that the name "pussy willow" comes from an old German tale. According to this story, a poor woman lived in a village and could not afford to buy her children Christmas presents. One winter, the woman came across some willow branches covered in soft, fuzzy buds. She gathered them and brought them home, where her children were delighted by the cat-like appearance of the buds. They named them "pussy willows" in honor of their beloved pet cat. This heartwarming tale highlights the connection between the soft, furry buds and the fluffy nature of a cat.

Another theory suggests that the name "pussy willow" may come from the Dutch word "pussigheid," which means "whiskery or hairy." This theory suggests that the name was derived from the hairy appearance of the buds, similar to a cat's whiskers.



## Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

*To my Caregiver: Since you think I just lie around and do nothing all day, you asked for a to do list of my daily activities. Here it is, control freak.*

*Whine constantly for food the moment I awake*

*Use the "facilities".- Facilities meaning anywhere except my litterbox*

*Paw the miniblinds trying to look outdoors. Never mind they are shredded and damaged beyond repair.*

*Hang from curtains in living room – just because I can. Shred carpet by entry door to sharpen my claws.*

*Use sharpened claws on new recliner in living room.*

*More food whining. Use "facilities" The bread machine on kitchen counter is a great target.*

*Jump on caregiver trying to take a nap. Jump on computer keyboard when he tries to work.*

*Stare out window at chipmunks and small birds - make funny wistful noises when I see them.*

*Nap. Beg for more food and milk-pee on caregiver's favorite blanket. Repeat activities over and over.*

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