

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

April 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.



Gardening Seminar – Aboite Library Branch

Tuesday April 29 – 6:00 PM

*Phenology - Using Flowering Plants to Predict
Insect Pests in the Landscape*

Ricky D . Kemery – Purdue Horticulture Extension Educator – Allen County (retired)

Ricky will discuss how spring flowering trees and shrubs can help signal when damaging pests of the landscape will appear.

Q & A Session: Bring your questions about the landscape, lawn and garden and Ricky will do his best to answer them on the spot with organic solutions when possible.

A special prize will be available for the best questions. No pre-registration is required

Note: It would be great to meet some of my readers of this newsletter in person.

Mole Patties

In many landscapes out and about, citizens are reporting strange “hills” of mounded soil scattered about the lawn. Have drones from outer space invaded your lawn? Have herds of cows deposited their poop patties in your backyard? Nope..these are mole patties.

In early spring the mole mom and her kits are deep underground in a den where the mole mom has given birth during the winter. The kids are hungry, so mom must go forage for earthworms, the favorite protein snack for the kits. When the soil thaws, the mole mom ventures upwards from the den to forage for worms near the soil



surface. When she finds food she heads back down to the den pushing the soil behind her. Doing so leaves a raised area in the lawn that I refer to as a “mole patty”

There are many myths about moles that are passed around by gardeners – especially on the Internet. Moles do not eat plants at all – they forage for earthworms and insects near the surface of the soil. They literally “swim” through the soil using their paws pushing soil behind them as they go. This disturbs the soil leaving their “runs” as they travel. Many people think there are large numbers of moles on their property when in fact moles are very territorial and guard their territories with a fierce vengeance. The mole mom in fact drives her own kids away when they can make it on their own – which is usually in late spring.

There are no “sprays” – castor oil for instance – that will reliably get rid of moles. Trapping in active runs or using worm baits laced with poison may work – but can still require skill and patience. Even if one is successful in the short run – often empty tunnels will be claimed by other roles in the area. Sigh.....

Bee Balm

Bee Balm (Monarda) has been treasured for its beauty, medicinal uses, and pollinator-attracting powers for generations. Available in an array of pink, red, and purple flower colors, the spectacular crown-shaped flowers are favorites of hummingbirds and butterflies. This native perennial's deliciously fragrant flowers and foliage are resistant to deer and rabbit browsing.



Bee balm has long been a favorite of temperate gardens in America and Europe, but in recent years it has surged in popularity as the desire to plant beautiful and functional American natives increases across the nation. There are few joys as great as working around bee balm in the summer and being kept company by the citrusy, resonant scent of foliage and flower; unless of course it's witnessing the honey bees and hummingbirds jockeying for position around the unusual, two lipped flowers shaped like little crowns.

Those flowers are borne at the end of square-stemmed stalks that can rise up to 4 ft above the main foliage. Blooms come in an array of colors, from pinks to reds to purples to white, and flower in mid-summer with other garden favorites such as phlox, liatris and daylilies

If deadheaded, bee balm will continue to re-bloom until late summer, when the gardener may wish to leave the seed heads for hungry birds during the winter months.

Select a sunny site with soil that is rich in organic matter to provide moisture retention and good drainage. While bee balm can cope with soils of average fertility, dry soil for a sustained period of time will cause the plant to weaken and die. Mulching your plant with two inches of organic-based mulch will go a long way towards preserving the moisture between rain and watering by the gardener, especially as bee balm is shallowly rooted.

Bee balm is in the mint family and as such, will spread aggressively via underground stolons (creeping stems). For this reason it's not a good bedfellow for smaller, more delicate plants. Pair it instead with a hefty Shasta daisy or alongside Rudbeckia, Sedum, or Phlox, which will set off its blooms but will set boundaries.

Many gardeners appreciate this spreading characteristic, as it means lots of favorite plants to share with other gardeners – and that shallow root system makes it easy to do. For older plants, dig it up, discard the woody center, and make small divisions of the newer shoots and roots. Even a small piece will become a good-sized plant in a season. For younger plants, you can simply shave off pieces with a sharp spade, keeping the plant in bounds and giving yourself more stock. Regardless of how you do it, a stand of bee balm will need to be divided after three years as it's prone to overcrowd itself and weaken.



Bee-balm is known for becoming a martyr to powdery mildew, which appears later in the summer and will disfigure foliage, diminishing the overall appearance of the plant. But there are methods gardeners use to avoid it. First, planting cultivars that are fairly resistant, which is usually stated in specific plant profiles. Second, siting your plants where they have plenty of ventilation. Third, using organic fungicides when conditions start to favor mildew (heat and humidity), but before the plant shows signs of it.

A finely scented tea can also be made from the foliage. In Revolutionary America it was cultivated and used when colonists were unable to purchase black tea. The tea was named 'Oswego

Tea' after the river and area in upstate New York where Native Americans collected it for that purpose, amongst others. But it is not, as many think, used to create oil of bergamot – the main flavoring in the British favorite Earl Grey.

Bergamot is another common name for bee balm but is misleading. Certainly, the strong, citrusy fragrance emanating from bee balm bears more than a passing resemblance to a steaming cup of Earl Grey, but bergamot oil comes from a citrus fruit, not this cottage garden favorite. It is likely that this name was given to bee balm due to the resemblance (which is why botanists and horticulturalists have such a good case for using Latin names when it comes to plants).

But there is even more to this plant, used medicinally by the Native Americans for centuries. It has anti-septic properties as it contains a high proportion of thymol and is used in poultices in the treatment of wounds. It is also said to be helpful for the treatment of nausea and depression.

Monarda is a large genus of flowering plants commonly called bee balm. As such, there are many varieties of bee balm for your garden. Here are a few of the most popular and notable for their disease resistance, flower show, and overall health.

- *M. didyma* (**scarlet bee balm**) is a wild variety known for its bright red flowers. It is a staple in the bee balm family and has been used to create many improved garden cultivars.
- *M. fistulosa* '**Claire Grace**' boasts light purple blooms and is known for being a prolific bloomer and relatively disease-resistant.
- *M. didyma* '**Dark Ponticum**' sports dark purple flowers and attractive dark green foliage.
- *M. didyma* '**Purple Rooster**' is known for its exceptional disease resistance, particularly to powdery mildew, which commonly afflicts bee balm. However, its floral display is not as spectacular as other cultivars.

- **Monarda ‘Petite Delight’** is a dense, compact variety of bee balm with a mounded habit. It sports fluffy pink flowers and is a favorite for container growing.



Monarda fistulosa (wild Bergamont) is native to much of North America and typically grows in sunny sites along roads or open fields. Its lavender to purple flowers appear from mid- to late summer on plants that grow 2 to 4 feet tall. This species has good powdery mildew resistance. Zone 3-9. I plant this in my garden and it works well mass planted with other taller perennials, I have never has issues with it spreading and pollinators love this plant.

Skillet Spaghetti



I like to cook, and it helps to prepare meals that can be easily stored and then heated up for dinner or late-night snacks. This is a recipe that works well and is easy to prepare. I use a large 14 ½ inch diameter nonstick deep skillet that is 2 ½ inches deep. It’s a big boy. A Dutch oven can also work.

Ingredients:

One Classico Fire Roasted tomato and garlic sauce. Use what you like best Newman’s Own marinara is nice also.

1 ½ pounds of organic grass fed ground beef

4 cloves of garlic – finely chopped

3 small cans of stewed tomatoes 1 can of diced tomatoes

1 tablespoon tomato paste

Italian seasoning about a teaspoon.

1 teaspoon sugar

¾ of a box of thin spaghetti – break in half when adding to salted boiling water

Approximately 1 cup of red wine. A good Cabernet is fine, but Lambrusco also works really well.

Directions:

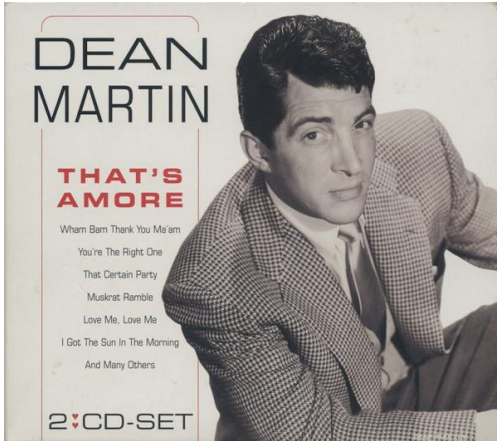
Put on water for spaghetti in a separate saucepan. I have one that has a lid that allows one to drain the water directly. As I mentioned before break the pasta in half before adding to water. Cook until tender-about 12-15 minutes. Not al dente. After draining, then chop the spaghetti with a spatula as much as you can into bite-sized pieces. I have even used scissors to do this. Don’t argue...please.

In the fry pan add the ground beef and brown. Use a spatula to break up the beef as it cooks. Don’t argue. Just do it. I mumble a lot when I cook – and I imagine I am an Italian chef in Italy. I mumble obscure Italian phrases like Maron Brando in The Godfather.

After the beef is browned, add the spaghetti sauce. I add the wine to the leftover sauce in the glass container and shake the container to get as much of the sauce into the wine. I then add the wine mixture to the beef.

Reduce the heat on skillet and just simmer the mix.

Add stewed tomatoes. I use my incredibly clean hands to squash the tomatoes as they sit innocently on top of the sauce. Then add the crushed tomatoes. Use spatula to mix and break up any larger tomato pieces. Continue to simmer on low heat.



Drain the pasta and chop as mentioned before. Sometimes I add a bit of olive oil to keep the pasta from sticking together.

Add Italian seasoning, tomato paste and sugar and garlic. I sometimes will add water or more wine if the sauce is too thick for my taste. I like a bit thinner sauce for this dish. Continue to simmer on low heat.

I then add the pasta to the skillet mixing it all together. I sing Dean Martin's 'That's Amore' as I do this.

One can add parmesan or mozzarella cheese on top along with Italian parsley. Mutter obscure Italian phrases and dance like a gypsy when doing this.

I will allow the pasta to cool. I then place the pasta in a large container. I can then reheat the servings in the microwave when I want to eat. It's nice because there is only a skillet and a saucepan to clean after cooking. I make wine coolers after cooking and drunkenly go outside to enjoy the day. I must exercise caution to avoid driving off the wheelchair ramp.

Amore Lyrics: I think ole Dean was hitting the sauce in the recording studio.

When the moon hits your eye Like a big-a pizza pie That's amore

When the world seems to shine Like you've had too much wine That's amore

Bells'll ring Ting-a-ling-a-ling Ting-a-ling-a-ling And you'll sing vita bella Hearts'll play Tippi-tippi-tay

Tippi-tippi-tay Like a gay tarantella

When the stars make you drool Joost-a like pasta fazool That's amore

When you dance down the street With a cloud at your feet, you're in love

When you walk in a dream But you know you're not dreamin', Senor-e 'Scusami,

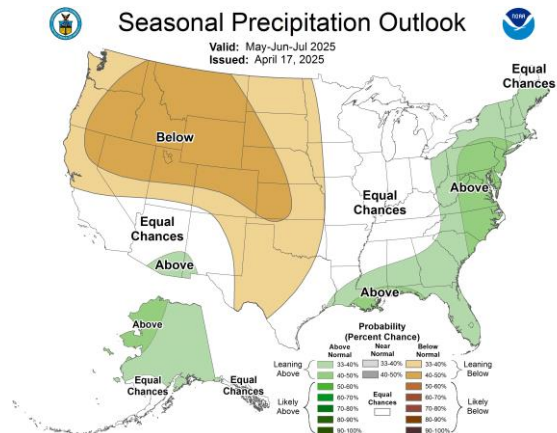
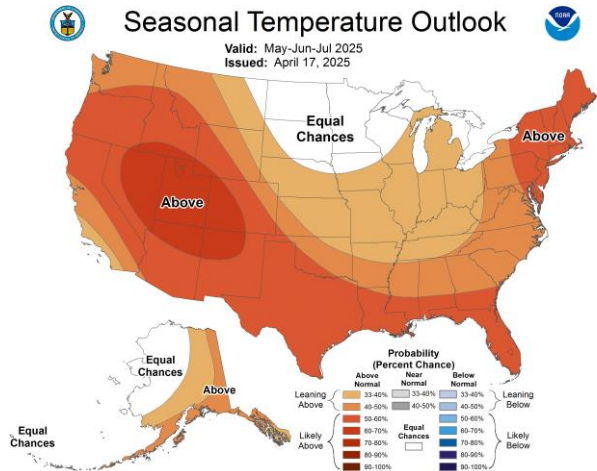
but you see Back in old Napoli, that's amore (When the moon hits your eye) (Like a big-a pizza pie, that's amore) That's amore

Summer Outlook

Here are the weather forecasts from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center for May, June, and July.

Once again they predict warmer than average temperatures with an equal chance of wet or dry weather. Our weather in northeastern Indiana has not cooperated with NOAA's predictions. Many days of below average temperatures, and lots of rain. April has been a good month to plant and move providing you could find a day to

actually do these tasks. As we move into May, it looks like once again many gardeners will start the year behind the eight ball- so to speak – to plant, weed, and mulch.



Slow Going

In our garden, things are slow, with sporadic bloom of plants in the garden. Our orange tulips are finally beginning to bloom. Just recently my clove currant planted last year is now blooming and spectacular.

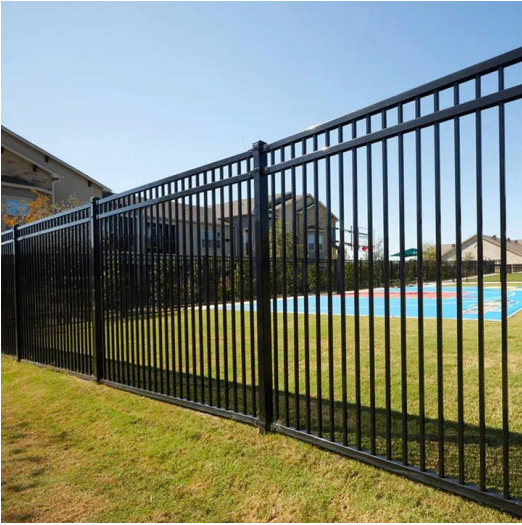
Ribes odoratum, commonly called clove currant, is a thornless, loosely branched, irregularly shaped, deciduous shrub that typically grows to 6-8' tall and as wide. It is native to slopes, rocky bluffs and stream banks from Minnesota and South Dakota south to Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

I like this plant because it is unusual and has multiple uses in the landscape. Golden yellow trumpet-shaped flowers appear in racemes in spring and emit a strong clove-like fragrance. Flowers give way to drooping clusters of large, oval-rounded, shiny black currants which ripen later in the season. Fruit can be eaten raw from the shrub or made into juices, jams, jellies, tarts and pies.



Since it has been rainy this spring, I think this is a good time to add fertilizer to existing perennials in the garden. One can scatter a slow-release fertilizer on existing perennials before you mulch. Osmocote is usually the fertilizer of choice. Since the bulbs are flowering, it is a good time to scatter a fertilizer over the bulbs so the plants can develop good roots over the summer. Many gardeners use fertilizer higher in potassium and phosphorous. Fertilize again when the bulbs are done flowering.

Fencing



This year we are replacing the crappy beat up chain link fence that surrounds our back yard with a newer taller modern fence in part to contain animals in specific areas, and also for a more modern look. Someone we know said we are going for the gated community look. Nope.....

This type of fencing is becoming more popular as it is easier to install than wood fence. Wood fencing also requires painting or staining and can shift and lean over time. Some folks install vinyl fencing but that can have issues with mildew and other issues. Using fencing also depends on whether one needs a tall fence for a barrier, like us, or a fence for privacy – which means you want a solid fence. Some folks like picket style fences for mostly a

decorative effect. Regardless, it is important to shop around, as I have heard horror stories from some folks if a fence is not installed properly. Make sure you investigate thoroughly before you pull the fencing trigger. Also make sure you investigate any local regulations – like from a neighborhood association and survey the property lines before a fence is installed. Talk to the neighbors beforehand before installing a fence. There are also some weird rules about fence ownership and maintenance if a fence complexly surrounds a property. It pays to ask questions (check with your city or town planners) and do the research beforehand.

The other issue with fences is weed control after installation as fences are magnets for birds who drop weed seeds, and the fence ground interface is an area where weeds will find. Weed barriers and mower access can help reduce this issue. Ultimately weed control may be necessary to keep the area clean.

Once Again A Rant About Root Flares

My friend Gwendra does the driving and so I have plenty of time to observe landscapes , neighborhoods, and commercial properties during our sojourns in the area. I continue to be appalled and annoyed by improper tree planting. Even trees planted by the city and professional landscapes where the folks who planted trees with buried root flares should know better.

The root flare is the place near the base of the tree where the trunk of the tree flares out before the roots begin. If this is planted below grade, or covered with a ton of mulch, the tree will develop circular roots around the base of the tree (see picture) that will eventually strangle the tree.



Sometimes trees are sold with the root flare already buried. Don't buy the tree – its like buying a couch with springs already coming out of the upholstery, rescuing a cat with horns, buying a pizza with no cheese, or trying to find a parking place in downtown Fort Wayne.

Please don't put a ring of pavers or stones around the trunk of the tree and fill the gap with soil. This also buries the flare. Certain death over time. Sigh.....



Boomer Logic

I am a boomer – and sometimes even I am amazed by our generation.

Boomer parent to son or daughter : I pressed a button on my phone, and now I can't text.

Reply” That's because you are on your AQL email account.

Out in the Garden



This is a picture of Ferdinand, my goose that I have had for many years. Sometimes I dress him up for a holiday. Or just for the fun of it. Ferdinand is situated near my fragrant viburnum. I like viburnums because even the flowers in bud are quite striking. When the flowers open fully, the fragrance from the flowers is very intense. Since the plant is located near the deck and sidewalk, it will fill the area with fragrance. Awesome plant with Ferdinand as the companion.

This is one of the Explorer climbing roses I have been raving about. It has survived the winter quite nicely and is already growing up onto my deck area

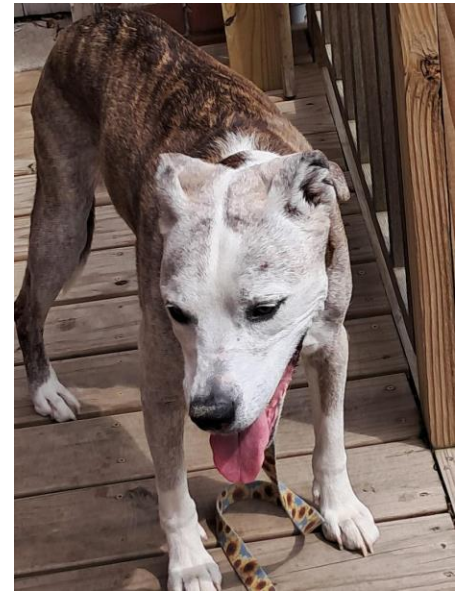
This is William Baffin and it should produce pink flowers in abundance this season. It's hardy to zone 3.





Under the Tulip tree in the front yard are orange tulips. I really like the color. We interplanted globe onion plants to extend the interest in the planting. Should look great!

Here is Gwendra’s rescue dog Kekela. She is 13 tears of age and has arthritis like yours truly. We suffer together and loves the deck so she can lay and bake in the sun.



s
and
she
out

Below is the Viburnum I mentioned previously in bloom. The fragrance is amazing, and it is a pretty shrub.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: I am a modest cat. Little did you know I have Italian roots. Not only did I serve as a cat guide on the pole boats in Venice , but I wrote the lyrics to the song “That’s Amore” I gave the lyrics to Dean Martin after a drinking spree in a Venice tavern.

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