

# Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

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

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## Kokedama – compiled from an article by Miruna Secuianu

Kokedama is a centuries-old Japanese form of garden art that is closely tied to the practice of bonsai. This Japanese term can be translated like this: “Koke” means moss, and “dama” means ball. Kokedama involves using a moss ball as the supporting and the focal point for a tree, shrub, or plant. In other words, it consists of wrapping the plant's roots in a ball of soil which you then cover with moss. The moss ball is either fixed to a platform, like a dish or a bowl, or suspended in the air with a string.

Kokedamas are pretty easy to make and can even be very therapeutic as the whole process involves patience and working with both of your hands independently, which is thought to help the mind be fully mindful of the task at hand.

### Here are a few plants that are suitable for Kokedama:

Pothos - Chinese Money Plant - Dwarf ZZ Plant - Ivy Peperomia- Ficus tree Bonsai

Spider Plant - Nerve Plant- Pineapple Mint - Rabbit Foot Fern- Bird's Nest Fern - Rex Begonia



The first step into making your own Kokedama is to mix half peat moss and half bonsai soil which you'll then dampen with water.

Next, you need to actually start making the ball around your plant's roots using the soil mix you've prepared. The next step is to wrap the soil ball you've made with sheet moss.



Once the moss ball is ready and has the shape that you wanted it to have, tie it up using wire, twine, or string, depending on what you prefer and work best with. Simply loop the wire/twine/string around the ball a couple of times.



The last step is to find a creative and attractive way to use the Kokedamas you make to decorate your indoor space. You can either add a separate loop that you'll use to suspend your moss ball or use a unique-looking tray or bowl to place the moss ball.

Like all plants, Kokedamas also need some sunlight to thrive. They don't like direct sunlight because this will only make them dry out quickly.



It is best to place your moss balls near windows but in a place where they get partial shade or, at least, where they are protected from direct sunlight. What's more, you also need to keep them away from any source of extreme heat such as a radiator because high temperatures also make them dry out quickly.

If your indoor environment lacks humidity, help the moss with a humidity tray or a humidifier to ensure that they remain moist and survive for longer.

Pay attention if your Kokedama becomes lighter because this is a sign that it is drying out. In this case, you need to give your moss ball a bath (literally!).

Take your Kokedama and soak it in water and allow it to absorb as much water as it can until it becomes heavy. Next, allow the excess water that has been absorbed to drip for a few minutes before you hang your Kokedama back. It's recommended to give your Kokedama a bath at least once or twice every week.

It is recommended to fertilize your moss balls once a month. To feed the moss ball, mix half of the suggested concentration of soluble organic fertilizer to the watering process you use.

Generally, a moss ball can survive for up to 2 or 3 years. However, the period can be shorter or longer, depending on the plant you use

To increase the lifetime of your moss ball, you need to keep an eye for the moment when the roots of the plant start to come out of the moss ball. This is a sign that the moss ball is too small for the plant's root system, and you need to remake the ball or replant it in a bigger ball.

To remake the moss ball, simply cut the wire or string and remove the moss, cut the excess roots and remake the ball with suitable soil and green moss.

**Ricky's Comments:** Kokedama is very popular with the Millennial generation as they generally love growing houseplants. It is sort of similar to the upside down tomato fad that every gardener was trying several years ago. Its interesting but a lot of work to keep plants growing and healthy long term.

## Using “Chemicals”

I never like to use pesticides if at all possible when dealing with any garden or landscape issue. Pesticides by their very nature kill things, and in doing so can be detrimental to the environment. and “natural” world.

However there are some pests out there that in my opinion where pesticides must be used to control or eliminate them . Here are a few examples.



**Canada Thistle:** This noxious weed cannot be managed without the use of a very specific pesticide called Thistledown. This weed spreads by seeds and underground structures called rhizomes. Efforts to dig it up, cover it for periods of time simply do not work. Digging only caused more underground shoots to form and grow. Do not believe the countless claims offered on social media. They do not work. Period. Two applications of Thistledown will eliminate thistle. It is labeled for use in ornamental plantings. It is expensive – but it does work.

**Scale Insects:** These insects are one reason I generally do not recommend Magnolias as landscape trees. Once scale insects attack the susceptible Magnolis tree – it will be a hard struggle. Scale insects form a shell or covering over this insect that sucks sap from the tree. Often sticky honeydew is present on the leaves and bark attracting ants and wasps to the tree. The honeydew can drip or be blown under and around the tree, covering surfaces such as cars for example parked nearby and causing a real mess. If left untreated the scale will weaken or even kill the tree.

In this case both dormant and summer oils should be used to smother the insect and systemic drenches such as Safari should be used after bloom. This dual control can eliminate scale on the tree but it will take at least two years to work effectively.

## Progressive Commercials

I never tire of the Progressive Insurance commercials that appear on T.V. They are funny, quirky and creative - evidently some are off the cuff and unscripted.

The actors in the Progressive commercials, including Stephanie Courtney as Flo, Jim Cashman as Jamie, Natalie Palamides as Mara, and Terrence Terrell as Terry, have become household names through their memorable and humorous performances. Each actor brings their unique talents and personalities to the Flo-

verse, contributing to the success of Progressive’s advertising campaign. Whether it’s Flo’s quirky charm or Jamie’s lovable awkwardness, these actors have undoubtedly left a lasting impression.

### **Stephanie Courtney as Flo:**

**Age:** Stephanie Courtney was born on February 8, 1970, making her 53 years old in 2023.

**Height:** Stephanie Courtney is 5 feet 8 inches tall.

**Spouse:** Stephanie Courtney is married to Scott Kolanach, a lighting director.

Before landing the role of Flo, Stephanie Courtney was a member of the groundlings comedy troupe and had appeared in various television shows and movies. She began appearing in Progressive commercials on television and radio in 2008. Since then, Stephanie Courtney has been in close to 30 movies and TV shows.



### **Jim Cashman as Jamie:**

**Age:** Jim Cashman was born on March 20, 1967, making him 56 years old in 2023.

**Height:** Jim Cashman is 6 feet 2 inches tall.

**Spouse:** Jim Cashman is married to Michelle Noh.

**Interesting Fact:** Jim Cashman not only plays Jamie in the Progressive commercials but is also a writer and producer for the company. He has been with Progressive since 2011.

### **Natalie Palamides as Mara:**

**Age:** Natalie Palamides was born on January 6, 1990, making her 33 years old in 2023.

**Height:** Natalie Palamides is 5 feet 7 inches tall.

**Spouse:** Natalie Palamides’ marital status is not publicly known.

**Interesting Fact:** Natalie Palamides is a comedian and actress known for her one-woman show, “Nate,” which won the Best Newcomer award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2017. Her acting skills and background in comedy help her stand out in the unscripted scenes. Natalie Palamides' Netflix special, A One Man Show, received positive reviews. The American actress also acted in several movies and TV series, including The Broadcast (2024), Life Above Ground (2016), and The Real Housewives of Shakespeare (2016).



### **Terrence Terrell as Terry:**

**Age:** Terrence Terrell was born on October 27, 1984, making him 38 years old in 2023.

**Height:** Terrence Terrell is 6 feet 2 inches tall.

**Spouse:** Terrence Terrell’s marital status is not publicly known.

Interesting Fact: Terrence Terrell is an actor and comedian who has appeared in various television shows, including “Empire” and “Criminal Minds.” He also co-hosts the podcast “The Bald & The Beautiful” with his friend, actor Brandon Kyle Goodman.

Born and raised in Cleveland, Mississippi, Terrence Terrell has always been interested in acting, writing, and creating inventive ads. He has an Emmy Award, even though he is new to acting. As a child, he would entertain anyone who would watch and listen. Throughout his teenage years, he was bullied but coped and turned the negativity into humor.

## A Bio Fungicide to Know and Use



Monterey Disease Control is a preventative bio fungicide/bactericide that uses the naturally occurring beneficial bacterium *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens* strain D747 as its active ingredient. This OMRI listed product can be used as a foliar spray or as a soil drench. When used as a foliar spray, this bacterium will overcome any pathogenic spores present. Spray application is suggested for those diseases affecting leaves, fruit and flowers - anything above ground. When used as a soil drench, this naturally occurring bacterium goes straight to the plant's roots, where it will establish itself and grow. This colonization prevents the establishment of disease-carrying bacteria and fungi. Drench application is favored for diseases affecting roots, tubers or any other part that comes in contact with the soil.

For use on ornamental trees, vegetables, fruits, nuts, flowering plants, houseplants, shrubs, and tropical plants grown in and around home gardens and greenhouses.

For best results, plants should be treated at the first signs of disease or before disease development.

Can be applied up to and including the day of harvest.

**Diseases Controlled:** Anthracnose (*Colletotrichum* species), Bacterial leaf blights, spots and specks (*Erwinia*, *Pseudomonas* and *Xanthomonas* species), Black mold, Brown spot and Black crown rot (*Alternaria* species), Black spot of roses (*Diplocarpon rosae*), Gray mold, Botrytis blight, Fruit rot (*Botrytis* species), Leaf spots (*Alternaria*, *Cercospora*, *Entomosporium*, *Helminthosporium*, *Myrothecium* & *Septoria* species) and Powdery mildews (*Podosphaera*, *Erysiphe*, *Golovinomyces*, *Sphaerotheca* and *Oidium* species, *Uncinula necator*, *Oidiopsis taurica*, *Leveillula taurica*)

**Diseases Suppressed:** Downy mildew (*Bremisa lactucae*, *Peronospora*, *Plasmopara* species), Early Blight (*Alternaria solani*), Late blight (*Phytophthora infestans*), Fire blight (*Erwinia amylovora*), Pin rot (*Alternaria/Xanthomonas* complex) and Scab (*Venturia* species)

# Hell Strips



A hell strip is that forlorn strip between the sidewalk and the street. This area has been often called a park strip, or median strip. Usually, the narrow area consists of a few trees and poorly kept grass at best and it is all too frequently nothing but a weed patch. Although the area is owned by the municipality, care is usually left up to the homeowner. Hell strip planting is a challenging task because the soil is usually badly compacted, stripped of nutrients, and negatively affected by road salt and grime. Additionally, reflected heat from asphalt and concrete keep the hell strip hot as you-know-what during the summer months.

Check ordinances and be sure your city allows hell strip planting.

Although many cities have certain restrictions and guidelines, most are happy to see the area beautified and cared for. However, they will probably tell you that it's your responsibility if the plant is damaged by snowplows, foot traffic, or road construction. When selecting perennials for hell strips, it's best to choose plants that are 36 inches (91 cm.) tall or less if there's any chance that the plants will block the vision of drivers – particularly your driveway – or your neighbor's.

Choose plants with a tidy growth habit that do not require much pruning or encroach on the sidewalk

Plant densely to discourage weeds

Repeat plantings(if possible) already present in the landscape for cohesiveness

Minimize the number of species for a simple classic look and to avoid looking too chaotic

Plant in mass to create a design effect similar to lawn

Use low, compact plantings so as not to obstruct views with a few optional taller things at the back or in the center for drama

Artemisia – Geranium – Hosta - Coneflower - Daylily - Lavender - Sedum spp - Catmint

Snow-In-Summer - Creeping Veronica- Woolly Thyme - Yarrow

Some neighborhoods across the country reward citizens for planting in the hell strip with tax breaks or other incentives. In our area, there are no such incentives for planting a hell strip.

In some communities people plant hell strips with vegetables, others plant the strip with a rain garden to collect stormwater runoff, others simply plant perennials for beautification.

I am not a fan of simply replacing the turf in a hell strip with taller perennials that will require maintenance. I believe hell strips should be planted with low growing perennials that fill the space with color if possible, at the same time establishing a planting that requires little if any maintenance. I prefer plantings with as few species as possible, and plants that flower early and long so that neighborhood code doesn't cite you for having tall plants that do not flower for most or all of the season. My favorite plant for a hell strip is yarrow that fills a planting over time – remains low and is colorful. Lower day lilies also would work, but I would combine early mid and late season day lilies for all season flowering.



# Fringetree – North Carolina Extension



Fringetree is a small, deciduous tree in the olive family (Oleaceae). It is native to the eastern U.S. Its genus name comes from the Greek chion meaning “snow” and anthos meaning “flower.” The species epithet is Latin for “of Virginia.”

This plant grows best in full to part sun with the best foliage in partial shade and the best flowering in full sun. Plant in average to rich, well-drained neutral to alkaline soil. It can tolerate clay soil, however, and also tolerates some drought. Small plants are best transplanted when young because larger plants resent disturbance at their roots.

Fringetree generally grows from 12 to 20 feet tall and wide, with a multi-stemmed rounded habit, though it can be trained into a single trunk. Fringetree grows about 6 to 10 inches each year. In late spring, fragrant flower clusters with creamy white fringe-like petals appear. The showy blue-black fruits,

maturing in late summer, provide a food source for birds and wildlife. A clear yellow color appears to provide some brightness to the fall landscape, and the bark, with its scaly dark brown ridges and red furrows, brings winter interest. In the nursery, it may be difficult to determine if the plants are male or female unless they have fruits present. The flowers have both male and female parts but are functionally unisexual. The system often breaks down causing a few fruits to form on functionally male trees. While the male flowers are slightly larger and showier, both male and female plants make beautiful additions to any garden.

Fringetree is a nice specimen plant in lawns and also works well as a flowering tree in a native garden. Plant it in small groups along a woodland border or take advantage of the sweetly scented blooms in a children's or sensory garden

## In the Garden

I have decided to try and use plants that I normally would not choose to plant in a landscape. A neighbor had planted this azalea in her landscape, and it has done well in a northern exposure.

Girard's Crimson Azalea is a hardy perennial, evergreen shrub prized for its year-round glossy green foliage and striking, large rosy-red crimson blooms. These showy red flowers will bloom mid to late spring.



Compact and rounded habit, Girard's Crimson will reach 2-4 feet tall and 3-4 feet wide when matured. Its small spreading size is perfect for foundation plantings, low hedge, borders, specimen planting, woodland gardens, shade gardens, and even in containers. It thrives in hardiness zones 5-8 and prefers partial sun or dappled sun. It likes moist, acidic, well-drained soil but not soggy or dense clay soil. In its habitat of origin on volcano slopes of northern Japan, these are known as "torch azaleas" due to the naturally intense coloring.

I have planted this in front of my He shed which will hopefully protect the shrub during the winter months.

# Bella Lugosi Day Lily



This day lily has caught the attention of me and my friend Gwendra. We plan to use it in the park strip planting that we are installing this year.

Hemerocallis 'Bela Lugosi' Daylily is a showy, semievergreen perennial blooming in midsummer. A dramatic, reblooming variety with a long bloom period, 'Bela Lugosi' produces 6-inch, trumpet-shaped, true purple flowers with a lime-green throat. The color is sunfast, unusual for a dark color. Each flower lasts one day, but each plant contains several long scapes with multiple buds that open in succession. So, it blooms for weeks, attracting butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds.

'Bela Lugosi' is a strong grower with a well-branched, mounding habit. This daylily is a tetraploid, with 44 chromosomes, twice as many as diploids. Tetraploids tend to be bigger, stronger plants. The full, grass-like, deep green foliage lends texture and color to the garden, so the plant is attractive even out of bloom. Although it is an excellent specimen, suitable for a container, 'Bela Lugosi' shows to best effect when grown in masses in large areas or in groups in beds and borders. It's an excellent choice for erosion control.



## Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

*To my caregiver: As a cat who happens to be a blood-sucking vampire, I would ask that the Bella Lugosi day lily be named in my honor. I have enjoyed sucking the very life out of you my caregiver in many psychological ways every single day.*

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