

# Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

June 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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## In The Garden

The Garden at the beginning of June is a bit slow to develop considering the below average temperatures, and cloudy days.



**Wiliam Baffin climbing rose - planted last fall is a real winner. This Canadian Explorer rose is flowering like crazy and hardy to USDA zone 3.**



**I love Siberian Iris I planted a mass of them and weeds are not an issue. This Iris does not have issues with Iris borer like bearded Iris and flowers longer even reblooming iof deadheaded.**



**Beauty Bush (Kolkwitsia amabilis) – right and left - is a rare and unusual shrub loaded with pink fragrant flowers.**





**Left – almost all of my annual dianthus planted last year overwintered and is spectacular in this year’s garden.**

**Right- Clematis – several types- is flourishing in this year’s garden.**



## **We Need More Festivals!!**

Fort Wayne has a festival every week – but I think we need more of them. Here is my list of festivals we deserve to have in Fort Watne.

**The Wheel Alignment Wheel Balancing Festival –** This festival is needed to celebrate the repairs needed after hitting hundreds of sunken manhole covers and potholes on our streets in Fort Wayne. Try and eat an ice cream cone while driving in the city. It will all end up on your face.

**Feel Free – Raise my A1C!!** - Enjoy every greasy, high carb food ever offered at a festival in Fort Wayne/ Alao available – a Big Gulp cup of high fructose loaded energy drink.

**Potatoes Potatoes!!!** - All we have are potatoes - .Come see Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head!!

**The Dodge Challenger Festival Extravaganza!!** Come and hear Dodge Challengers rev their engines and burn rubber!! Just like being on the streets of the city.

**Tiny Marching Bands and Horses!** Watch marching bands with less than ten members struggle their way through horsey doo-doo.

# Useful Native Viburnums for the Home Landscape

Viburnums are generally very useful plants for home landscapes. They can grow in full sun or part sun. Many have attractive flowers and or berries – and many have fall color interest. They are adaptable to different soil types – including clay soils. Many gardeners today are interested in native plants, and there are a few native viburnums that can be valuable additions to a home landscape.

**Blackhaw:** *Viburnum prunifolium* - commonly called Blackhaw - is a large, multi-stemmed, deciduous shrub or small tree. It is native to North America and grows in zones 3 through 9. It can grow up to 30 feet tall but can be pruned as a tree or large shrub. The plant provides 3 seasons of interest and is a high-value wildlife plant. The darling 5-petaled, star-shaped flowers are a creamy white and appear in fragrant clusters in early spring. The small leaves turn red and purple in the fall. Bluish – black berries mature in fall and are eaten by both humans and birds. Viburnums set fruit better with more than one shrub for pollination.



Blackhaw Viburnum is lovely to look at but also plays an important role for wildlife. The flowers are a food source for pollinators like butterflies, while birds and other wildlife eat the berries. Birds also use the branches as nesting sites and cover. This shrub has a branched, upright growth habit and can appear as a small tree when mature. Use Blackhaw Viburnum in a mixed bed where it will add height, or create a stunning border along a fence or property line.

This shrub grows well in dry conditions, making it an excellent option for busy gardeners or those living in areas with water restrictions. Give the Blackhaw Viburnum a spot with full sun, although it can handle partial sun. Average garden soil that promotes drainage is best because viburnum does not like wet feet. Established plants are drought tolerant, but water during a dry spell to keep the plant lush and healthy.

Unfortunately there is a darker side to the use of Black Haw as it was commonly used by slave owners to prevent abortion. Slaves were a valuable asset, and their owner also owned their offspring, so ensuring that female slaves gave birth was of paramount importance. In defiance, some slave women would attempt to use cotton seeds to cause a miscarriage. The slaveowners would therefore force pregnant slaves to drink an infusion of Black Haw to prevent that.

Black Haw was used extensively by the Native Americans, its berries as a food source and its root bark in many types of herbal remedies. They used a decoction of Black Haw to treat gynecological conditions, including menstrual cramps, aiding recovery after childbirth, and in treating venereal diseases.

It was enthusiastically embraced by the early colonists to the United States, where its use was well documented. It was used as a uterine tonic, again to relieve menstrual cramps and afterbirth pains, and it was also taken to prevent miscarriage.

**Arrowwood:** The southern arrowwood viburnum, *Viburnum dentatum*, is a plant valued highly for its ability to adapt to a tremendous variety of cultural conditions. Native from New Brunswick to Florida and Texas, it is a fast-growing viburnum with a multiitem suckering habit. Its long, straight stems were once used by Native Americans to make arrows. Hardy from Zones 3 to 8, it is a good plant throughout the season because of its creamy spring blossoms, its light green coarsely toothed leaves, and its deep blue fall fruits.





The fall foliage is yellow to red to reddish purple. Though in the wild the arrowwood viburnum grows in woodlands, bogs, and along stream banks, it adapts easily to many soil types in full sun to partial shade. It is even tolerant of alkaline soil. Growing from 6 to 12 feet high, this tough shrub can be used as the backbone of a screen or unclipped hedge against which more ornamental shrubs can be featured. It can be naturalized or placed in moist locations where other shrubs would struggle.

## Watering - What You Should Know

Summer is here and it is necessary to water plants properly so they are as healthy as possible. Water is an integral part of plant function and growth. It is necessary for photosynthesis, respiration, and cell structure and growth. Here are some do's and don'ts to water your garden and landscape effectively and efficiently.



Most plants need an inch of water weekly to be healthy. This is true – so it is important to know how much water actually falls on your little piece of paradise. Rain gauges work well but they need to be placed in an area out in the open so they are accurate. One can now measure daily and weekly rainfall amounts for one's specific location with apps for your computer or phone. Many apps work with I-phones, with fewer apps for android phones.

Never water plants in the late afternoon or evening. This practice promotes disease. Watering in the early morning is the most efficient way to water plants

Contrary to popular belief- watering when it is hot doesn't "burn" plants. It is inefficient- and cold water can sometimes stress hot plants.

Most established trees and shrubs really don't need much watering- even during drought periods. It is best to water deeply and infrequently- if at all. There are exceptions of course. Hydrangeas in particular need more water than most-especially if they are planted where they receive afternoon sun. Placing plants such as hydrangea, rhododendrons, azaleas, dogwood , Japanese maples, on the east side of a home or under other trees and shrubs is more sustainable because the plants simply do better with less water needed than if they are planting in exposed areas. In general. these plants- and recently planted trees and shrubs - need deep watering about every 3-5 days during hot dry periods.

Annual flowers and vegetables usually need watering about every 2-3 days during summer drought periods. Use a hand trowel to dig down six inches near the plants. Water when the soil at this depth is dry. Water long enough so the soil becomes moist at that depth. This can take a while, because generally an average faucet only produces a gallon of water every 30 seconds. It will take several gallons to water an area properly. Use a "breaker" to water – not just your thumb on a hose.



Most established perennials will need deep watering about once a week during hot dry periods. There are exceptions- Astilbes and clematis are touchy when it comes to drying out. Other plants, such as sedums- barely need water at all.

Mulching conserves soil moisture. Remember, three inches of mulch is all you need to help conserve moisture. Please do not pile mulch around the trunks of trees or the crown area of perennials.

Sprinklers can be used for larger areas, but one still needs to dig around to see how much water actually penetrates the soil. Rainwater is best for plants -so do your best to conserve it by using rain barrels if possible. I prefer overhead whirlybird sprinklers that cover large areas.

Final rule: Most plants die from overwatering.

## Fertilizer 101

Fertilizers provide the nutrients that plants need to grow and flourish in a landscape or garden. Each particular nutrient plays a role in plant function.

**Nitrogen:** This element promotes rapid green, leafy growth. Too much can cause a plant to grow too fast or not produce the part of the plant that you are growing it for. For example: too much on a tomato may cause the plant to grow lots of green leaves and few flowers, delay fruit set and attract insects such as aphids. The same is true of flowering and ornamental plants. Too much nitrogen can also burn plants.

**Phosphorous:** It stimulates early root growth and hastens blooming. Too much may be lost in the soil and wash into water ways.

**Potassium:** Increases resistance to drought and disease.

**Calcium:** Improves root formation and vigor and helps regulate the uptake of other nutrients. A deficiency combined with insufficient water will result in blossom end rot of tomatoes.

**Magnesium:** Aids chlorophyll formation and phosphorus metabolism. Regulates the uptake of other nutrients.

**Sulfur:** Imparts dark green color, stimulates seed production and formation of amino acids and vitamins.

**Micronutrients:** These are all necessary in tiny amounts, they work with the other nutrients to provide a balanced diet for all plants.

What kind of fertilizer to use is a question all gardeners discuss on every forum on the Internet.

**Fertilizers are sold in many forms, and you need to know the differences.**

Commercial ( or conventional) fertilizers are made from synthetically derived materials or are mined, and come in many different formulas depending on the suggested use of each product. There are many N, P, K combinations such as 16-16-16, 5-10-10 or 4-6-6 as examples.

They come in dry, liquid or slow release forms. Each package should tell you if the product has any minor nutrients. There are many combinations made for specific uses such as lawn, rhododendron or vegetable "food." Some commercial ingredients are derived from sources that are becoming scarce.

I still use commercial fertilizers for large areas – large perennial gardens or lawns – mainly because it is less work. The main issue with conventional fertilizers is how they are made – using a very energy demanding process that is not environmentally friendly. Another issue is that most of these fertilizers are made in the south – so shipping costs are also added on to the consumer.

The other main issue with conventional fertilizers is that they do not contain any micro-organisms that absolutely enhance plant growth and function. Micro-organisms explain why plants respond to organic fertilizers like compost even though the percentage of nutrients in those materials are low. In addition some research suggests that the salts in conventional fertilizer can damage microorganisms in the soil and drive away earthworms.

## **Organic fertilizers**

I use these types of fertilizers as much as possible in my garden and landscape.

There have been many studies from trusted sources about the benefits of compost for plants. Compost promotes plant growth but also can help plants be more disease-resistant – and help them absorb nutrients more efficiently. Compost can also improve soil structure, and nutrient and water-holding capacity.

The Rodale Institute has excellent information about how to make compost and its benefits <https://rodaleinstitute.org/why-organic/organic-farming-practices/composting/>

I also love to make compost tea to spray on garden plants.

To make compost tea, you can follow these steps

Put four cups of compost in a mesh bag. (I use an ankle-length panty hose)

Set the compost bag into a bucket and fill it with clean water. (I mix it in a five gallon container)

Put the bucket in a dark closet or basement and stir once daily. (I cover the bucket outdoors to prevent mosquitoes)

After one week, remove the compost bag, and you have compost tea. I use a small sprayer with a filter attachment to spray on the foliage of plants. Compost tea will never burn plants – I use it as often as once a week.

## **Manures**

It is better to use manures from animals like cows, rabbits or chickens. Do not use exotic manures from exotic animals from the tropics and or meat eaters. It is better to use “aged” or “composted” manures- where the poop has aged for at least six months outside. Manure teas can also be made but they can burn plants if too strong of a mixture is used. I like to use materials containing worm compost such as fertilizers or soil additives. Worm poop is really good for plants. It is easy to make at home <https://www.gardeningetc.com/advice/worm-composting>.



Other organic materials can be used in gardens. Fish emulsion is basically ground up fish used as a fertilizer. One can also collect seaweed from an untreated lake or pond- spread it out to dry – and then use that in a garden for a fertilizer.

Some folks use garden cuttings and or weeds without seeds as a fertilizer. Put in a large trash container and add water. After a week or so-use the water to fertilize the garden.

A fair number of folks on social media promote the use of human urine and or manure as fertilizer. In my opinion there is too much risk of spreading pathogens to edible food to consider this.

Whatever fertilizers one uses try to avoid using them on really hot dry days to avoid fertilizer burn. Plants do use up nutrients from the soil- so I try to fertilize most plants in the vegetable garden at least once every 2 weeks.

Mature trees and shrubs need to have fertilizer applied by a trained professional. For newly planted trees and shrubs I like to use a root stimulator (Greenlight Root Stimulator) at planting and maybe a month or two later.

Perennials prefer slow release fertilizer like Osmocote twice a year.

## ICE and Dog Breeds

ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) has been in the news a lot in recent months. My deranged mind has pondered the question: What if ICE broadened their activities to include dogs not born and bred here in the USA? Here are a few scenarios. **Note:** This article contains satire – from my deranged mind – try to take the article as that – making fun of our crazy world – my apologies to anyone offended. P.S. I watched a rerun of the Westminster Dog show-they are to blame.



**ICE trucks** pull up with sirens and flashing lights to a woman walking her chihuahuas in the street. Man on a loudspeaker: Lady! Down on the Ground! Agents surround the woman with rifles drawn... Your chihuahuas are being taken into custody and will immediately be deported back to Mexico! They will be trained to bite the ankles of cartel members interfering with the production and sale of Avocados! Avocado's from Mexico on toast shall survive and Prosper!!

**At a local dog park:** ICE agent on a loudspeaker (again): All German Shepards will enter our van immediately! These dogs will be returned to Bavaria where they will carry large round platters with huge mugs of beer and sauerkraut at any Oktober fest celebration held in Germany. Forever! *German Shepard owners say tearful Auf Wiedersehens to their pets...*

**News Release:** An executive order has been declared that all Pekingese and Pugs will be sent back from the US. to China immediately! These dogs will be trained to steal ideas and technology and discover the true source of the Covid vaccine.

*Only dogs born and bred in the U.S. will be allowed to stay in our country. Here is a summary of a few native breeds:*

**American Bulldog:** These dogs are valuable because they can smoke cigars and play cards better than any breed of dog in the world.

**Boston Terrier:** This breed is born with a hatred of anything in New York city – including especially the New York Yankees. They bark with an attitude and a weird accent. They run away from home to drink beer at a neighborhood bar.

**Assorted Coonhounds:** What better activity for a southern gentleman fired up on moonshine to drunkenly stagger to a tree where coonhounds have “treed” a racoon and take wild potshots at the racoon with grand pappy's shotgun?

**Eskimo and Other dogs from Alaska:** Anyone who has ever watched the series “The Last Alaskans” knows how naughty and disruptive this breed can be.. They never really follow simple directions and act like starving children constantly fighting over fish scraps.. They would just as soon drag a sled out on a partially-frozen river and swim back to shore to watch the human drown.

## **Blossom End Rot – Why!** *Adapted article from the*

*Farmer's Almanac by Catherine Boeckmann*

Blossom End Rot is once again showing up on tomatoes in our area.

Blossom-end rot is a disorder in which the tissue of the blossom end (the “bottom”) of the fruit breaks down and rots, thus reducing the quality of the fruit and the overall yield from the plant

Thankfully, blossom-end rot isn't caused by a disease or pest.

Instead, it is the result of a lack of calcium in the plant. Soils in our area contain plenty of calcium since the soil was formed from limestone bedrock. This lack of calcium occurs in soil that is over- or underwatered. Wide fluctuations in soil moisture reduce the plant's ability to take up calcium from the soil. When the demand for calcium exceeds the supply, the tissues in the fruit break down, and blossom-end rot occurs. It's important for gardeners to realize the End Rot is a condition – not a disease. Fungicides or insecticides will Not control Blossom End Rot – ever!



In addition to watering issues, calcium deficiency during fruit formation may also be caused by:

Too much nitrogen-heavy fertilizer - Improper soil pH - High salt levels in the soil - Damage to plants' roots

Some blossom-end rot is more or less normal in the first tomatoes of the season since the plants are usually under stress during the initial fruit set. It also tends to happen more often in plants grown in containers, as the soil is more susceptible to fluctuations in moisture. Blossom-end rot often appears while the fruit is still green or ripening, so it often affects the first fruits formed on the plants.

Blossom-end rot first appears as a small, depressed, water-soaked area on the blossom end of the fruit (the bottom, opposite the stem). The spot starts off looking like a dark bruise. As the spot enlarges, it becomes sunken and turns black or dark leathery brown in color. Half the fruit may eventually be affected.

The rot will not go away once a fruit is already affected. If the damaged portion of the fruit is small, you can trim it off and enjoy the rest of the fruit.

To help avoid blossom end rot.

Choose cultivars that are tolerant of calcium deficiencies and less likely to show blossom-end rot symptoms.

Avoid watering your plants too much or too little. Instead, water consistently and evenly.

Fertilize tomatoes using a product that contains nitrate nitrogen instead of ammonium nitrogen (as the latter may contribute to more blossom-end rot).

Avoid over-fertilizing during early fruiting, when blossom-end rot is more likely to occur.

Avoid cultivating or digging near the roots of plants, as root damage can affect their ability to absorb water and nutrients.

Staking plants or using sturdy cages and mulch around the plants. I like to use acidic pine needles to mulch tomatoes.

One can use calcium sprays on the tomato foliage to help prevent any future issues, but often Blossom end rot goes away on its own as the plant develops.

# More Garden Pics

I do want to say that If you live in the area you are more then welcome to arrange to visit our garden. Even small groups are welcome. Just email or text me with dates (several) that might work for you.



Left: I really like John Corbett – another very cold hardy Explorer climbing rose. The red flowers last a bit longer than William Baffin.

Right: Day lilies are beginning to bloom; I chose many varieties with different bloom times and colors to add more seasonal interest.



Left: False sunflowers are one of my favorite native flowers. These will eventually reach a height of about 5-6 feet.

Right: A view of the deck area with a UV cover to protect from the sun and rain. The petunias are from Young's Greenhouse. Love the color.





Left: A view of my He-shed.

Right: I have many types of low-growing catmint. In this case it frames the firepit area.



This day lily – called Meme’s Ricky – was hybridized by Advanced Master Gardener and grand mistress Day lily and Iris breeder Lana Wolfe (formerly Higgins). The blooms are eight inches (or more across). Thank you Lana – so much.

## Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

*To my caregiver: I am totally in favor of the ICE deportations of dogs. In fact if every dog was sent away (perhaps to Greenland) I would be the happiest cat EVER!*

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