

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

and Home Horticulture

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Written and compiled by Ricky D. Kemery, Allen County Extension Educator Retired, phone: 260 - 431- 6893

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.

Terrible Weeds

Often when one just maintains a lawn area, potential broadleaved weeds are suppressed by the turf. The weeds are there, but only when one removes the turf and exposes bare soil does one encounter weeds that spring up like magic. Other times one inherits a weed problem that occurred long ago when a plant was introduced when no one knew the consequences of bringing it in. Sometimes the weeds were around, but we didn't know they were a big time problem child. We have encountered all issues in our garden and pay dearly in time spent trying to control weeds – even in a mass planted garden.

The First Offender – Japanese Knot Weed.



Long ago someone planted Japanese Knotweed around Gwendra's house. This plant was introduced from East Asia to North America in the late 1800s as a landscaping ornamental. It soon escaped cultivation and today has a wide geographical distribution in more than 42 U.S. states where it has the status of an invasive species.

The ecological impact of Japanese knotweed is severe everywhere. It has no natural pests or predators that keep it in check. It chokes out native vegetation and reduces biodiversity, altering natural ecosystems and negatively impacting wildlife habitats.

Despite its invasive nature, Japanese knotweed has been used for centuries for its medicinal properties. However, research on Japanese knotweed is limited, and, therefore, many health claims surrounding it are not supported by strong scientific evidence. Japanese knotweed is especially high in resveratrol, a polyphenol found in red wine and various foods that has been associated with antitumor, anti-inflammatory, and heart-protective effects. Fresh Japanese knotweed can be grilled, cooked in other ways, or eaten raw. Numerous recipes are available online that detail ways to add Japanese knotweed to cooked dishes or baked goods. Japanese knotweed is said to have a tart flavor, similar to rhubarb.

Sometimes when I have mentioned our knotweed issue to other gardeners, I am lectured about removing the plant because it is edible and has a few health benefits. They are not around to deal with this weed. When I first met Gwendra 13 years ago and visited her place, knotweed had taken over the entire landscape. 4-6 foot high knotweed was everywhere and continued to spread everywhere. The plant forms huge rhizomes which spread deep in the soil. Simple cultivation does not work. I had to repeatedly use sprays of 51% glyphosate and managed to eliminate the knotweed on the northern side of the house. Even though I thought I had eliminated the six foot tall knotweed on the



south side of the garden and near the driveway, it came back and continued to take over the garden area. It is a monster. I used the 51% Round – Up with no surfactants because some research had shown the surfactants in Round-Up cause the most health issues. I still hated to expose myself to that much herbicide. This weed continues to be a monster to control.

Second Offender Creeping Bellflower

Gwendra’s property is surrounded by an unusual blue flowered tall perennial that grows in her alley and surrounding properties that I thought was a wild native very pretty *campanula*. Turns out it is actually a creeping bellflower that attempted to move into a garden where a bare area was left after a few plants were removed from the garden. One can ID this plants because the flowers often just form on one side of the stem. This plant also forms a deep taproot with creeping rhizomes. The Internet is filled with horror stories from gardeners trying to eliminate this plant. Our plan is not to use herbicides. Instead we will use a sturdy garden fork to lift up the taproot and then dig the rhizomes to control the bellflower. If we do this repeatably, then other gardeners have reported they can eliminate this plant. It is also important to cut off the flower spikes of the bellflower to prevent it from spreading to new areas. We have done this with permission from neighbors.



Third Offender Bindweed



Field bindweed is an introduced perennial weed that viciously climbs using tendrils to quickly overtake and climb over surrounding plants or structures like gutters in a garden. Notice the morning-glory like white flowers, and the spade-like foliage. The plant forms creeping rhizomes that quickly take over an area. Pulling the plant is difficult because the stem breaks off

easily. At the Display Gardens at Purdue Extension bindweed had taken over an area planted with unusual evergreens. We tried removing the evergreens and then spraying the area repeatably over an entire season with Round-Up. This failed to completely control the bindweed. In a perennial garden herbicides are tough to use without damaging neighboring plants. Hand pulling can help but it will not actually control its spread.

In a perfect scenario one would eliminate all existing weeds before ever planting a garden area. Unfortunately one can inherit weeds that were planted long ago, weeds that move in after planting, or are already near your garden in the surrounding neighborhood. Life is not fair when it comes to invasive weeds in a garden space.



Gardening Panic and Regret in July



This is the time of year when gardeners get on the Internet to report that their lives are in complete disarray. They have no time to clean, cook, do laundry and other household tasks because the upkeep of their gardens is overwhelming. Many just give up and let the garden go – the garden becomes an embarrassing weed patch and an eyesore. It was all different at the beginning of the season when the same gardeners talked about how wonderful it was to be outside in nature getting exercise and reducing stress by planting watering and weeding the flower and vegetable gardens. So much for that dream of hope that became a nightmare.

The same issues plagued the gardeners at the Extension office when I was there. Some garden teams were more focused on planning and then planting their garden spaces than preparing the garden for less work later on. I remember stressing every year that the spaces need to have soil amended if necessary, then weeded, then planted and mulched so later on the maintenance was easier. Some teams insisted on doing things their way and paid for it later on.

Over the years I learned tricks that help reduce the panic in July.

Know how much time you really have for a garden. How many vegetables do you really need? You can find garden planners on the Internet that discuss how many plants are needed for certain size family units. Many gardeners grow much more than they need. Same for flower gardens. How large and how many flower gardens are necessary for you to be happy? Does the entire landscape have to be a garden and can you maintain it? Many gardeners have careers - children to raise. Does having large areas to maintain fit into the schedule? Be brutally realistic.



Get out as early as possible to prepare soil and weed.

Avoid using horse manure which can be loaded with weed seed. Be careful of using mulch from landscapers or tree services as that too can be laced with all sorts of problem weeds. Even purchased soil from commercial suppliers can contain tons of weeds.

If you grow vegetables use raised beds as much as possible. Weeds have a much tougher time establishing in raised beds, and the taller the raised beds the tougher it is for them to invade and the easier it is to deal with them as they are easier to reach. I usually top off my raised beds each fall with compost and rotted leaves and this really helps reduce any weed invasion while at the same time adding nutrients and microorganisms to the soil in the beds, I see many younger gardeners who still grow their vegetables in larger conventional gardens.



Conventional gardens are usually tilled every year. Tilling brings up buried weed seeds and this becomes a maintenance nightmare. Some gardeners attempt to do a “no till” method where the soil is not disturbed and deep mulch is added. I have seen first hand these type of gardens can become completely full of weeds. This is because many weeds are blown in or scattered about by birds or animals visiting the garden. The deep mulch is a good spot for those seeds to germinate. The bottom line is that no matter

how hard you try some weeds will always invade a garden area. How many weeds invade and what kind of weeds invade depends on you. I will also add that most “homemade” remedies for weed control only burn off

the top of the foliage. The weeds will reappear after a while. I know some folks will argue, but that is the truth unless one sows an area with so much salt or some other material that nothing will grow in the space for a long time.

Raised bed soil can be made using the lasagna method and as long as you use weed free soil amendments, will be as weed free as one can get. Bagged soil can be used, but it is more expensive and labor intensive. Bagged soil is pasteurized so weed seeds are absent, but the pasteurization of the soil does eliminate soil microorganisms. Here is a link: <https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-make-a-lasagna-garden-2539877>

Mass planting flowers can really help to reduce weeding in the landscape. Adding vegetables or herbs in a flower garden can also fill in space and help make a garden easier to maintain. For example I seed some dill in the flower garden every year. I like the way it looks, it doesn't spread readily in mass planting, and I harvest it to use in cooking salmon or potato recipes.



Homesteading is popular among some folks nowadays. I watch some PBS shows that make it seem as if growing vegetables, raising chickens, turkeys, geese, goats llamas, rabbits and other creatures is such a joy. It may be joyful, but it is also a ton of work to homestead as I know some homesteaders who work very hard to raise healthy food for their families. Think about homesteading before you put all your marbles in or start out small to see if it is the life for you.

My final comment is to say be realistic and practical. Plan ahead and design and maintain your spaces to reduce maintenance in the long term so you don't panic and give up gardening in mid-summer.

Out in the Garden

Flowers in our garden are finally developing and right now it is a chaos of color. I was finally able to camp out in my he shed for an afternoon and the views are fantastic.



Left: Our Golden Rain Tree is blooming. This smaller tree blooms in July / August. It will form seed pods than can produce saplings to give away. It needs more pruning after flowering for a better shape.

Right: Another decorative fountain from Stucky's on Lima road that we placed near our deck. The sound of water is very soothing.





Left: This Primal Scream day lily from Oakes Day Lily is fantastic. It should become a lot taller as years progress.

Right: This climber rose First Lady on the gazebo is very vigorous and free flowering and has a spicy fragrance.



Weird Things That Can Happen To Your Tomatoes

Growing tomatoes is the number one vegetable gardening activity. With so many folks growing tomatoes, it is not a surprise that insect and disease pressure is high. Tomatoes grow wild in the foothills of South America, so they are more used to the sunny cool slopes of the Andes mountains – not the hot humid conditions of northeastern Indiana. Following are some common and more uncommon problems you might encounter with your tomatoes.

Tomato Hornworm



The plump, green menace known as the tomato hornworm is a significant pest for anyone who grows tomatoes and other members of the nightshade family. (These include peppers, potatoes and eggplants.)

The tomato hornworm is the larval stage of the five-spotted hawkmoth. They're primarily found across the northern United States. In late spring, female moths lay small, spherical, greenish-yellow eggs on the underside of foliage. Hatching after about a week, the larvae begin to feed on your plants. They go through five instars, or stages, where they shed their old skin to allow for new growth.

Their green color provides perfect camouflage amongst the foliage, since they're almost the same shade of green as tomato leaves. The most damage occurs at this stage, as the caterpillars eat voraciously to fuel their

growth. After gorging themselves for two to four weeks on your poor tomato plants, the larvae burrow into the ground to pupate. They can reach up to six inches deep in sandy soils. They overwinter in their protective cocoons before emerging as moths in spring to start the cycle anew.

Emerging from the pupae, the adult five-spotted hawkmoths are impressive creatures with a wingspan of up to five inches.

Because hornworms are large, you can easily pick them off your plants. Doing this regularly, especially in the early morning or late evening when they are most active, can greatly reduce their numbers. I drown them in a bucket of soapy water. I know it's not nice, but it's a safe, easy way to get rid of them.



Braconid wasps are natural predators of the tomato hornworm. Attract these allies to your garden by planting flowers that draw them, like dill, parsley and mustard. The eggs of the wasps are parasitic, and the larvae eat the hornworm from the inside out. If you find a hornworm covered with the eggs of the wasps, just leave it alone as the wasps will find and parasitize other hornworms.

Use *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt): *Bacillus thuringiensis* (sold as Dipel Dust) is a naturally occurring bacterium that's harmless to pets, wildlife and humans but lethal to these caterpillars. Dust

the tomato foliage at the first sign of an infestation, and it'll kill the hornworms after they ingest it.

Plant basil: The strong scent of basil masks the smell of the tomato plants, disorienting and repelling hornworms. Plus, basil improves the flavor, health and vigor of tomato plants.

Early Blight



Early blight, caused by a fungus, is the most common type of leaf spot disease on tomatoes. Early blight is more prevalent in hot, humid regions and remains in the soil for one year. In areas impacted by early blight, choose disease-resistant cultivars with Resistant to EB (Early Blight) labels.

Dark brown spots encircled with rings start on the lowest leaves and move up, eventually causing foliage to shrivel, dry up, and fall. Lesions develop on stems and fruits. The defoliation causes sunscald. Remove infected lower leaves. Apply a tomato fungicide at the first sign of infection or when weather conditions are favorable for the disease to develop. Monterey Complete Disease Control is a good organic bio-fungicide to use (available online).

Prevent early blight by watering at the soil level and mulching. Keep adequate space between plants and rows; use stakes or tomato cages.

Fusarium / Verticillium Wilt

Fusarium wilt and verticillium wilt are often confused with one another—their symptoms are similar, but they're caused by separate fungi. In warm weather, the entire plant wilts down during the day, often recovering at night. Symptoms start on older, lower leaves and move upward. Eventually leaves on one side turn yellow, dry up, turn brown,



and fall off. The inner tissue of the lower stem turns red or black. Plants may die quickly or succumb in a week or more.

Treatment is similar for both types of wilt. Remove and dispose of infected plants and roots. Fungus spores can remain in soil for many years, but this disease does not spread among plants grown in the same season. (There is no effective fungicide for wilt.)

Septoria Spot



This fungal infection affects leaves but not the fruit. Septoria thrives in warm, wet weather, so watch for symptoms and act immediately.

Septoria more often appears at the first fruit set. This fungus appears on leaves as multiple small, dark circles that enlarge to 1/3- to 1/4-inch in diameter. The spots develop a tan or gray center, and the leaves eventually wilt and fall off. It spreads rapidly, causing loss of older leaves first, then infects new foliage, and can quickly move through an entire crop. Early leaf drop leads to fruit loss and sunscald.

The most effective treatment is repeated applications with a tomato bio fungicide (Monterey Complete Disease Control) Remove infected leaves to prevent the spread of spores to other leaves, as water splashing on the leaves helps transmit the disease.

Good garden sanitation is critical for preventing septoria leaf spot. Remove fallen leaves and debris from the garden immediately. Clean tools before and after working with plants, water at ground level, and control insect pests. Rotate your tomato crops every three years.

Late Blight



Late blight is a more serious disease affecting tomato leaves, stems, and fruit. It develops in cool, wet weather and spreads rapidly.

Greasy-looking, irregularly shaped dark brown blotches with green-gray edges appear on leaves. A ring of white mold develops around the spots, especially in wet weather. The spots eventually turn dry and papery. Blackened areas may appear on the stems. The fruit also develops large, irregularly shaped, greasy gray spots and can turn mushy from a secondary bacterial infection.

Fixed copper sprays (Kocide or Bordeaux Mix) offer some control. Late blight can overwinter in soil, tomato debris, and seeds, even in colder areas. Remove all the debris. Rotate crops to prevent infections the following year.

Bacterial Wilt

Bacterial wilt is a very serious disease that affects not just tomatoes but also other crops in the Solanaceae family, potentially including peppers, eggplant, and potatoes. The disease loves high temperatures and overwatered tomatoes.

Leaves will begin wilting and can turn yellow or brown, before the whole plant perishes – usually very quickly.

Remove infected plants immediately and dispose of them. Do not plant solanaceous crops again in this area. There is not much you can do once the disease sets in.



Curly Top



Curly top virus can be found in over 44 plant families such as garden tomatoes, beets, beans, spinach, cucurbits, potatoes, and peppers. Sugar beets are the most commonly infected hosts. The disease is transmitted via the tiny sugar beet leafhopper and is most prevalent when temperatures are warm and populations of leafhoppers are greatest.

The infected leaves of tomatoes and peppers become thick and stiff, rolling upwards. The leaves of beets become twisted or curly.

If plants are very young and become infected, they will usually not survive. Older plants that become infected will survive but will display stunted growth. It is sometimes hard to know the difference between curly top on plants and heat stress. The best way to determine what is ailing your plants is to water the plant thoroughly in the evening and check it in the morning. If the plant still shows signs of stress, it is most likely curly top. Since this is a virus, there is no cure.

What are Influencers?

The term "influencer" has become quite common online, especially in social media marketing. What was previously being done by celebrities is now taken over by regular people with large followings on social media platforms. The influencer marketing industry will be valued at \$24 billion by the end of 2024.



An influencer is someone who has the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of his or her authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with his or her audience. Influencers are usually active on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, X, TikTok, and Instagram.

An influencer is known for a specific niche—be it fashion, travel, gaming, beauty, cooking, fitness, or any other interest area. They create content around their niche, and people who follow them are interested in that particular topic.

For example, James Charles is a beauty influencer with a significant following on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. He makes content around makeup hacks, beauty tips, makeup tutorials, and product reviews. People who follow him are interested in beauty and makeup, and they trust his recommendations for products or brands.



Sometimes, influencers also encourage their followers to act, such as buying a product or signing up for an event by sharing their discount codes. For example, Jesse James West is a Gym Shark influencer who shares his code with his followers, encouraging them to purchase Gym Shark products at a discounted rate. His net worth two years ago was approximately 3 million dollars.

Mega-influencers are individuals with at least a million followers on their social networks. Most of them are celebrities who have gained their fame offline, such as movie stars, sportspeople, musicians, and even reality television stars. However, some mega-influencers have gained their vast following through their online and social activities. Content creators such as PewDiePie and MrBeast (picture to right) are some examples of mega-influencers. His estimated net worth is about 102 million US dollars.



Some smaller audience influencers who will create content for free when you gift them products. Sana Jardin was promoted on a TikTok video promoting their perfumes when they sent some samples to Elise Loves Smells, an influential perfume content creator with nearly 38k followers.

Some influencers are popular bloggers making them ideal partners for brands that want to focus on in-depth and long-form content. They also make excellent partners in your affiliate program as they drive clicks and purchases directly from their blogs.

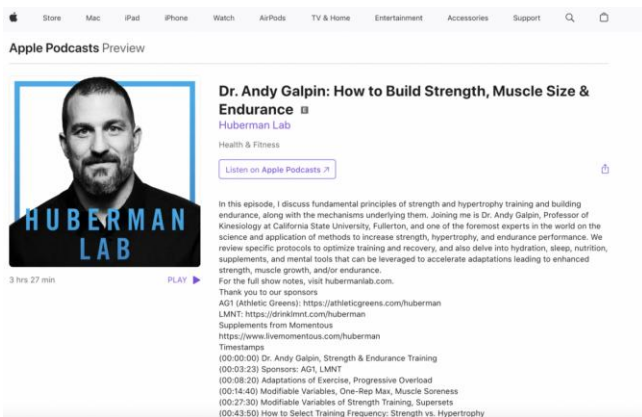


For instance, Nomadic Matt is a highly popular blogger creating content about all things travel. He created the following blog post on travel backpacks and listed links to buy each product featured in the post. When readers make a purchase through the links he shares, he earns a commission.

There are influencers who primarily create video content using YouTube as a platform. The style of video may vary depending on the influencer and the niche they specialize in. So you may have a travel influencer creating travel vlogs, a gaming influencer sharing game walk-throughs, a comedy influencer putting together a skit, a beauty influencer sharing makeup tutorials, and so on.



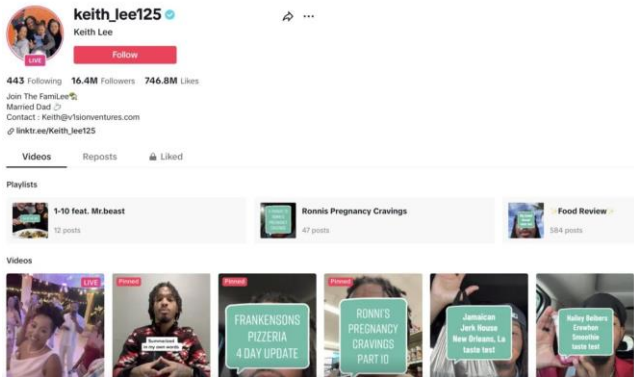
Youtubers build their influence by sharing their expertise and taking a unique approach to tackling a topic. For instance, makeup influencer Bailey Sarian has gained over 7 million subscribers on YouTube by discussing true crime, mysteries, and dark history while she does her makeup.



Podcasters are influencers who primarily create audio-focused content where they talk (literally) about specific topics in their chosen niche. Their content may involve a solo speaker, an interview-style discussion, or a panel of people participating in a conversation.

While most podcasts lack a visual element, they draw in a highly engaged group of listeners who tune in to hear what they have to say. In fact, there are 460 million podcast listeners globally, according to the latest podcast statistics. 62% of U.S. consumers listen to podcasts.

Podcasting influencers are an excellent option for brands that want to raise awareness about their products or services. Brands like Athletic Greens, LMNT, and Momentous have sponsored episodes on Huberman Lab, a podcast by Andrew Huberman.



Keith Lee is a TikTok creator who primarily creates food-related TikTok videos. He's the creator behind the viral Chipotle hack, which resulted in the food chain adding a new temporary item to their menu. He has garnered over 16 million followers on TikTok and 2.2 million followers on Instagram, where he maintains a secondary presence.

Why Be an Influencer?

As with many things in life it is about the money. In some cases it is about not working in a structured corporate setting. Many influencers are from the Y and Millennial generations who either can't or won't work at a traditional job. I can't tell you how many friend requests I receive on Facebook from people who list their professions as influencers. The national average salary for an influencer is \$52,035 per year. This may depend on the size of the influencer's presence, how many brands they partner with and the success of their sponsored or advertised content. Influencers may be able to earn more if they grow their following or collaborate with a popular brand.

Sometimes influencers do really stupid things. This influencer woman stomped all over plants in this conservatory for Instagram shots despite staff repeatedly asking her to stop





This Social Media Influencer to left was caught destroying California's super bloom of poppies.

Influencers commonly travel to public or private gardens to take tons of selfies - sometimes destroying the plants in the process.



OVERNIGHT IN RAMEN NOODLES BATH (Challenge) | Sam Golbach

This influencer above challenged viewers to take an overnight bath in ramen noodles to attract attention. Never mind the wasting of food.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: I would like to announce my new job as an influencer. My plan is to video my daily activities such as ripping up carpet, destroying mini-blinds, new furniture and other activities to torment my caregiver to promote my new cat food line called Hello Hoggles. Hey if Martha Stewart can promote Hello Kitty Cat Litter – I can earn millions with my cat food.

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