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.

Wetlands "Mitigation"

It is now widely accepted that wetlands are a vital resource providing services to both humans and the greater environment. Wetlands protect and improve water quality, floodwater storage, groundwater recharge, maintaining surface water flow during dry periods, and provide habitat for fish and wildlife, recreation and aesthetics.

Wetlands are defined as the places between areas where it's always wet and areas where it's always dry. They may be wet year-round or only seasonally. They are often distinguished by the presence of aquatic plants, which adapt to live in saturated soil. Wetlands are hugely important to birds and other wildlife. Wetlands provide birds with places to breed and nest, and as places of refuge to eat and rest during migration. Some of Indiana's most vulnerable birds depend on wetlands.

Unfortunately Indiana has lost most of its wetlands. In the 1800s and 1900s millions of acres of wetlands were converted into farms, cities, roads, and to protect human health. Best estimates from a 1991 Indiana Department of Natural Resources report suggest that Indiana has lost over 85% or 4.7 million acres of the approximately 5.6 million acres of wetlands that existed in Indiana circa 1780. Only about 10% of Indiana's original wetlands remain, and data show accelerated wetland loss, This is partly because of new laws passed by the Indiana State legislature. A 2021 state law, Senate Enrolled Act 389, removed all state protections for Class 1 wetlands, which make up more than half of the state's remaining wetlands. Although considered to be less pristine, those wetlands still help reduce flooding and improve water quality. Indiana has recently lost more than 260 acres of wetlands in the two years since a new state law made Hoosier wetlands land more vulnerable. The new law also reduced the permit requirements for disturbing or filling other wetlands in Indiana.

Indiana now ranks fourth among states with the greatest loss of wetlands. More recently the building of a new Goggle data center has caused some controversy regarding permission to develop commercial enterprises on wetland areas. In this case, Google has requested to build on 2.5 acres of protected wetland on the site of the $2 billion data center it is constructing in southeast Fort Wayne.

Google's request was filed by Hatchworks LLC and has to be reviewed by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). No wetland permit has been issued for this phase of the project yet, and

determinations are made in accordance with Indiana's State Regulated Wetland Law, according to IDEM. That law requires permits for filling or excavating in wetlands. It also requires "compensatory mitigation," which means Hatchworks LLC would purchase other wetlands from a wetland mitigation bank and protect that land to make up for the land they fill at the data center.

This compensatory mitigation allows companies to fill in existing wetland areas for development and use a "credit" to purchase wetlands located elsewhere to "protect" In my opinion, this is a loophole for companies to develop sites and to destroy existing wetlands. The birds and other creatures on the existing wetlands at the Google site will have no place to go and they will most likely perish. In addition floodwater control will be replaced most likely by a retention pond somewhere but drainage off the Google site will be compromised.

Evidently this is the price of "progress".

Rose-of-Sharon

Our Rose-of-Sharon is blooming in a location in what we call our "side" garden. I have noticed other Rose-of-Sharons in Fort Wayne also blooming at this time. Rose-of-Sharon is an interesting plant that is native to Asia, India and areas of the Middle east. It is a highly treasured plant in Japan.

Rose-of-Sharon does provide late-season flowering interest in landscapes in our area. It is also considered a relatively low maintenance plant with few serious disease or insect issues. Japanese beetles like the plant but rarely do any serious damage.

Rose-of-Sharon likes area in full sun with decent drainage. It does not do well in areas with poor drainage or area that flood. It grows well even in clay soils and soil pH seems less of n issue compared to other plants. Late spring frees or hard frost can sometimes reduce flowering.

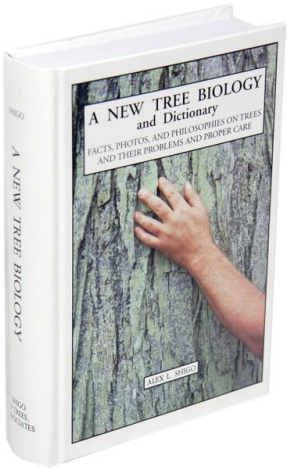
Rose-of-Sharon can spread from seed but seedlings can be easily removed if they appear near the plant.

The biggest issue is that the old wood on the shrub must be remove occasionally or the shrub can become a tree over time. The plant produces flowers on new growth, so if it is not pruned flowers can be located only on top of the plant in fewer numbers.

Once the plant reached about 6 feet in height - I usually cut back the plant in early spring to about 3-4 foot in height and remove any older growth at ground level (usually located in the middle of the plant). The same pruning strategy is used to remove overgrown lilac shrubs.

If I do this every year or so, then I always have a shrub rater than a tree that flowers more profusely and consistently to produce beautiful flowers late in the season.

Alex Shigo



Perhaps the greatest authority on tree pruning was Dr. Alex Shigo. His book “A New Tree Biology” is probably the most definitive source of information about properly pruning trees.

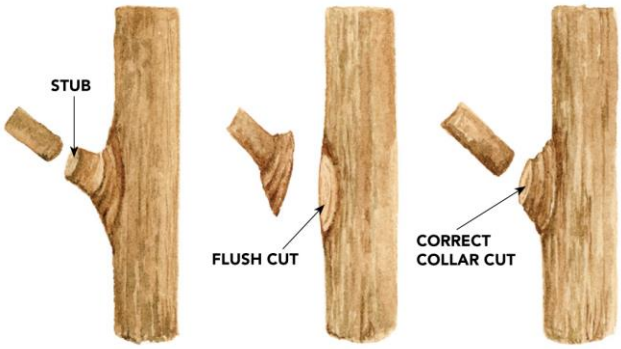
Before that book was written, professional tree pruners pruned trees making flush cuts, right against the surface of the tree, and then sealed the cuts with paint, tar or other long-lasting goop. Shigo proved that many of these pruning techniques were doing more harm than good. Shigo determined that instead of healing themselves as our skin does, trees heal themselves instead by a process he called compartmentalization (building new wood around the damage) to avoid decay in trees. One of the most important recommendations Shigo made was regarding where to cut a branch when pruning. Shigo recommended that branches not be cut past their "collar," - the slight swelling of tree material often seen at the base of a branch. This collar provides protection to trees against injury, - a trees’ natural defense was lost when the collars were flush cut - or if large stubs were left on the tree to rot over time..

Shigo also recommended that no more than a third of a tree should be pruned in a season as over pruning puts stress on the tree and can make it more susceptible to disease and insect issues. He also was against topping tree as the resulting growth from topped trees was subject to breakage and decay.

In my opinion folks need to hire a tree professional (usually a certified arborist) to properly prune trees in their landscapes so they can grow properly in the future. The arborist might also have further suggestions on observing or adding additional measures to keep the tree healthy.

Rules for properly pruning trees.

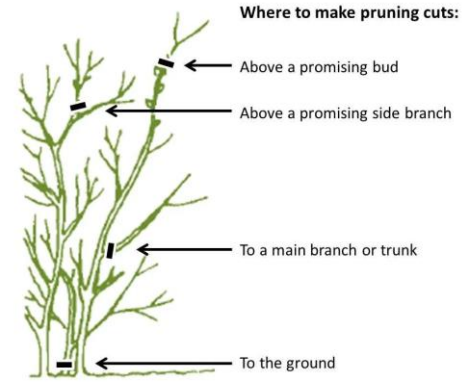
Avoid “Flush Cuts” If one prunes too close the branch will not heal properly.

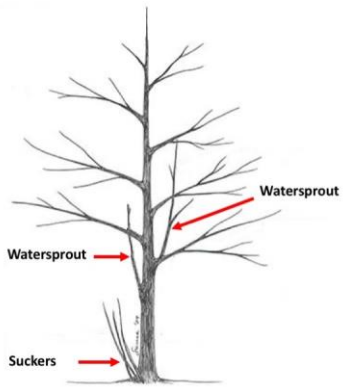


Avoid Topping Trees – Condemns the tree to a slow and painful death and can create unsafe and weak branching.

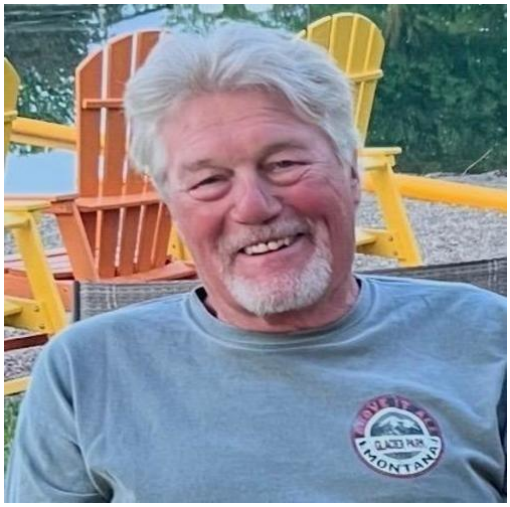
Avoid Over Pruning – Prune no more than 1/3 of the tree in any one season. Below is a tree that is WAY over pruned.

Prune properly (below) and anything that grows straight up, that covers or crosses another branch or grows to the interior of the tree.





A Special Day



One Friday afternoon in late August we traveled to Steuben County to attend a visitation for a high school classmate of mine who passed away recently. Neal Knox was a superior athlete at Hamilton High school where he played baseball, football, basketball, and track and field. I played basketball with Neal and we were placed on the varsity team when we were just freshmen. He played power forward and I played center since I was the tallest person on the team at 6'4". One highlight of our careers was winning the NECC conference tournament in 1971 and being recognized as first team all-conference players.

As a classmate Neal was funny and very popular at our small school. He eventually married his high school sweetheart Beverly and farmed and also worked for the power company as a lineman.

Hundreds of people came to the visitation. Lines stretched out from the entrance all the way across the parking lot for hours – they were still there when we left after spending almost four hours waiting in line and inside the church. It was great to meet Beverly again after so many years, and Neals' brother Noel whom I worked with when he was an advocate for Fort Wayne Parks.

On the way in Neals original letter jacket was displayed, and there was also a scrapbook containing pictures of Neal in sports activities. One section of the scrapbook contained pictures of our high school basketball team. I found my picture in various photos which brought back tons of memories from those days long ago.

As we left I thought about the wonderful legacy Neal left. He impacted everyone he met with his kindness, humor and caring. I have never seen such a display of love from so many people. He made a mark in his life that will always be remembered.

Lanternfly

The spotted lanternfly is thought to have first been brought to the U.S. from China on a stone shipment in 2012.

The first spotted lanternfly infestation broke out in 2014 in Berks County, Pa. Since then, spotted lanternflies have been seen in New Jersey and 10 other states — Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

The species is considerably highly invasive and a threat to crops. Spotted lanternfly was observed recently in Fort Wayne – especially in the downtown area- but in other locations as well.

Lanternfly is a member of a group of sap-feeding insects known as "planthoppers." They crawl up the sides of buildings; they feed at high densities (by the hundreds or even thousands) on single trees, where their sugary

excrement, known as honeydew, rains downs on anything below and attracts stinging bees and wasps. Because honeydew is sugar-rich, a sooty mold often grows on it, which visibly blackens trees, understory plants, decking and lawn furniture. Lanternfly feeds on the sap of over 100 different plant species, including economically important crops like grapevines, maple trees, and black walnuts. Their feeding can weaken and potentially kill these plants, leading to significant agricultural losses. Both nymphs and adults of spotted lanternfly can damage plants. There is usually only one generation per year and eggs are laid in the fall (September to December). Adults are the most obvious and easily detectable stage because they are large (about 1 inch) and highly mobile. Adults have black abdomens with yellow bands that become visible as they mature. Their forewings are gray with black spots, and the tips are black with gray veins, while their hind wings are red, black, and white. Only the adults have wings and can fly.

Lanternfly adult

Tree - of-Heaven an invasive tree found in waster areas, is a favorite of lanternfly because it is used as a brood tree. Many experts recommend the removal of tree-of heaven as a control option.

The spotted lanternfly feeds voraciously on several economically important crops such as grapevines, hops, ornamental landscape plants and certain trees. Lanternfly's strategy to survive is to attack a plant with huge numbers. Heavy infestations of this insect have contributed to the death of grapevines.

Spotted lanternflies do not bite, sting, or pose any direct health risks to humans or pets. However, the presence of these pests can lead to discomfort due to the attraction of other stinging insects.

It is crucial to manage and control their populations to protect plants and crops from the damage they can cause. If you encounter a spotted lanternfly, it is recommended to kill it to help prevent further spread and damage.

Circle Trap

In my opinion one should use least-toxic insecticides to help control lanternfly such as neem, insecticidal soap, and pyrethrum. Natria is a company that has environmentally friendly controls for lanternfly. Some citizens have reported success setting out a tray of soapy water that attracts and kills the insects once they dive in. Many experts recommend the use of what is called a circle trap which can be placed on trees to trap the pets so they can be sprayed in mass numbers. Scouting for egg masses which are deposited by adults on trees also helps. Circle traps are available on Amazon.

Many states ask citizens to report lanternfly infestations to agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources. The DNR does not treat lanternfly infestations, but many states attempt to quarantine areas in an attempt to slow the spread of the insect. In my opinion, these efforts have failed in the past as in the case of Japanese beetle, spongy (gypsy) moth, and emerald ash borer.

Most experts agree that lanternfly is here is stay, and the hope is that natural enemies and new control options over time will help keep lanternfly populations under control. For the next several years, expect lanternflies to be a real problem.

Catmints

I have written about Catmints before but it is such a great plant that performs well even during drought periods we have experienced this summer. A reliable long-lived perennial, catmint (Nepeta) is a member of the mint family. It produces aromatic gray-green foliage and upright flower spikes in shades of lavender-blue, pink or white. Bloom occurs from late spring into fall, with the small tubular flowers attracting hummingbirds, bees, butterflies and other insect pollinators.

Catmints are native to the Caucusus Mountains in Turkey and northern Iran. These area are tough areas for any plant to grow well.

. Leaves are highly aromatic when crushed or bruised. Catmint flowers may continue throughout summer into early fall under proper growing conditions and with proper shearing of spent flowers. Although *Nepeta cataria* is the true catnip which drives house cats ecstatic, the leaves of this species are also attractive, though somewhat less enticing, to cats. Our cat loves to roll around in the plants located in our garden.

Catmint is drought tolerant and thrives on neglect, making it good for beginning gardeners, low-maintenance landscapes and water-wise borders. Hardy in USDA zones 3-8, plants are virtually pest and disease-free, while the mint-like scent repels deer and rabbits. Catmint's mounding or upright growth habit is perfect for mixed borders, as pathway edging, or in mass plantings.

Catmint grows easily in most soil types, including rocky or clay soil. Plants will perform best in well-draining soil to prevent root rot. Catmint is drought tolerant once the root system is established, needing little or no supplemental water. Catmint does best with little or no supplemental fertilizer. There are many cultivars of catmint – some grow close to the ground and others can reach up to three feet in height. Some varieties of catmint may become leggy or flop open at the center. After initial flowering, shear plants as needed to encourage a bushier habit and rebloom later in the growing season

Bagworms – A Pesky Pest

Recently I talked with someone who had talked with a person at a garden center who told him to spray for bagworms in May every year to control them. Well this year he sprayed in May, but his spruce tree was covered with bagworms this fall. He then sprayed the bagworms again recently and then cut down the tree a week later.

I don’t like to see people spray pesticides unnecessarily. In this case the pesticides were sprayed with no hope of controlling the bagworms.

Many folks still have trouble identifying bagworms because the cone-like houses the bagworms make for themselves really look like they are supposed to be on the shrub or tree. True bagworms make houses for themselves that look like little cones hanging from the plant.

Bagworms are tough to handle because of the silken houses that each bagworm quickly makes for itself after it hatches in late spring or mid-to-late summer in our area. The small caterpillars quickly begin feeding and spinning a web like material to make a bag - or little house - for itself. Female bagworms never leave the protection of the bag. The bag protects the bagworm larvae from birds and other critters who might like to eat a juicy young caterpillar. The larvae quickly develop and enlarge their house. They are voracious feeders; and move along the shrub by spinning and attaching new webs to attach themselves as they feed. Think of Spiderman jumping from one building to another-the bagworms move across a tree or shrub in the same way.

Bagworms like any other insect are influenced by degree days. Based on the weather bagworms can emerge as early as May but often can emerge much later in the year. Bagworms are actual worms that spin a cone-like web around themselves that protect them from birds and other creatures. The bag also protects the bagworm from pesticides. The only way to protect trees like spruce and arbor vitae (their favorites) is to spray the foliage of those trees at the time when the bagworms begin to feed on the foliage of the trees.

This requires vigilance as one must look at the trees during the season. One knows when the bagworms are feeding when one sees the bagworms swing back and forth on the trees – moving along the branch using silk to attach and reattach themselves as they munch away on the foliage. It is an eerie site as the whole tree appears to be moving. This is the time to apply pesticides on the foliage to control and kill the bagworms.

Since bagworms are protected by their little houses, it is important to use an insecticide that covers the foliage that will poison the caterpillars as they feed. The foliage of smaller shrubs and trees can be treated with Dipel dust or a liquid spray called Thuricide. This environmentally friendly compound works well on younger bagworms-essentially giving them a big stomachache. Mature bagworms (cones 2 inches or more in length) can be treated with Spinosad - sold as Captain Jack's Dead bug Brew, Monterey Insect Control, or Fertilome Borer, Bagworm, Leaf miner, and Tent-Caterpillar Spray. Make sure to follow label directions and thoroughly cover the foliage. Large trees infested with bagworms will probably need to be sprayed by an arborist. In the fall, insecticides are ineffective against the bagworms as they are done feeding for the year. Make sure to remove any bags that might remain on the plant over the winter. Use a pair of scissors to cut and remove the cones. Each over-wintering cone can contain 50 or more eggs that can hatch out into a new generation of annoying bagworms next season. In my opinion it is better to use environmentally friendly pesticides on bagworms as they begin to feed in the spring and hand pick and destroy any leftover bags in late summer or early fall.

Ruth and the Prairie

One of the activities of the Master Gardener volunteers at the Allen County Extension office was answering gardening phone calls from citizens in our area. Each year, approximately 6,000 folks called our office for research-based information.

There were few volunteers left when I came to work at the Allen County Extension office as a Horticulture Educator in December of 1995. It had been almost a year since the previous administrator had left. One of the few volunteers left who still answered phones was an elderly woman

named Ruth. Ruth was in her seventies, but she had a youthful smile and her eyes were still mischievous. It took Ruth a while to warm up to "the new guy", but over time Ruth would consult with me over the few calls she needed help with.

Gradually, we became friends. Ruth had lived in the area all her life. She invited me to her house to have dinner with her and her husband Ralph, her soul mate whom she had been married to for over 50 years. Ruth told me of the days when she and her family would grow and harvest vegetables to take to a farm market in the city. She had used her skills as a Master Gardener to create wonderful flower and vegetable gardens that her and Ralph tended. She cooked wonderful dinners using the vegetables and fruits that they grew. Ruth was very perceptive. She looked at me once and said, "I know your life hasn't been easy, and I know that sometimes you are sadder than you let on".

Ruth believed (like many folks from her generation) that it was important to give back to the community. She gave talks to groups and organizations about gardening. She loved to help the people who called the office requesting information about gardening. She found her joy in life with many things; but she surely found joy in helping others.

Gradually Ruth's activities at out office began to decline. I heard she was ill, but she had never mentioned her illness to me. Despite her illness Ruth came and helped me celebrate my birthday in September of 1999. Ruth and the volunteers purchased a cake and gave me a few items. They never knew how much their friendship meant to me. My first wife had long ago given up even acknowledging my birthday.

In December of that year, just a week before Christmas, I received word that Ruth was in a nursing home. She was not expected to live long. She had cancer, and it was too late to do anything about it. I visited her. Ralph was at her bedside. I held her hand and read her a story I had written about a Christmas long ago. I wanted to get her mind off the pain I knew she felt. When I finished the story, tears were in her eyes. "That was a wonderful story", she remarked. She told me how sad she was that she would not experience another Christmas. I kissed her forehead and said goodbye - tears streaming down my face – knowing I would not ever see her again. Three days later she died.

After her death, I received a letter from Ralph. He told me that my visit to Ruth so close to her death meant more to her than I would ever know.

Volunteer coordinators are told not to become too involved with their volunteers. I ignored that advice from my supervisors. I always wanted to remain involved with the volunteers I know. They give me so much joy in return. They were there at times when I was at my lowest. They deserved nothing less in return.

The following spring, I looked out over the prairie I had recently installed in an area near our Extension office.

As I looked at the tall grasses dancing in the wind, I was reminded of the fall of 1992, I was an undergraduate student when Purdue University Horticulture professor Dr. Michael Dana took me for a walk on a prairie. I was one semester away from finishing my bachelor's degree at Purdue, and I was working part- time for Dr. Dana as a teaching assistant.

I had never seen a prairie before. I had read stories about the prairie; the most notable is the Little House on the Prairie series I had read to my children. I didn't realize that there were actual prairies in Indiana.

We traveled northwest, to the border of Illinois and Indiana to a tiny town called Ambia. We parked along a deserted road. "Here we are", Dr. Dana remarked. At first glance, I was less than impressed. Between the road and the railroad track was an area of tall vegetation that looked like weeds. "Let's go", Dr. Dana said.

We spent several hours walking the prairie. I soon discovered that the prairie grasses were much taller than they looked form the road. They stretched over my head easily; and I am six foot four inches in height.

Prairie Gentian

Nestled within the grassers were forbs, the prairie flowers. We found the rare prairie gentian and observed the broad foliage of prairie dock and forbs such as rattlesnake master, purple coneflowers, and liatris (Blazing Star). The only sound we heard was the wind rustling through the tall grasses, which swayed and danced in patterns of light and shadow. I fell in love with prairies that day.

Nowadays one can only find remnants of prairies near railroad rights-of-way and old cemeteries that are not mowed. Many people drive right past these rare remnants; not realizing they exist.

Over the years I spent many hours visiting prairies in Indiana and Ohio. I developed a prairie area in the Display gardens near the office where I work. Many of the plants I installed were propagated from seed collected at Ambia prairie. Visitors to our garden prairie can see a rare legacy of our past.

I stood for a long while looking at the prairie I had created. I thought of Ruth and Ralph and their wonderful life. So rare and so wonderful was their love for another. The next day I called a volunteer who made signs for our Display Gardens. She made a sign which named the prairie after Ruth Ehle and her wonderful, joyful, spirit. Visit it sometimes- you will see her spirit - so free and joyful - still there.

Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: Would it be so difficult for you to grace my feeding dish with a few sprigs of catmint for my enjoyment? I have a lonely life trying to meet your every need. Must you constantly deny me the pleasure in life I truly deserve? So what if I stumble around like a drunken sailor after imbibing a bit of mint?

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