

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

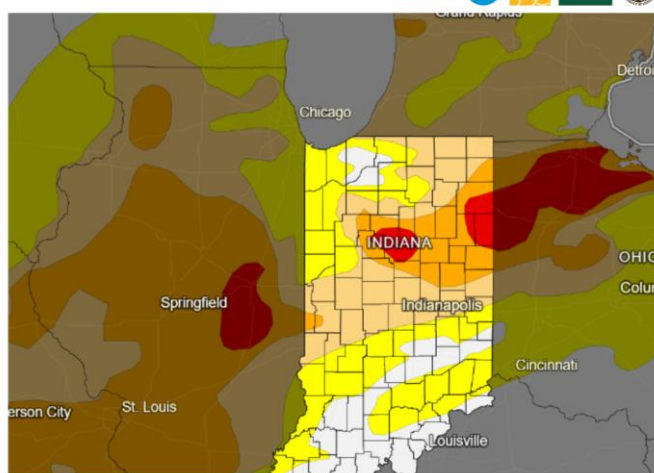
October 2025 Issue

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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.

Drought Conditions and Fall Tasks – Do's and Don'ts

U.S. Drought Monitor: Indiana



Drought & Dryness Categories	
D0 - Abnormally Dry	
D1 - Moderate Drought	
D2 - Severe Drought	
D3 - Extreme Drought	
D4 - Exceptional Drought	
Total Area in Drought (D1-D4)	

% of IN
35.6%
26.9%
11.8%
3.9%
0.0%
42.6%

Source(s): NDMC, NOAA, USDA
Data Valid: 10/16/25

Drought.gov

Drought worsened significantly throughout September in Fort Wayne, It was the driest September in 30 years. Severe drought extends from Kokomo to Muncie to Fort Wayne. According to the National Weather Service, so far we have received approximately 20 inches of precipitation so far this year. Our area averages 38.1 inches of rainfall annually Without substantial improvement this winter, soil moisture shortages could extend into next spring's planting and growing season.

This extended drought will affect how folks should manage fall tasks in the yard and landscape.

Normally lawns should be fertilized in early fall so the lawn can store nutrients to get a head start the following spring. In my opinion adding fertilizer to a super dry lawn this fall is counterproductive as the salts contained in the fertilizer can dry out the turf even more than it already is and burn it up. I would wait until conditions improve to apply fertilizer to the lawn. Lawns can be fertilized as late as November as long as the soil is not frozen.. The same logic holds for core aeration of the

lawn. Pulling out plug cores now would not only be difficult to do in hardpan dry clay, but opening up holes in the lawn now could dry out the lawn further.

Even mowing is an issue. Running a mower over a drought stressed lawn will damage and compact the lawn. Mowing can also send a message that encourages the lawn to grow after mowing, and that will be difficult if the soil is super dry. I see many folks around town mowing drought-stressed brown dormant grass. They are doing more harm than good. The bottom line message is if these drought conditions persist as predicted is best to leave well enough alone until conditions improve.

One can set sprinklers to irrigate the lawn, but it is important to remember to apply enough water to moisten the soil to at least a 4 inch depth each time we irrigate to make sure we provide enough water for the root zone. If



we don't, then we "spoil" the lawn and end up with a weak root system. Water again when the soil at the 4 inch depth dries out. A soil probe can be purchased online to insert into the soil to test for dry/moist soil.

As we approach the winter months it is very important that perennials head into the winter with adequate moisture. Perennials need moisture in the root zone to avoid issues with entering into a dormant state so that they are more susceptible to cold injury and desiccation. Apply enough water so that each time one waters the soil at the 6-8 inch level is moist. Usually one has to do a bit of digging near the plants to check moisture levels

at that depth. I would definitely recommend making sure that trees and shrubs planted this year be watered deeply before winter this season. Watering deeply means applying at least 5-10 gallons of water per week per plant as long as the drought continues and no or little rainfall is received.

Pay special attention to evergreen trees and shrubs as their needles can be desiccated when exposed to strong winter winds. Boxwoods, hollies, and Japanese maples can also suffer. I would not worry about large existing trees as it would take hundreds of gallons of water to irrigate the trees, and they can handle drought periods as they have done in past droughts in our area. We have survived severe drought conditions before – especially in 2012 and dramatically in 1988. The drought of 1988 became the worst drought since the Dust Bowl 50 years before in the United States; 2008 estimates put damages from the 1988 drought somewhere between \$80 billion and almost \$120 billion in damage. The drought of 1988 was so devastating that in later years it was compared against Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and against Hurricane Katrina; It would be the costliest of the three events. I remember when rain finally fell in late 1988, citizens stood outside in the pouring rain and cheered as the water finally soaked the parched soil. This year, the trick is to maintain plants so that the drought causes as little overall damage as possible.

Cold Hardy Crape Myrtles



Crape myrtles are sturdy landscape staples that offer lush summer flowers, vibrant fall color in shades of orange, yellow, or red, and striking winter bark texture. These plants are used extensively in the south, and some gardeners consider them like weeds because they are so common.

All crape myrtles are sun lovers, generally cold hardy in Zones 7-10, although there are some that will work in Zone 6 as well. Now there are a few varieties hardy to zone 5. These are the types that can be planted in our area. They are extremely heat-tolerant and quite drought-tolerant once established.

When I was still working for the Extension service we had two cold hardy varieties at the Display gardens. One was planted in front of the office, near a brick wall that retained heat during the winter. The other was planted in the Patio Garden in the back of the building in a

'Tonto' Crape Myrtle

protected corner near the window of my office. It was spectacular every spring. Both plants lasted quite a while but eventually died off.

Now in my old age, I am willing to give a hardy crape myrtle another try. The Crape Myrtle Company online offers quite a few small trees and shrubs that are hardy to zone five. I chose “Tonto” a small tree that is touted as one of the sturdiest varieties offered by the company. It reaches a height of about eight feet. My plan is to plant it near my He Shed which should protect it from winds from the west southwest that are common during Indiana winters. Our house being two stories protects the area from winds from the north.

We will see how it does. In my opinion it is still important to protect the plants by placing them in area that offer winter protection such as alcoves or areas facing east. Larger plants can be placed near the crepe myrtle to offer more winter protection. Choose an area that is well drained and amend the soil in the area before planting.

Hopefully you will be successful and able to brag about the plant to anyone who will listen.

A La Nina Winter

"La Niña conditions emerged in September 2025, as indicated by the expansion of below-average sea-surface temperatures across the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, Forecasters say this La Niña could impact the tail end of the 2025 hurricane season, and also have an effect on fall and winter weather in the United States.

Experts at NOAA say there’s a 60% chance that La Niña will develop by the end of November and a 75% chance it will develop by January. But the anticipated La Niña doesn’t appear to be very strong

"La Niña conditions are associated with more hurricane activity (double the amount) in November when compared to ENSO Neutral and especially when compared to a Novembers with El Niño conditions,"

When a La Niña phase occurs, less wind shear occurs in the regions of the Atlantic basin where tropical weather develops, increasing the potential for more storms,

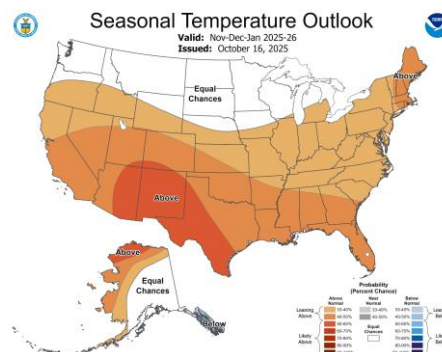
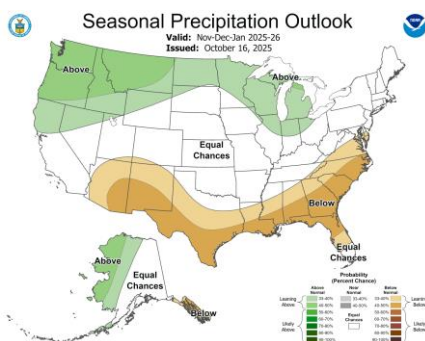
A typical La Niña winter in the United States brings cold and snow to the Northwest and unusually dry conditions to most of the southern states, according to the Climate Prediction Center. The Southeast and mid-Atlantic also tend to see higher-than-average temperatures during a La Niña winter.

It could increase the amount of moisture in storms, making atmospheric rivers more prolific rain and snow producers, while also slowing the winds in the jet stream

The Farmer’s Almanac predicts a cold and stormy winter, especially in the Midwest, Great Lakes, and Northeast. NOAA's winter forecast predicts above-average temperatures and precipitation in the Northwest and Great Lakes regions.

The Great Lakes region is also expected to be wetter than normal — conditions that could lead to more snow.

Below are the three month outlooks.



Belgian Endive



Belgian endive is a small, cylindrical head of lettuce (about 6 inches in length) with pale yellow leaves that are tightly packed and feature slightly curly edges. It is moderately bitter and is grown just beneath the soil in dark rooms, much like mushrooms, to keep it light in color and preserve its delicate flavor. The first endives are believed to have originated in Egypt and Indonesia, making their way to Europe in the 16th century.

It isn't cheap either. But if you really want to serve something different with your roasted chicken or fish, it makes for a surprisingly good side dish, adding a bit of complexity to a

meal

Chopped, it can be used in salads, or it can be braised whole or baked as a side dish. The leaves can be separated and used as an edible dish for small appetizers or used as dippers. The compact heads of endive can be brushed with a vinaigrette and grilled, a good accompaniment for grilled fish.

Endive, in general, is both a little confusing and a little complicated. It doesn't refer to just one type of green but to the leafy part of any of the bitter-flavored plants in the chicory family.

For cooking, the other two main types are curly endive (*frisée*) and broad-leafed endive (*escarole*). *Frisée* is an unmistakably bushy head of curly greens with lacy leaves. It looks a tad unruly on the plate, like a tangled mane, which adds an unusual visual contrast to the foods with which it's paired.

Frisée is slightly bitter and often used in salads for both texture and flavor, but it can also be sautéed. To further muddy the conversation, in the U.K., *frisée* is simply called endive.

Belgian endive" typically refers to the specific variety grown through the forced-growth technique in Belgium. Other endive varieties include curly endive, *escarole*, and broad-leaved endive.

Broad-leafed endive is sometimes called *escarole*. The leaves are longer and larger than the others, with wavy edges. Clean it as you would any other head of lettuce, whether you are going to eat it raw or cook with it,

Belgian endive can be used in various ways, such as in salads, appetizers, grilled, sautéed, or added to soups and stews. The leaves can be separated and used as individual cups for fillings.

This **endive salad** recipe is a mix of refreshing, tangy and sweet! Combine this bitter green with orange, Parmesan and red wine vinaigrette.

Ingredients

Belgian endive

Radicchio (thinly sliced, for color; or purple endive if you can find it)

Oranges



Sliced almonds

Pecorino or Parmesan cheese

Vinaigrette

Red wine vinegar

Dijon mustard

Maple syrup or honey

Kosher salt

Garlic powder

Neutral oil or olive oi

Cut off the bottom 1/2-inch of the endives. Cut the leaves in half lengthwise, leaving most of the smaller leaves whole. Rinse the leaves and blot them dry with a towel or place in a salad spinner to dry.

Zest one orange. Then cut both of the oranges into segments (or simply remove the pieces).

Make the Red Wine Vinaigrette.

Place the endive leaves on a large plate or platter, or on individual plates. Top with the sliced radicchio, orange zest and slices, sliced almonds and shavings of Pecorino or Parmesan cheese. Top with the red wine vinaigrette (taste and add more if necessary). Belgian endive is often paired with prosciutto and fruit such as pears or apples to offset the bitterness. I became a little more interested in endive and other bitter greens because the PBS show “Back to the Cutting Board” cook Christina Pirello mentions that bitter greens can cleanse the liver and improve mood based on a stressed liver. Since I am cranky most of the time I felt it wouldn’t hurt to try some bitter greens.



Major Droughts in History

There were at least three major droughts in 19th-century North America: one from the mid-1850s to the mid-1860s, one in the 1870s, and one in the 1890s.

Tree-ring data showed evidence of a major drought from around 1856 to around 1865. Native Americans were hard hit, as the bison they depended upon on the Plains moved to river valleys in search of water, and those valleys were full of natives and settlers alike. The river valleys were also home to domestic livestock, which competed against the bison for food. The result was starvation for many of the bison.

The 1870–1877 drought brought with it a major swarm of Rocky Mountain Locusts, as droughts benefit locusts, making plants more nutritious and edible to locusts and reducing diseases that harm locusts. Locusts also grow more quickly during a drought and gather in small spots of lush vegetation, enabling them to swarm, facts which contributed to the ruin of much of the farmland in the American West.



The Dust Bowl or the 1930's was a period of severe dust storms causing major ecological and agricultural damage to American and Canadian prairie lands from 1930 to 1936 (in some areas until 1940). The phenomenon was caused by severe drought coupled with decades of extensive farming without crop rotation, fallow fields, cover crops or other techniques to prevent erosion. Deep plowing of the virgin topsoil of the Great Plains had displaced the natural grasses that normally kept the soil in place and trapped moisture even during periods of drought and high winds.

During the drought of the 1930s, without natural anchors to keep the soil in place, it dried, turned to dust, and blew eastward and southward in large dark clouds. At times the clouds blackened the sky reaching all the way to East Coast cities such as New York and Washington, D.C. Much of the soil ended up deposited in the Atlantic Ocean, carried by prevailing winds which were in part created by the dry and bare soil conditions itself. These immense dust storms—given names such as "Black Blizzards" and "Black Rollers"—often reduced visibility to a few feet). The Dust Bowl affected 100,000,000 acres centered on the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, and adjacent parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Kansas.

Millions of acres of farmland became useless, and hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes; many of these families (often known as "Okies", since so many of them came from Oklahoma) traveled to California and other states, where they found economic conditions little better than those they had left. Owning no land, many traveled from farm to farm picking fruit and other crops at starvation wages. Author John Steinbeck later wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, and *Of Mice and Men* about such people.



The 1988 Drought



A significant drought in the United States occurred during 1988 and 1989. Following a milder drought in the Southeastern United States the year before, this drought spread from the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, Northern Great Plains and Western United States. This drought was widespread, unusually intense and accompanied by heat waves which killed around 4,800 to 17,000 people across the United States and also killed livestock across the United States] One particular reason that the drought of 1988

became very damaging was farmers might have farmed on land which was marginally arable. Another reason was pumping groundwater near the depletion mark. The drought of 1988 destroyed crops almost nationwide, residents' lawns went brown and water restrictions were declared in many cities. The Yellowstone National Park fell victim to wildfires that burned many trees and created exceptional destruction in the area. This drought was very catastrophic for multiple reasons; it continued across the Upper Midwest States and North Plains States

during 1989, not officially ending until 1990. The conditions continued into 1989 and 1990, although the drought had ended in some states thanks to normal rainfalls returning to some portions of the United States. Dry conditions, however, increased again during 1989, affecting Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, much of Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota and some regions of Colorado. The drought of 1988 became the worst drought since the Dust Bowl 50 years before in the United States; 2008 estimates put damages from the drought somewhere between \$80 billion and almost \$120 billion in damage

Hurricane Katrina comes second with \$81 billion (2005 United States dollars), Hurricane Andrew coming in third. The drought of 1988 qualifies being the costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States.

In 2012, much of the U.S. had drought conditions develop through the late winter and spring months and lasting into the summer, creating the 2012 North American drought. Meanwhile, severe to extreme drought developed in the lower Midwest and Ohio Valley as well as the southern and central Rockies. This led to large wildfires in Colorado including the record setting Waldo Canyon fire, the most destructive in Colorado history. Drought conditions have led to numerous firework show cancellations and voluntary water restrictions in much of the Ozarks, Mid-Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys. Lagging effects of La Niña, climate change, and also a large persistent upper level ridge of high pressure present over much of North America since the late winter have all contributed to the drought and above average temperatures since February 2012. This further lead to the vicious cycle of reduced evaporation and decreased rainfall all through the spring of 2012. While the summer of 2011 was the second-warmest in U.S. history after the Dust Bowl era of 1936 the summer of 2012 was the third-warmest. This intense heat wave contributed to the intensification of the drought particularly over the Midwest and the Northern Plains. Because the drought conditions were forcing American farmers to sell off livestock, the Department of Defense sought to buy up meat at "fire sale" prices in order to stockpile meals for the lean times ahead.



Our current drought is similar to the drought in 2012 – perhaps a bit more severe. Only time will tell how long these conditions will persist. Currently we are entering the transition period between summer and fall that I have discussed in past issues of Home Horticulture. These transitions occur when we observe a period of rainfall followed by much cooler temperatures afterward. The rainfall tends to be a cold dreary rain that is often prolonged. A quietness pervades as the leaves turn color. Winter is approaching sooner than we think. I feel a bit melancholy when this transition happens. Maybe I need a few more bitter greens.

Proposed Changes to Purdue Extension

This story is about a dramatic change proposed for how Purdue Extension will operate in the near future. Over the past year in information I receive from Extension sources - Purdue Extension has appeared to realize that they were continually losing support from citizens and funding sources for their educational resources at the local level.

Purdue created a team to look at how to solve these issues. The County Pod Initiative appears to be their brilliant solution to solve these issues. Most of my readers are familiar with Extension offices and I am sure utilized Extension in some way over the years. This plan is going to change how citizens utilize and use Extension services statewide. Following is current Extension Director Angela Abbot's description of what is referred to as the County Pod Initiative.

Purdue Extension has a proud history of serving Indiana's communities through impactful programming, trusted relationships, and significant engagement. As we look to the future, we will build on this strong foundation to ensure our work remains relevant, resilient, and responsive to the evolving needs of the people we serve.

This fall we are launching the county pod initiative - a strategic effort to test new approaches to strengthen our connection to communities, foster collaboration across counties, and support long-term sustainability.

This initiative is guided by two key priorities.

Transformation: Reimagining our programs, technologies, and delivery models to better meet today's challenges and opportunities and to anticipate and shape the needs of tomorrow.

Sustainable Funding: Building a resilient operational model that supports innovation, emphasizes impact, and strengthens partnerships.

The two county pods are:

East Central: Blackford, Delaware, Henry, Jay, Randolph and Wayne counties

West Central: Benton, Fountain, Tippecanoe and Warren counties

Under this initiative:

Counties will transition from a **personnel-based** approach to a **collaborative service delivery model**.

4-H programming will continue to be delivered locally in each county, with volunteers remaining central to its success.

Teams of educators and specialists will work across each pod to deliver Agriculture & Natural Resources, Health & Human Sciences, and Community Development programming.

The goal is to provide **broader access to expertise, more flexibility to meet changing needs, stronger university-community connections, and more sustainable operations**. Our core mission remains unchanged: supporting agriculture, natural resources, food, family, money, health, leadership, community, and youth development - helping producers, families, youth, and communities thrive.

We've begun working with staff in the two selected pods to build out and test strategies. We are also hosting stakeholder listening sessions in both pods to gather insights and perspectives that will help shape the path forward. We have scheduled a brainstorming session at PDC in December, where we invite you to share your ideas and help shape the future of Extension. This initiative is not just about change. It's about collaboration, innovation, and honoring the legacy of Extension while preparing for what's next. Thank you for your continued dedication and partnership.



Ricky's Observations: Notice first there is no Allen County pod. This is a lot of blah blah but essentially Purdue is going to have a regional approach to provide educational programs to citizens. There will only be a 4-H Educator in each county office. All other educational programs will be delivered by some Educators on a regional level.

To me there are huge issues with this initiative. Other states have gone to regional programming with disastrous results at local offices-many which disappear over time. To expect funding sources to pay for programming not even held at local offices seems like a pipe dream.

Master Gardener training sessions would only be held in regional locations meaning volunteers would need to travel to attend training sessions which would mostly be held online and with specialists conducting the training. In my opinion this totally dismisses the loyalty and local leadership needed by Master Gardeners to become invested in their local county.

If I was a current Educator in a county office I would be looking for other work as I see no way that many county Educators would not have their positions eliminated. In my opinion there used to be days long ago when local educators were valued – now it appears that value is gone forever. I also see that many support staff in county offices will no longer be needed.

Of course state leadership teams and higher level Extension officials will keep their positions to run these new regional pods.

I know from personal experience that no matter how good a job one does and how much impact one has in a community means nothing to top officials in Purdue Extension – based on how I was railroaded out of Extension and forced in early retirement – I feel bad for my friends still working in Extension that will learn they are just as expendable as I was.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: Please add some bitter greens in my cat food to help reduce my old cat crankiness and maybe a little bit reduce my desire to ruin your life at every opportunity, I realize who opens the cat food cans.