

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.

Poinsettia

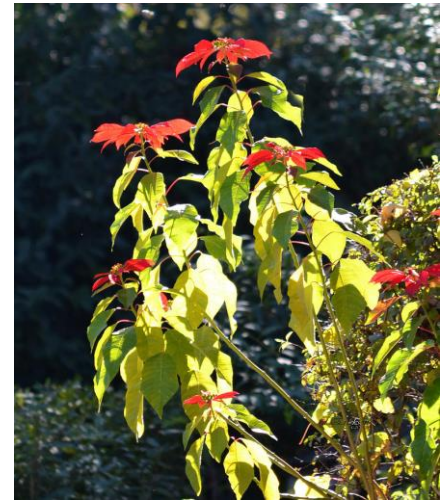


There was once a poor Mexican girl called Pepita who had no present to give the baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve Services. As Pepita walked to the chapel, sadly, her cousin Pedro tried to cheer her up. 'Pepita', he said "I'm sure that even the smallest gift, given by someone who loves him will make Jesus Happy."

Pepita didn't know what she could give, so she picked a small handful of weeds from the roadside and made them into a small bouquet. She felt embarrassed because she could only give this small present to Jesus. As she walked through the chapel to the altar, she remembered what Pedro had said. She began to feel better, knelt down and put the bouquet at the bottom of the nativity scene. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red flowers, and everyone who saw them were sure they had seen a miracle.



Poinsettias are native to Mexico and they often are tall rangy plants in their natural setting growing in waste areas that are undisturbed. It was only after the Ecke family began breeding and improving poinsettias that they became a Christmas staple in the U.S.



In My Garden

Even after snow and freezing temperatures, there is still activity in our garden. Annual Dianthus is still blooming in the garden. They can often survive the winter, especially if they are covered with leaves or a loose bark mulch which is then removed in early spring. It is one of the reasons I love these plants.



Part of gardening is the surprises than can happen. Who knew that one can still find centaurea (bachelor's buttons) flowering this late in the season?

The history of *Centaurea* is deeply tied to its European origins, where it was once a common weed in grain fields, earning the name “cornflower” (from “corn,” referring to cereal crops like wheat and barley). Its prevalence in agricultural fields made it a symbol of rural life, but modern farming practices, particularly herbicide use, have endangered wild populations in Europe.



Introduced to Britain and Ireland during the Iron Age, it has since declined dramatically, with only a few native sites remaining in the UK, prompting conservation efforts by organizations like Plantlife. The plant's ornamental value was recognized in the 19th century, leading to its cultivation in gardens across Europe and beyond. Its global spread occurred through horticultural trade and as a seed contaminant in crops, naturalizing it in North America, Australia, and parts of Asia.

Bachelor's Button also holds cultural significance, often associated with love and fidelity in folklore—young men wore it as a boutonniere to signal romantic interest, hence the name “Bachelor's Button.” It is the national flower of Germany and has been used in art, heraldry, and even as a symbol of political movements.

The fall foliage of Blackhaw (*Viburnum prunifolium*) – left - is a deep wine red and very handsome (as my instructor Harrison Flint used to say. The species name refers to the similarity of the leaves to the Black Cherry (*Prunus*). The common name comes from this plant's similar appearance to hawthorns.



Rose hips also provide color and interest even in a winter landscape. They can be harvested anytime and eaten as they are rich in vitamin C.



Monthly Moon Names

Historically, Native American and other traditional names for full or new Moons were used to track the seasons.

January – Wolf Moon - The howling of wolves was often heard at this time of year. It was traditionally thought that wolves howled due to hunger, but we now know that wolves use howls to define territory, locate pack members, reinforce social bonds, and gather for hunting. European settlers may have used the term “Wolf Moon” even before they came to North America.

February – Snow Moon - In the 1760s, Captain Jonathan Carver, who had visited the Naudowessie (Dakota) and others, wrote that the name used for this period was the Snow Moon “because more snow commonly falls during this month than any other in the winter.” The Cree called this the Bald Eagle Moon or Eagle Moon. Bear Moon (Ojibwe) and Black Bear Moon (Tlingit) refer to the time when bear cubs are born. The Dakota called this the Raccoon Moon, and certain Algonquin peoples named it the Groundhog Moon. The Cherokee names of “Month of the Bony Moon” and “Hungry Moon” give evidence to the fact that food was hard to come by at this time.

March – Worm Moon - This name is traditionally thought to refer to the earthworms that appear as the soil warms in spring. Alternatively, during his travels in the 1760s, Captain Jonathan Carver wrote that this Moon name refers to a different sort of “worm”—larvae—which emerge from the bark of trees and other winter hideouts.

April – Pink Moon - This Moon heralded the appearance of the “moss pink” (*Phlox subulata*), also called wild ground phlox or creeping phlox—one of the first spring wildflowers. In the movie “The Way” I first heard the song “Pink Moon” by songwriter Nick Drake. Amazing song by a little known but brilliant songwriter who committed suicide about a year after he recorded this song late at night in a British studio.

May – Flower Moon - The appearance of flowers in abundance inspired the name for this Moon, a term used by Algonquin and Ojibwe peoples.

June – Strawberry Moon - Used by the Algonquin, Ojibwe, Dakota, and Lakota peoples, among others, this name came about because ripe strawberries were ready to be gathered at this time.

July – Buck Moon - At this time, the antlers of bucks (male deer) are in full growth mode. This Native American name was noted by Captain Jonathan Carver during his travels in the 1760s.

August – Sturgeon Moon - Lake sturgeon, found in the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, as well as in several rivers, were once much more abundant. These large (some more than 6 feet long!) migratory fish were an important staple for Native American peoples living in the area

September – Corn Moon - Corn was ready to harvest at this time.

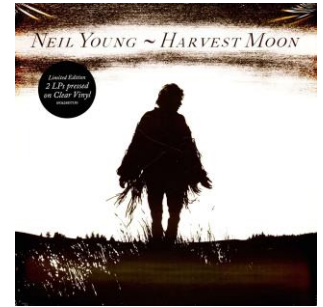
October – Harvest Moon - This is the month when game is fattening up for winter. Now is the time for hunting and laying in a store of provisions for the long months ahead. One of my favorite songs of all time is “Harvest Moon” by Neil Young.

November – Beaver Moon

This was the time when beavers finished preparations for winter and retreated into their lodges.

December – Cold Moon

A name used by the Mohawk people, this Moon occurs when winter cold fastens its grip.



Moon Phases

If you watch the PBS weather channel, moon phases are listed so that we maybe could know what moon we will see in the night sky. Does it help? Probably not as the names for the phases are confusing at best.

The eight Moon phases:

- New: We cannot see the Moon when it is a new moon.
- Waxing Crescent: In the Northern Hemisphere, we see the waxing crescent phase as a thin crescent of light on the right.
- First Quarter: We see the first quarter phase as a half-moon. So a quarter means half. Interesting.
- Waxing Gibbous: The waxing gibbous phase is between a half-moon and full moon. Waxing means it is getting bigger. Yes but what does gibbous mean? If there is a gibbous moon, you can see more than half of the moon but not all of it. I would define gibbous as “ a bunch of gibberish.”
- Full: We can see the Moon completely illuminated during full moons.
- Waning Gibbous: The waning gibbous phase is between a full moon and a half moon. Waning means it is getting smaller.
- Third Quarter: We see the third quarter moon as a half-moon, too. It is the opposite half as illuminated in the first quarter moon. Wow. Once again a quarter is a half. Gibberish.
- Waning Crescent: In the Northern Hemisphere, we see the waning crescent phase as a thin crescent of light on the left.

The Moon displays these eight phases one after the other as it moves through its cycle each month. It takes about 27.3 days for the Moon to orbit Earth. However, because of how sunlight hits the Moon, it takes about 29.5 days to go from one new moon to the next new moon.



A Virtual Zoom Thanksgiving – Some family events never change

The Participants: **Maggie**, the super energetic tech-savvy Millennial organizer, **Patty** - Pie in the sky dreamy Gen-X with a creative bent. **Marge and Uncle Bob:** very pious, set in their ways, and judgmental. **Cactus** (not his real name) - Maggie's brother – the black sheep of the family. **Grandma:** about as tech savvy as a beached whale. **Prudence:**

Perfect in every way. **Boomer** – baby boomer second cousin (from a previous marriage) who has past issues.

The family has arranged to each person to cook a Thanksgiving meal with a pre-approved menu supplied by recipes from the participants. During the Zoom meeting participants will eat the meal and talk.

Maggie: Thank you all for participating in the Smith family **Zoom Pandemic Thanksgiving Extravaganza!!** *Waits for applause-..... there is none.* Everyone have their mics muted? Grandma – please mute your microphone....

Grandma: Television blaring in the background- Steve Harvey is yelling and dancing lewdly on Family Feud- What? I can't hear anyone.....

Maggie: Grandma, see your computer screen? Press the little button on the left that says "Mute... Oh never mind- I will mute you myself....

Prudence: She should never be allowed within 10 feet of any computer.....

Maggie: Lets have Marge and Uncle Bob say grace before we eat, shall we? Some participants roll their eyes and shake their heads....

20 minutes later..... thanks to Marge, our wonderful grocery store clerk who double bags our pork chops, and thanks for all the incredible blessings to each and every one of us that are a part of this exalted life on earth... *pause...* Now Bob will recite the entire book of Psalms... I know you will all enjoy it so much.... some participants groan and roll their eyes and begin to nibble on the food....

45 minutes later...

Maggie: Ok uh.... thanks Uncle Bob and Marge.... *pours a large glass of wine ...* anyone have any family news they want to offer for everyone? Yes, Prudence...

20 minutes later..... **Prudence:** and our son Willet has just been accepted to Harvard law school! Isn't that just wonderful?? We were soooo fortunate to purchase twin black Mercedes convertibles this year... of course me being the most successful real estate broker in the history of Connecticut real estate, and the incredible money I make selling top notch exclusive homes .. it funded our new addition to the house with furniture upholstered with Corinthian leather

Maggie: interrupts ok... I think it's time to eat... Oh... I have so say.... Patty,,, what an unusual recipe for Turkey and stuffing.... *pours another large glass of wine....*

Patty: Yes... I know... I am soo tired of the traditional turkey every single Thanksgiving. This is a praline, turmeric, peanut butter glazed turkey with a hummus and sardine stuffing... I just threw the recipe together while I was painting species of birds and reading Tarot cards in my studio....

Boomer: *sitting at a desk with three computers and stock market quotes on a T.V in background...* I have never seen an orange turkey before... Wow! It tastes about as good as it looks...My entire house now smells like rotted fish.... Patty... I am still a little bit upset about how....during your visit three years ago.. your Corgi puppies urinated and defecated on my prize rose bushes- totally destroying them...

Patty: Takes a huge pull of Elderberry wine...I can't believe you would ditz my turkey and my beloved Corgis at Thanksgiving dinner! *Patty's screen goes blank...*

Bob: I have to get back to work, things to do.....*screen goes blank...*

Maggie: Takes a big drink of another glass of wine...her speech is now slurred and sloshy... we seem to have lost Patty..... and booooring .Bob....Grandma!.....how do you like the damm turkey?? Unmutes grandma's microphone.....

Grandma is in her chair snoring. The Lawrence Welk show is blaring in the background. One of her 6 cats is nibbling on the meal on the table; its mouth and fur are covered in peanut butter and orange/yellow turmeric. It pushes off a gravy boat full of congealed gravy and sardines to waiting cats on the floor..... Grandma's flannel nightgown has sprung open revealing that she is wearing nothing under the nightgown...

Marge...Oh my heavenly Father--- Bob.. cover your eyes! *Their screen goes blank...*

Cactus: so.... I can see that no one is really interested in how I am doing... I hope everyone enjoyed the Spam, Top Ramen, and Possum casserole I made. I do appreciate all the money everyone sent so I could pay the lawyer to try and keep Thelma Lou out of prison. I just don't understand why writing bad checks at the grocery store is such a big deal....

Prudence: perhaps if you had actually saved your money instead of losing it all buying lottery tickets and online gambling.....and there is no possum at the grocery. My butcher looked at me like I was crazy.

Cactus: Duh! You just drive around till you see one lying on the side of the road..... *screen goes blank...*

Prudence: Well, Maggie... I guess it is just you and me and grandma. Did you all like the Maine lobster, Crab Legs, and Diver Scallop dish I created? I haven't told you all about the wonderful cruise we took to Belize in January

Maggie's hand thrashes wildly towards the computer keyboard ...spilling her glass of wine and uneaten Spam casserole she leaves the Zoom group....

Prudence: Well. pause... Grandma, that turkey was an inedible travesty...and her Corgis .. as dysfunctional as The Queens Corgis. I remember how naughty they were when we visited the royal family at the annual All England Polo tournament. ,,,, It also reminds me of the Thanksgiving we had for my son's graduation at our exclusive beach property in Florida .. we had 5 turkeys that day, all prepared in different ways.....

.....Grandma continues to snore.....

Ricky's Comments: This is probably my favorite article I ever wrote about the Thanksgiving holiday. I obviously wrote this during the pandemic – when folks resorted to Zoom for educational seminars and family communication because everyone was so isolated. To me the article represents the technology to communicate in a very difficult and confusing time but also shows that family relationships and get together never really escape the dysfunctionality.

The Caretaker **Ricky's Comment:** *I was nearly fired for writing this article in my newsletter long ago. My supervisors at the Extension office and the district director and my secretary – all who had never written a newsletter in their lives – deemed this inappropriate. To do that is disrespectful to my second wife – who died of early onset Alzheimer's. I wrote the article to tell a story of how difficult it is for the caretaker of a person suffering from Alzheimer's whom you love dearly. Lately I have begun the process of being a volunteer for the Alzheimer's Association – and plan to help educate others about this terrible disease.*

Once upon a time, there was a person named Bob. Bob was married to a wonderful woman named Lettie. Lettie was a baker; she made wonderful breads and cookies for Bob. Lettie loved to tell jokes- corny jokes that Bob laughed at – even when he had heard them many times before.

They lived in a small cottage by a lake. Every evening, they would swing on the porch swing and look at the lake; the clouds in the sky, and the stars and moon in the evenings.

August was the month for Lettie's birthday. This August was Lettie's 60th birthday. On that day Lettie began to make cookies for the guests that were to arrive later. She thought of her family and how they would help her celebrate.....Bob came into the kitchen from doing chores outside. "My goodness!" he remarked. Lettie looked at the stove. Smoke was pouring out of the oven. She had forgotten to take the cookies out on time. No matter, she thought, I will make more. And she did.

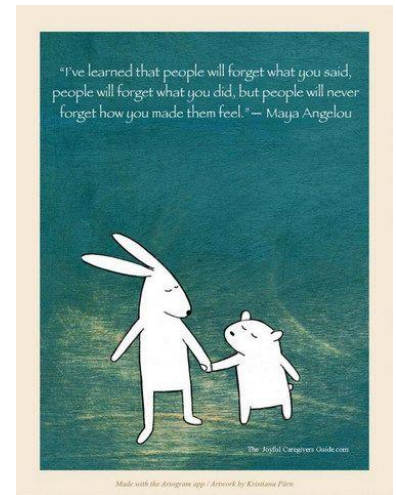
A few weeks later Bob found Lettie parked on the side of the road. She had gone to the market to pick up some groceries. Bob was worried when Lettie didn't come home. He found her car on the side of the road not far away - opened the door and found Lettie inside- tears running down her face. "I couldn't find my way back home" she said.

...The doctor called Bob into her office. She told Bob that Lettie suffered from what was called early onset Alzheimer's disease. Her memory was failing- her brain was dying. There was no cure. "I will take care of her" Bob said.

Over time, Bob found that he was consumed with everyday tasks that Lettie found more and more difficult to do – bathing, laundry, cooking, cleaning, shopping. Bob was the caretaker in charge of all these new chores. He was still working for a large company but was finding it more and more difficult to keep up. Many times Bob was so tired, distracted, and upset that he made mistakes- mistakes he had never made before.

His supervisors and co-workers were upset that he wasn't sharp and focused. His boss complained that he wasn't at work as much as he should be. Bob felt bad and worthless. His co-workers avoided him.

He didn't get much sleep as Lettie would wander at night- often searching for some lost item.



Lettie's family also didn't understand what was happening. Her sister called and asked Lettie to make some sugar cookies for her kids. Bob found Lettie sitting in the kitchen staring into space. "What's wrong? He asked. "I ..uh I can't find the cookie recipe" Lettie remarked, walking quickly away.

Over time, Bob found wonderful people who helped him take care of Lettie. He spent his life savings paying for her care. This did not matter. He was the caretaker.

A year later, Bob and Lettie were swinging on the porch swing, looking at the night sky. "Those.. uh....lights- are so pretty" Lettie said. "Those are called stars" Bob said – very softly. "They are stars".

**"You can give
without loving, but
you cannot love
without giving."**

Amy Carmichael



Bob had long since quit working as he could not afford to pay for caretakers to help, and he had used up all his vacation and care days. The plain fact was Bob could not afford to work, and Lettie's care was taking up more and more time.

Late at night with Lettie sleeping Bob would drink- at first a little- and then more and more- as he watched television and remembered the days of family - laughter- honest hard work, and.... cookies..

Time passed, and it was Christmas- three years later. Lettie didn't say much anymore. There were no jokes – no cookies, or homemade breads. Most of the time Lettie sat quietly as they looked at clouds and stars on the front

porch.

As they sat together holding hands, Bob turned to Lettie and whispered in her ear. "I will always be your caretaker- the person who always will care for and about you- no matter what". "I will show you the stars, the moon, and the clouds and the sun, because you are like those things to me- ever enduring, even if you can't remember them- ever in my thoughts- even when you cannot speak" I will be your caretaker even when I cannot take care of you anymore. This I promise you".

Then they both turned back- to once again look at the sky.

Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease and the most common cause of dementia.

It is characterized by a decline in memory, language, problem-solving and other cognitive skills that affects a person's ability to perform everyday activities. This decline occurs because nerve cells (neurons) in parts of the brain involved in cognitive function have been damaged or destroyed.

In Alzheimer's disease, the damage and destruction of neurons eventually affect other parts of the brain, including those that enable a person to carry out basic bodily functions such as walking and swallowing. People in the final stages of the disease are bed-bound and require around-the-clock care. Alzheimer's disease is ultimately fatal.

Rick's final thoughts: *I cried after I wrote this story, and I still cry after rereading it.*

We Apologize for the Inconvenience

I have become less tolerant with age. Little disappointments and obstacles that I used to shrug off now are a big deal. I mean how difficult is it to do things correctly? What I am really tired of is the phrase “We apologize for the inconvenience” when the company or individuals who messed up even the simplest of tasks don’t regret anything at all. Examples follow:

“We are sorry we messed up your take-out order and acknowledge that you asked 17 times for catsup packets to be included with your order of French fries. We cannot explain the lack of listening skills involved to blatantly ignore such a request.” We apologize for the inconvenience

We take full responsibility for the fact that we overcharged your account several thousand dollars due to a clerical error causing a negative balance, overdraft fees of over a thousand dollars, and your credit score going to zero – which by the way – we never thought possible. We promise to do our utmost best to remedy this situation within the next several weeks – or so. We value you as a customer and are deeply sorry and apologize for the inconvenience.....

We are deeply sorry for inadvertently towing your new 2022 BMW– loaded with extra features – from the driveway of your home. We somehow went to the wrong address to repossess a 2011 Chevy Volt. The service person sent to repossess the vehicle somehow did not know the difference between a Chevy Volt and a BMW. We also deeply regret that the vehicle was taken to the junkyard and crushed for scrap. Look at it this way – every setback is an opportunity – maybe a Mercedes is in your future. We apologize for the inconvenience

Amazon is aware that our East Coast server is down, resulting in total mayhem and foolishness. We will fix it when we get around to it – in the meantime who really cares if your precious Netflix is down, and your Alexa doesn’t respond to any commands? She doesn’t respond to any commands anyway. We do apologize for any inconvenience that our total domination of the Internet has caused ...Yawn...

We made a wee bit of an error in calculating the trajectory of a large comet and a Mount Everest-sized asteroid which are now on a definite collision course with our beloved yet mistreated Earth. We are very sad and disappointed to announce that these objects will collide with Earth on New Years Eve 2021/22, resulting in the end of life as we know it and a possible return of dinosaurs. Talk about a rocking New Year’s Eve... We apologize for the inconvenience



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“Someone calling themselves a customer says they want something called service.”

Therapy The Wester dictionary defines therapy as a treatment that helps someone feel better, grow stronger, etc., especially after an illness: I have been to many places offering physical therapy. I gradually lost the ability to walk on my own even with a cane soon after a knee replacement 5 years ago when I developed severe osteo and psoriatic arthritis. It's not fun to be confined to a wheelchair all of the time. Recently I decided to give therapy one last shot at the Turnstone facility. The best thing about this facility is the people and the machines- specially designed for folks in wheelchairs. They also have TV's to watch to relive the boredom and have even had bingo to get one's mind off of the physical stress At Turnstone one meets people with many stories and obstacles to overcome. After many months I have finally been able to walk short distances with the aid of canes. It's a good feeling to overcome my own obstacles.



The other part of therapy has to do with me seeing a therapist to help me get over the anger and bitterness left over from my forced retirement from Purdue Extension in 2017. I know it's been awhile, but the individuals at the Allen County Extension office and the statewide leadership team never quit – even to this day - in doing their very best to ruin my reputation – and others closest to me - our standing within the community – and deleting any reference to our service to the citizens of Allen County. I have provided my record of what happened at the end. If you are a former volunteer or a current or former member of the Extension community – or just curious to know the reality of Purdue Extension - then I will be happy to send you my account of what happened. This is my final effort to try and let what happened be shared with others and for me to let it go off into the wilderness – where it belongs. To request my account of what happened -- msg me at kemeryr7@frontier.com.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: You have never placed a stocking for me near any of your highly fancy Christmas trees. This will change this season or I will turn your tree into rubble jumping on it repeatably as ornaments will be scattered everywhere. My list for my stocking include Tins of gourmet cat food. The highest quality catnip acquired from a border state where it is legal. Cat food treats made in your image so I can gleefully eat while thinking of you. A ballerina cat outfit – don't ask questions – and a seven page letter of apology that lists and asks forgiveness for every transgression in your caregiver responsibilities – signed in blood.

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