

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks *(and Gnome Tales)*

Summer 2018 Issue

The Plant Medic - Ricky D. Kemery, Allen County Extension Educator Retired, phone: 260-431-6893

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com stating: "Please add me to the email list for **"Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks."** (Or your own words to that effect.)

If you need a speaker for neighborhood association meetings, business groups, or other organizations; I will be glad to come and talk about gardening, landscaping or turf, the environment, or sustainability. Just contact me at 260-431-6893. You can also email or text me with gardening questions, or pictures of poor sick and dying plants. For a small fee; I will visit your home landscape and garden to offer advice.

Summer Drought

My home garden soil is as dry as a bone. My neighborhood rabbits are all wearing their BPA free watering bottles around their necks as they feed on my flowers and veggies. Normally dry periods occur during the summer months, but this one feels different to me. It has a parched feeling that one gets when we hope it rains – but then it never does.

We are experiencing ENSO neutral conditions at the moment with a good chance of El Nino conditions in the late fall and winter. Nothing to explain this feeling that we won't receive much rain - except this feeling in my old bones.

Anyway water conservation is always good, so here are some water wise tips for the summer.

Water in the early morning if possible. It is not true that if you water at mid-day; the leaves of your garden plants will "magnify" the water and burn holes in the leaves. This is only possible only on days that moles fly.

Don't water in the late afternoon / evening as this can promote/spread disease organisms.

Keep in mind that on average, it takes 30-45 seconds to deliver a gallon of water to a plant via an overhead watering system or hand sprinkler. Most perennial plants need at least 3-5 gallons of water per watering. This means you will need a time machine (or a Delorean) to have enough time to efficiently water a large garden.

Use drip irrigation or soaker hoses when possible.

Try to mulch bare garden areas – keeping the mulch away from the base of the plant. I like newspaper first, then bark mulch.

My raised bed flowers and large container vegetables need watering about every two to three days when there is no rain. Smaller containers need watering every day (sigh).

This year the rabbits have concentrated on my yellow-flowered Gomphrena and morning glories. The large Elmer Fudd cutout I have traveling around my garden on a Lionel train track has not worked---sigh...

Lawns need about a ½ inch of water per week to stay alive in an urban area. Use an empty tuna can or pie tin to measure the water. If we receive a ½ or more water in a week's time; there is no need to water.

Established trees and shrubs can handle summer droughts. They may not look their greatest, but they can survive. Water trees and shrubs established less than a year with at least 5-10 gallons of water per week if no rainfall occurs.

Garden Pest Questions

The leaves of my tomatoes are beginning to yellow and they also have spots on them. My eggplant leaves are riddled with holes, and my beans look like they are scorched. I am ready to give up. Please help us!

Ricky's Answer: It can be difficult to maintain a totally healthy garden during summer drought periods. It's a little strange, but I actually received more samples of plants at the Extension office with fungal issues during dry periods compared with wetter periods during the summer.



This phenomenon occurs because people are just watering more. With water often comes fungal issues in the garden. Other insect pests of the garden love the hot dry weather. Then again, as I grow older and more gullible, I wonder if gnomes are behind all this mischief.

It sounds as if your tomato plants are becoming infected with early blight. Early blight is a common fungal disease of tomatoes, with yellowing spotted leaves that appear first at the bottom of the plant. If you do nothing, the disease will move from the bottom of the plant up- until the entire plant looks as if it had been hit with a flame thrower. No one wants this effect on their tomatoes. There are several options that will help to control early blight and other common fungal leaf disease of tomatoes.

Make sure to water in the morning, and try to water at the ground level - rather than sprinkling the foliage of the plants. Use a mulch of untreated grass clippings, compost, pine needles, or clean straw under and around the plants. Mulching will help prevent fungal pathogens from splashing up onto the plant from the soil. Pick off any leaves close to ground level that look like they could be infected. Use a fungicide registered for use on tomatoes. Serenade is an organic fungicide that can be effective. Ortho vegetable disease control is also an option. Apply a fungicide at the first sign of disease on your tomatoes, and follow label instructions.

It sounds as if flea beetles are the issue on your eggplant. They are difficult to control. I have found that regular dustings with Diatomaceous Earth can really help reduce the leaf damage. This organic product is made from crushed diatoms - a prehistoric sea creature that is mined in western areas of the U.S. This material basically dries out the insect. Sometimes it can be difficult to find this product, although most garden centers and even some health food stores (such as the Three Rivers Co-Op) carry this product.

Mites can be a real issue on beans during hot dry periods. The leaves appear scorched, with a bronzed appearance. Looking closely at the leaf, one can sometimes observe fine webbing. Wash off the mites with a high pressure water spray periodically. Regular dustings with Diatomaceous Earth can also help control mites.



Canada Thistle Don't Care

Would a Honey badger eat Canada Thistle?

One of the most famous or infamous YouTube videos is entitled "Honey badger Don't Care" Basically a Honey Badger will eat anything, including bees, varmints of all types, and cobras.

I suspect even a honey badger would meet his match with Canada thistle.

This noxious invasive weed is a true survivor.

Digging it up, mowing it, covering it, using most herbicides, just makes the thistle shrug and make more thistle plants.



Canada thistle is native to southeastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. It was introduced into North America in the early 1600s - probably as a contaminant in hay, crop seeds, and ship ballast.



Canada thistle facts:

Thistle plants can grow up to about four feet in height and have small flower heads that are either male or female (dioecious), with patches of a single sex often occurring.

Canada thistle produces flowers from mid- June through September. Cross-pollination is required for successful seed development..

A single plant averages about 1,500 seeds per plant.

Although 90 percent of all seeds germinate within one year of dispersal, buried seeds can remain viable for as long as 21 years.



Once dispersed, each single-seeded fruitlet is able to establish either a male or female clone through vegetative propagation of its root system.

Canada thistle root system may extend horizontally as much as 18 feet in one season, but individual roots live only for about 2 years.

Roots are able to regenerate entire plants from very small fragments. This is why trying to dig or pull the plant only produces more plants.

Canada thistle also produces phytotoxins that inhibit growth of other plants. Extracts of roots and foliage from Canada thistle inhibit germination of its own seed and clover, and reduced growth of seedlings of seven other species. It also has an allelopathic effect on crops such as sugar beet, wheat, alfalfa and corn One can try various cocktails of herbicides to try and control thistle. My go-to product is Thistledown. 2 applications of Thistledown will kill Canada thistle, saving money and needless herbicide application. Thistledown is available at the Allen County Co-Op in New Haven and online.

Epicormic Branching

Epicormic branching of trees and shrubs occurs when small shoots begin to appear on the lower portion of the trunk or stem for no apparent reason. Sometimes small shoot appear at the base of the plant also.

There are always reasons why things happen in the plant world,

Humans on the other hand are a different story. There may not be a defined reason why people honk their horns. It could be they see someone they know. Maybe they are annoyed because they feel as if traffic is not moving fast enough for their high energy needs. Maybe they are trying to tell the car in front of them that they are swerving from one lane to other –putting themselves and others at risk- because they are texting and driving. Or worse- they are shaving- doing their makeup-fixing their hair-eating a full pizza with their bare hands-while texting and driving, Like I said- human behavior cannot be explained.

There is always a reason for epicormic branching. The tree or shrub could be under attack by boring insects - like emerald ash borer-for instance, The picture at the left shows the epicormic branching that occurs when emerald ash borer attacks the trees, the tree is trying to produce growth in a last ditch effort to save itself. Always check for borer holes or bark damage or disease when epicormics branching occurs.

Sometimes over pruning results in epicormic branching. Remember the rule, prune no more than 1/3 of a tree or shrub per year (in general). Otherwise the tree will produce epicormic branches or vertical shots (called water sprouts) in response.



A classic tree mulch Pyramid with mulch piled up way over the root flare

Improper planting, mulching, or watering can also result in epicormic branching, as in the case of this volcano-mulched tree to the right.

Overwatering a tree can kill the roots, resulting in epicormic branching.

Just remember, whenever one see this phenomena of epicormic branching, there is a reason, unlike multi-tasking texters.



Creeping Charlie

Every year homeowners used to call me at the Extension office about Ground ivy, or Creeping Charlie.

Ground ivy is a perennial, evergreen and aromatic plant in the mint family. Ground ivy is native to Eurasia and was introduced into North America as a ground cover / medicinal plant, as early as the 1800s. Ground ivy is common in moist areas, disturbed sites, low woods, roadsides; and of course lawns.

Its many common names include cat's foot - referring to its leaf shape. "Alehoff", "turnhoof", and "guiller" were all common names that referred to ground ivy's use in the brewing process for beer.



The names "Creeping Charlie" or "Creeping Jenny" appear to be of English origin, because the plant was (and still is) a popular ground cover in England. Charlie and Jenny evidently were popular English names-or they were the names of children in England who would visit and never go away- wanting to stay for supper-wanting all your child's toys. Only a thought.

Ground ivy was used by Romans as a medicinal plant. The tea was an ancient all-purpose drink. Herbalists believed it had a cleansing effect on lungs, kidneys, stomach, and bowels. The sap of ground ivy, applied externally, is reported to be good for a black eye. Unfortunately, ground ivy ingested in large amounts - either fresh or as hay - is toxic to horses.

In the U.S., the plant is considered a pernicious weed, because of its ability to spread in lawns by seeds and underground roots. Attempting to dig or cultivate the plant only makes more structures that root readily. Since ground Ivy is a mint, it can be very difficult to control.

Research by Purdue University found that herbicides containing the active ingredient triclopyr (Chickweed/ Clover control) can be effective. Multiple applications are necessary since ground ivy will often re-grow after 24 days.

Triclopyr can be rather slow-acting, so don't give up hope for control after a week or two. Researchers also found that populations of ground ivy exist that have differential susceptibility to herbicides.

It can be helpful to alternate herbicides when attempting to control ground ivy. Speedzone, is one herbicide that can be used in a control program.

Fall applications of herbicides for ground ivy are the most effective. Searching for reliable information about ground ivy and its control on the Internet can be very confusing. Borax acid formulations are often touted for "organic" control of ground ivy. Unfortunately, boron can quickly build to toxic levels in soil, so eventually nothing will grow.

For control of ground ivy; it is better to build a healthy lawn with proper mowing and fertilization, and attack ground ivy both in the spring and fall with formulations that work.

“Natural” Insecticides – Essential Oils

The big thing nowadays is “natural” ingredients. Many folks are concerned and fearful about pesticides or “chemicals” as they are called. For a long while now, I have been a proponent of organic pesticides with little or no impact to the environment. I only use conventional pesticides when I have no other choice.

Recently there has been interest in insecticides that are made from made from essential oils of common botanicals such as thyme, cinnamon, geranium, mint, clove, lavender, and rosemary.

Jack DeAngelis, retired OSU entomologist, states that new, natural, plant-based botanical insecticides offer an effective, low toxicity, and environmentally friendly alternative to conventional pesticides. A variety of formulations are now available including dusts, aerosols and wettable powders.



The research on the effectiveness of essential oils is limited. There are tons of recipes from questionable non-research based sources on using essential oils to kill or repel insects.

However, essential oils are already used in some products. Mint, for example, is a highly effective ant and wasp control. Cinnamon extracts have proven effective against spider mites.

As always it is buyer beware - products and claims differ greatly. Some products can damage plant tissue.

Other oils, including peppermint oil and tea tree oil, are toxic to pets—especially cats, whose livers are unable to metabolize some of the compounds in essential oils. If exposed to essential oils (either orally or topically, on the skin), pets can suffer symptoms that include drooling, vomiting, respiratory distress, tremors, and even liver failure. Unfortunately, as the popularity of essential oils rises, veterinarians have reported increased rates of poisoning.

Essential oils can also be hazardous to your own health and the health of your family. Tea tree oil, in particular, can be toxic if swallowed (especially if it is undiluted or a high concentration). This is something to be very careful of if you have young children.

It is tempting to use essential oils as a pest control. Trifecta is a product sold online that contains a blend of essential oils formulated with “nana technology”. It is very expensive.

Consumers should realize that any product that kills an insect can also do harm to the applicator, so one must take the same care using products containing essential oils as any other insecticide sold on the market.

The issue that faces many consumers nowadays are reviews. Many homemade essential oil products come with reviews that rave about their effectiveness. The reviews are impossible to check. Always try to see if there is any credible research to support the product’s (and reviewers) claims.

Mites – Bring on The Heat!

Mites are not true insects. They are more related to spiders because they have 8 legs and a crablike appearance when viewed under a dissecting scope. This is the reason why mites are also referred to as spider mites. Mites undergo incomplete metamorphosis- meaning that they skip the larval or worm stage that many insects go through. Mites just hatch from eggs present in leaf debris, or from eggs which have over-wintered in bark and twig crevices. Insects with an incomplete life cycle such as mites can build up tremendous populations very quickly. Since most mites cannot be seen easily with the naked eye; they are often only noticed by the damage they cause.

Dwarf Alberta spruce is a favorite food source for mites, but Blue spruce, Norway spruce, and Bird's Nest are also susceptible to mites. Beans are susceptible to mites when the summer weather is hot and dry. Burning bush is also susceptible to mite attack. Many burning bush plantings in our area are already turning color – this is because they are most probably infected with mites!



Mites can barely be seen with the naked eye; but they and their webbing can often be seen by using a magnifying glass or hand lens. One can also tap the foliage of the plant over a piece of white paper – if small dots appear on the paper and either smear when rubbed or crawl around- then you have mites. Yikes!

Mite damage usually appears on the interior foliage first; curling and bronzing of the foliage appears usually from the bottom inside of the plant- traveling upwards and out.

Mites can be difficult to control because pesticide options for homeowners for mite control are limited. One can start by washing the mites away with a high pressure spray from the garden hose. For smaller plants, Diatomaceous earth is probably the most effective and non-toxic control.

Insecticidal soap, summer horticultural oils, and products containing neem are organic options for mites.

Pyrethroids (Eight, Triazicide) can also help reduce their numbers, but can damage plants when the weather is sunny and hot. Always read and follow label directions as some pesticide options for mites can damage certain species.

In my opinion, large shrubs and evergreen trees infested with mites should be evaluated and treated by an arborist.

Hoggles'



To my Caregiver: Consider me a honey badger of the cat world. Like a honey badger, I will eat almost anything. Give me a cobra pate'!

I don't care one whit about you as a person- just continue to serve my every need and desire!

Donations to support the cause are accepted – any amount in the form of checks is fine to cover some expenses. Send to Ricky Kemery 5929 Lorman Court Fort Wayne, Indiana 46835. Ads for businesses are also accepted a small fee / donation will be gratefully accepted.

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