

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

Early Spring 2020 Issue

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

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture and home issues, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com.

Prehistoric Lawn Care

When I talk about my years growing up at Hamilton Lake in Steuben County; I can't help but notice younger folk yawn – roll their eyes – and generally dismiss my old codger rantings. As one becomes older, we mistakenly believe that younger people are actually interested in how things “used to be”. They are not much interested in anything unless it is posted on the Internet.



I was ruminating about my younger days recently as I was having my morning coffee and realized that at the time when I was growing up in the 1960's and 70's – no one actually used lawn pesticides – or even fertilizer – in my neighborhood. I am sure they were used in the bigger cities, but somehow lawns in rural areas managed to survive even without broadleaf weed killers, Round-up, and 5-step fertilizer plans.

Dandelions and clover were accepted as just a part of the lawn, and no one worried about their presence.

Summer drought periods resulted in lawns that were as brown as toast, and yet managed to green up in the fall when rains returned.

It just seemed as if people had better things to do than to spend time and money worrying about whether a lawn was perfectly groomed, or what people would think if the lawn had dandelions.

Many folks stated in a survey of lawn care and homeowners that they felt that the way a lawn was kept was a direct reflection of themselves – and their status within a community.

What I think now is that people do not realize the impact that pesticide applications and massive fertilizer and water applications have on everyone. I always have hoped that somehow everyone could go back to the days when it was ok to have a lawn that wasn't perfect.

I have over the years become even more of a proponent of earth-friendly lawn care. I have this philosophy because earth-friendly lawns are lawns that can have less weed pressure disease and insect issues – without poisoning the air and water.

Here are some tips to have healthy lawns that are more earth friendly.

1. Renovate lawns with the best disease and drought resistant seed mix possible – or convert a small lawn into a hard fescue mix. The Allen County Co-Op in New Haven carries a hard fescue mix. The mixes require little or no mowing and grow better in lower light areas.
2. Reduce or eliminate lawns - especially in very small areas. Plant groundcovers or mass planted flowers or short prairie grasses such as prairie drop seed or little bluestem on banks.

3. Plant a buffer strip or rain garden in the front of a lawn (a five foot or wider area) so water is slowed and diverted before it enters the street and storm drains. Mass planting is preferred for less maintenance.
4. Core aerate compacted lawns with poor soil, and at the very least top dress every spring or fall with compost and or Canadian Sphagnum peat moss.
5. Mow higher - up to 3 inches or higher – especially in areas farther from the house as no one will actually notice or care whether the lawn is cut higher in these areas.
6. Use least toxic pest controls only when absolutely necessary. For instance, milky spore formulations are becoming more effective for longer term grub prevention.
7. If you have to irrigate, then only do so in severe drought periods and water until the soil is damp at a 3-inch depth.
8. Spot-treat (there are some earth friendly weed killers on the market)- or hand remove weeds – or accept the fact that some so-called weeds such as dandelions and violets and clover are actually great for bees and other pollinators.
9. For smaller lawns - get an electric mower. There isn't much of a difference between cost between an electric and conventional mower nowadays. Using electric mowers significantly reduces air pollution since lawn mowers are a number one air pollution sources during the summer in urban areas.
10. Many lawn care companies now have more earth-friendly options.
- 11.



Aboite Library Horticulture Series

Join Ricky Kemery, retired Purdue Horticulture Extension Educator in Allen County, and Advanced Master Gardener Penny Alles for a two-part mini gardening series at the **Aboite library branch** in March and April 2020.

On **Monday, March 23**, Ricky and Penny will discuss “**The Totally Awesome Earth Friendly Vegetable Garden**”. This free seminar will discuss many aspects of growing an earth friendly garden – including bio char, organic pest control, hugelculture, biodynamics. raised bed and lasagna gardening, and more. The seminar will be held from **6:00 – 7:30 PM**.

“**Tree Selection and Care**” will be the topic for discussion by Ricky and Penny on **Monday April 13 (6:00 – 7:30 PM)**. The average lifespan of an urban tree is 7- 11 years. Ricky and Penny will tell attendees why trees are so short-lived. Learn how to plant and maintain a tree correctly, select trees with fewer issues, and learn to avoid selecting trees with just “too much drama”.

Ricky Kemery was the Purdue Horticulture Extension Educator in Allen County for 23 years. He was named Purdue Master Gardener Coordinator of the year in 2005. He is the author of the book “Silver Maples and Garden Fables, and of “Home Horticulture” an online newsletter with over 1,600 subscribers, He was a weekly contributor to WOWO’s “Green Thumb” radio program with Tim and Loti Persing, and “House Calls” program with Rick Wolf for over 15 years, and answered gardening questions from radio listeners on the popular Mid-Day matters radio show and classical radio with Janice Furtner on PBS for over eight years. Ricky was a regular contributor of gardening articles for Fort Wayne magazine for many years and continues to write bi-weekly gardening articles for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette.

Penny Alles is a Purdue Advanced Master Gardener who has delivered numerous educational gardening seminars to fellow master gardeners, citizens, neighborhoods and organizations in Allen County. She is a plant diagnostic specialist and is especially knowledgeable about insect pests and diseases of vegetables and ornamentals.



Kitchen Table Players at Sol Fest

The Kitchen Table Players are a trio of local musicians that play original acoustic urban folk and new-age county music. The band consists of Ricky Kemery (songwriter, vocals, guitar, mandolin), Gwendra Turney (violin, vocals) and Ronnie Brocher (cello, keyboard). KTP will be appearing at Sol Fest on Saturday May 2 at 5:30 PM. Sol Fest is held annually at Fox Island. Check out The Kitchen Table Players music and videos at kitchentableplayers/facebook.com

The Great Emu War

I am a fan of the Limu Emu commercials for Progressive Insurance. There is something strangely amusing about an over-the-top obsessive insurance salesperson named Doug with an Emu sidekick that pecks at his reflections in glass and microphones, wrestles with a seatbelt, and freaks out when the car alarm goes off in a surveillance “sting”.

It turns out the Emus have also been in the news in a big way in Australia.

Emus are very big, flightless birds primarily found in Australia. With heights that average no less than 5.7 feet, emus are the second-largest living birds. They have long necks and legs, but very short wings (less than 8 inches)

Up until 1922, emus were a protected native species in Australia, but then things changed.

Emus started to wreak havoc on crops; they came in huge numbers and ate standing crops down to the stub, thereby ravaging farmers’ crops and destroying their livelihood. By late 1932, around 20,000 emus had migrated to newly cultivated lands, as resources in those areas were plentiful.

Needless to say, this was a nuisance that farmers couldn’t just ignore. At first, the farmers, who were ex-military veterans of WW1, started shooting emus, since they were trained riflemen.

Yet even after felling hundreds of those mighty birds, they couldn’t really put a dent in the ever-growing numbers. It was then that they turned to the government for aid and requested the support of the Australian military.

Major G.P.W. Meredith of the Seventh Heavy Battery of the Royal Australian Artillery was assigned the task of eliminating the Emus. Armed with 10,000 rounds of ammunition and 2 Lewis guns, a small contingent headed to the district of Campion to gun down a bunch of emus

Armed troops moved behind the birds in tight combat formation, but the birds responded to this strategic assault by scattering themselves in all directions to minimize their casualties.

A couple days later, around 1,000 emus were spotted in a particular area. Again, soldiers opened fire, but this time from point-blank range. They felled around 10-12 emus before their machine guns jammed in the rainy weather, giving a perfect window of opportunity for the remaining emus to escape. That’s exactly what they did, fleeing safely out of the range of soldiers’ guns.

The abject failure of the military contingent to accomplish its objective (killing thousands of emus), combined with a lot of negative media coverage, prompted the government to pull out the military from the affected regions. Thus, in the first battle, emus emerged victorious.

A second military attempt to cull the emu numbers was made on November 13, 1932. While this assault provided better results (i.e., they killed more emus this time), it was still far from a successful operation, from a logistical standpoint. Reportedly, it took no less than 10 bullets to bring down a single emu, so, the government decided it wasn’t worth it. Major Meredith was recalled, and the emus won... again!

Further Emu Shenanigans

This Emu was spotted exploring the terminal by cleaning staff at Whyalla Airport in South Australia. Lesley King came across this guy trying to board a plane during her regular cleaning routine at the airport. "I came out of a toilet and he was there, about three inches from my face and I let out a piercing squeal," Lesley said. "I ran and told my manager, who didn't believe me at first." The emu was eventually 'shooed' to an outdoor viewing area. Lesley said the emu, which had been hanging around the airport for about a week, left her a nasty present on the floor as it departed the building.



Microgreens

Microgreens are young vegetable greens that are approximately 1–3 inches tall. Microgreens are considered baby plants, falling somewhere between a sprout and baby green. Sprouts do not have leaves - greens do. Microgreens are in demand from consumers, and by restaurants looking for an upscale addition to their menus. Microgreens vary in taste, which can range from neutral to spicy, slightly sour or even bitter, depending on the variety. Generally speaking, their flavor is considered strong and concentrated. Adding microgreens to juicers is also very popular. Growing microgreens has become a viable business opportunity for growers – young and old.



While their nutrient contents vary slightly, most varieties tend to be rich in potassium, iron, zinc, magnesium and copper. Microgreens are also a great source of beneficial plant compounds like antioxidants and polyphenols. Research comparing microgreens to more mature greens reports that nutrient levels in microgreens can be up to nine times higher than those found in mature greens. The December 2016 *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* reported that mice on diets with red cabbage microgreens had lower levels of "bad" cholesterol than mice on diets with mature red cabbage. As always on the Internet, the health claims made by various sources – especially ones who sell seeds, books, or other products related to microgreens – tend to be exaggerated and without solid research. Really, eating microgreens is very good for most people, since eating vegetables- especially organic vegetables- is really really good for you. Many microgreens may be high in vitamin K, an essential vitamin involved in blood clotting. If you are taking Warfarin or another blood-thinning medication, consult with your doctor beforehand.

Common plants grown for greens are: Cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, watercress, mustard, radish and arugula, lettuce, kale, endive, mizuna, chicory and radicchio, dill, carrot, fennel and celery, garlic, onion, leek, amaranth, quinoa swiss chard, beet and spinach. Cereals such as rice, oats, wheat, corn and barley, as well as legumes like chickpeas, beans and lentils, are also sometimes grown into microgreens.

Microgreens are easy to grow. They can be grown year-round, both indoors or outdoors. If you are planting microgreens in a garden bed, loosen the soil and rake it smooth. Scatter your seed so that the seeds are about 1/8- to 1/4-inch apart. Remember, you'll harvest them very young, so they don't need a lot of room. Once the seed is scattered over the area, cover it with about 1/8 inch of soil and water gently but thoroughly. I would recommend a tall raised bed which receives at least 4 hours of sunlight a day no more than 3 feet in width to make watering and harvesting easier.

If you grow microgreens in a container either indoors or outside, choose a container that is at least two inches deep and as large in diameter as you want. Shallow trays or even a salad table work well. Single use growing mats produced specifically for growing microgreens (available on the Internet) are considered very sanitary. Rockwool hydroponic systems might be a very good way to grow microgreens indoors. Fill containers or trays with a good quality organic grower mix and smooth the soil. Scatter the seeds and cover with soil as above. Water gently but thoroughly and place your container in a spot where it will get at least four hours of sunlight. Grow lights are highly recommended in our area. The first leaves you'll see are seed leaves. They don't look anything like the actual leaves of the plant. The best time to harvest microgreens is when they've developed the first set of true leaves, which is generally about 10 days to two weeks after planting. To harvest, simply use scissors to cut the microgreens just above the soil level, and then enjoy.

Ducks and Locusts

At least 100,000 ducks from China are expected to be sent to Pakistan as early as the second half of this year to combat a desert locust outbreak, according to Lu Lizhi, a senior researcher with the Zhejiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences. The ducks are “biological weapons” and can be more effective than pesticide, said Lu, who is in charge of the project in tandem with a university in Pakistan.

As it turns out, “One duck is able to eat more than 200 locusts a day,” There’s gonna be some fat ducks in Pakistan.



Huge swarms of desert locusts have been spreading through countries from eastern Africa to South Asia, destroying crops and pastures at a voracious pace. Experts believe that above average rainfall has been a contributing factor in the outbreak,



It will be crucial for China, which shares a land border with Pakistan and India, to prevent an invasion.

A group of Chinese agricultural experts visited Pakistan this week to help control the locust outbreaks as the plague moves eastwards.

The cost of fighting desert locusts in eastern Africa has doubled to \$128 million, with more countries being affected each day, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization said. The situation remains extremely alarming in the Horn of Africa, where there has been a significant movement of swarms over the Arabian Peninsula that reached both sides of the Persian Gulf.

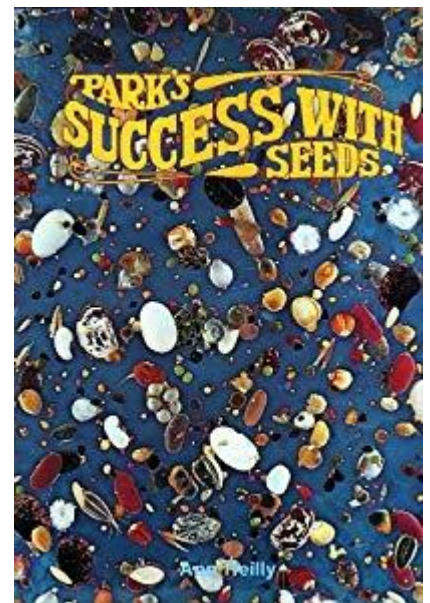
Info About Seed Germination

Even though I am not a big fan of Facebook, I do look at posts occasionally. Sometimes I will respond to gardening questions or requests for assistance. Recently, there was a person lamented her lack of success with the germination of zinnia seeds. She was interested in growing the seeds to eventually be transplanted at her mother’s property. Awww...

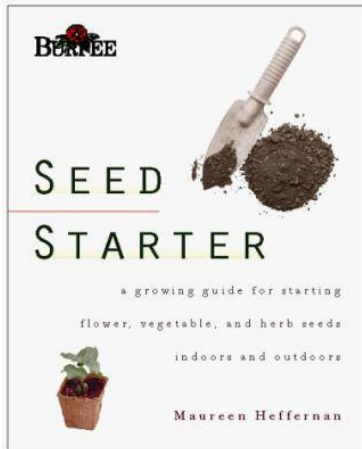
Comments on the post were varied, from just scattering the seeds in the ground or container soil, to tips on whether the seed needed covered—or not, to using heat mats to enhance germination.

Of course, that is one of the issues with Facebook, in that it was rather unclear about whether she had a more substantial growing system – or she was trying to germinate seeds in a window. Of course, it is extremely difficult to germinate seeds indoors- especially at this time of year, without a “system” of racks and lights – since Antarctica probably has more sunny days than we have had this winter. In addition, since zinnias general take about a month to reach transplant size from seed, it may be a bit early to begin growing the zinnias.

There is also the issue of seed quality – how old were the seeds? Were the seeds stored properly?



Regardless, my answer to the post really had to do with getting the proper information about starting seed of flowers like the zinnia in question. There are great resources on growing seed indoors. One of my favorites is Park's Success with Seeds, and old reference book that has stood the test of time. This book will list information regarding temperature, light, and cultural requirements for common and unusual annual and perennial flowers. The book is available on sources like E-Bay for less than five bucks. There is even a Park's Success with Herbs for those interested in growing herbs in their gardens.



Many companies that sell seeds have great catalogs that are chocked full of great information. Burpee Seed company has a great reference book on starting seed. Johnny's seed catalog has wonderful information about growing vegetables with some great charts at the beginning about when to start the seeds, how many to seed per row – cultural requirements... good stuff. Many seed catalogs are free – and some charge – but it's a good idea to write or call the company to ask for a catalog. For some reason having a hard cover ready resource seems better than surfing the Internet or Facebook.

Woodchucks Chucking Wood

Every company that sells insurance now has discovered that humor – especially animal humor - sells insurance. Well...it is not like folks bubble over with excitement looking at actuary tables... In the mid-1990's, insurance company advertising was considered novel and companies like GEICO insurance wanted to move towards the idea that insurance was a commodity rather than a service offered through a long-term relationship with a full-service agent. Interesting. Once again let's diminish the idea of human to human interaction.



Many of the most prominent television ad campaigns, such as the GEICO Gecko, the GEICO Cavemen, the Rhetorical Questions campaign featuring Maxwell the Pig, and the GEICO Hump Day Camel were developed by the Martin Agency, which has held the advertising contract with Geico since 1994. I am particularly fond of the woodchuck chucking wood commercials – which if one ponders – has nothing to do with insurance.

GEICO is the second largest television advertiser in the United States. I have visions of the cable series Mad Men, where rooms full of Martin Agency cigarette smoking ad salespeople conducted market research with consumers.

Salesperson: We have asked you people here today to find out what makes you think: “Today I am going to switch my insurance company” ... Groans from audience....

Audience member: You said we would get a free Gecko T-shirt for attending this, is that true!!!

Salesperson: Yes indeed... Now I am going to show you all pictures of different objects, and just shout out if the picture makes you think insurance! Ok? Nods from audience

Shows picture of **cobra**..... no response... Shows picture of **Elmer Fudd**.. slight stir from group... **My Little Pony:** “I loved that pony more than life itself! One member of the audience wipes away tears.....

Sonic the Hedgehog... Groans .. **Wonder Woman**... Person in group responds: “She just doesn’t say “insurance” to me”.. nods of assent from other group members...

Picture of Woodchucks... Wild clapping and yells from audience.... ringing gongs and cowbells from the street....



Despite what their name or popular culture might make some assume, woodchucks do not toss, chuck, or throw wood. They actually get their name from the Algonquin tribe of Native Americans, who originally called them “wuchak.” English settlers, in trying to use that word, likely came up with the name “woodchuck.” Depending on where you are in the country, woodchucks are also known as groundhogs, land beavers, and whistling pigs.

The woodchuck is an herbivore preferring tender plants to coarser bark and trees. They do not typically eat hard wood. While woodchucks do not “chuck” wood, they do

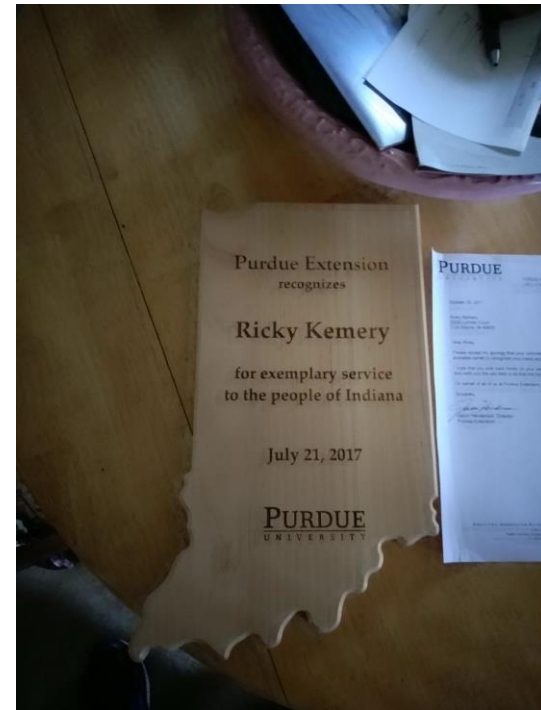
“chuck” dirt as they build underground burrows. In 1988, Richard Thomas, a New York Fish and Wildlife technician, decided to estimate how much wood a woodchuck might chuck if it indeed could chuck wood. Using the dirt woodchucks remove when building their burrows, he estimated woodchucks chucked about 700 pounds of soil when building a burrow.

Hoggles' Demented Cat Logic Logic



To my Caregiver: Just a note to let you know how appreciated you are by Purdue Extension (see plaque from former employer), citizens, and cats in the community.

I am especially proud of your work (with the help of Master Gardeners) to develop and enhance the Display Gardens at the Allen County Extension office, creation of a Master Gardener Youth Program in 1998, the creation of the regional Master Gardener program so that almost every county in northern Indiana now has Master Gardener volunteers, the creation and development of community gardens, school gardens, and farm markets in Fort Wayne, and



developing, teaching and promoting the Indiana Master Naturalist and Tree Steward programs in the area.

You supported and served the Allen County Landscapers, Fort Wayne Arborists, and the Northeast Indiana Flower Growers. You also amazingly delivered over 700 talks to neighborhood associations, business and professional and non-profit groups. You also befriended and cared for me - probably the most unruly and unappreciative cat of all time.

Now Since I am finished sucking up – can I have a special cat treat at bedtime each evening? Nothing special .. just a filet of tuna or salmon ... wild caught ... not farmed... of course...

P.S You have done well to try to forget and forgive Allen County Extension office support staff, Educators , and a few disgruntled volunteers who were part of the toxic work environment who spread rumors, half-truths, comments out of context, lies, and made up stories about your work performance and professionalism - My cat view and response to those who violated your friendship and trust – shame on you and your continued behavior.

P.S.S. See next page for some Park Dept. trips coming up!



Going Places

Day Trips and Tours with Fort Wayne Parks & Recreation



Chicago Flower & Garden Show March 21, 2020

At Chicago's Navy Pier, you will enjoy lush themed gardens, creative tablescapes, demonstrations by florists and chefs, gardening seminars and the popular marketplace. Entry to the show, lunch on Navy Pier and a continental breakfast en route are included. A fast food stop (on your own) will be made on the way home.

Departs: 8:00 a.m. from Bob Arnold Park
Parnell at East State Blvd.

Returns: 10:30 p.m.

Fee: \$115

Holland Tulip Festival May 2, 2020

A showcase of millions of tulips. We will visit Nelis' Dutch Village where we will step back into the Netherlands of over 100 years ago complete with authentic Dutch architecture, flowering gardens, canals, windmills and dancers. Enjoy an authentic Dutch lunch (included) before joining a costumed guide on a bus tour that includes Holland's historic areas. Our final stop will be the downtown Artisan's Market. A continental breakfast will be served en route and a fast food stop (on your own) will be made on the way home.

Departs: 7:30 a.m. from Bob Arnold Park
Parnell at East State Blvd.

Returns: 9:30 p.m.

Fee: \$115

SIGN UP TODAY!

www.fortwayneparks.org • 427-6000

Questions? Call Diane Kennedy at 427-6017.



Contact me if you are interested in placing ads (for a small fee) in this newsletter. *To subscribe to this electronic newsletter, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com - or text 260-431-6893. I will not share information with others.*

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, sustainability. Just contact me at 260-431-6893.
Ricky Kemery will not knowingly discriminate in any way based on race, gender etc...