

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

and Home Horticulture

April 2020 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.

Note: I apologize in advance for this newsletter being larger than most. I found I had a lot to say about gardening in this world of social isolation and fear. While I included articles intended to be lighthearted because we all need a bit of a laugh nowadays, I also included information that I thought might help folks in their gardening efforts this particular spring. I hope everyone stays safe and socially isolated as much as they can!

The Gardener's Dilemma – How to Purchase Plants and Supplies in 2020

Since so many folks are cooped up at home, I would expect home gardening to be on the rise in popularity this year. Food availability is still an issue, and growing food in a home garden may result in fewer trips to the grocery. Gardening has always been good for the body and soul, and this year getting outside to enjoy sunshine and fresh air is a good thing when we are socially isolated. One can also involve the kids – if you can tear them away from cell phones and computers. Good luck...

Evidently many folks feel the same way, as some online seed and plant companies are now refusing or postponing orders because the demand is so high. I guess it is the same folks who are purchasing a year's supply of flour, taco sauce, and egg noodles at grocery stores to survive the apocalypse.

It will be interesting to see consumer behavior as the weather turns warmer. One would hope that mobs of gardeners do not crowd the garden centers that are open in search of plants and supplies this spring. No bag of mulch is worth getting the corona virus.

Late Note: As you can see from a recent picture of the parking lot at Menards on the north side, folks are continuing to shop and crowd stores as normal – how disappointing.

I have written previously that my hope is that these garden centers will provide delivery and pick up services similar to groceries to protect consumers this spring.

I found a few places online where one can order supplies and transplants of vegetables. There is no guarantee these places will also not be overrun, or their products will meet your expectations. I enjoy shopping at small operations because those kinds of operations can provide personal service and unusual products not found at mainstream stores. Here are a few places that are interesting.



The Chile Woman is a real person (Susan Welsand) who owns a small greenhouse in Bloomington Indiana. She grows unusual peppers, some tomatoes, and tomatillos. Some peppers are from seed she has collected and acquired from all over the world. She is a champion of sustainable and organic gardening. Here is an article excerpt from the local Bloomington newspaper.



My business The Chile Woman is dedicated to collecting, preserving and growing chile pepper varieties from all over the world. I am committed to preserving chile pepper biodiversity. I now maintain my own version of Svalbard, a seed bank of over 1800 chile pepper varieties. I am not a fan of hybrid, GMO or bioengineered seed. I have been a Hoosier organic chile grower for 21 years utilizing natural, sustainable chemical free methods. My sustainable lifestyle has carried over to every aspect of running my business. I use local suppliers and recycle everything we can reuse from our greenhouse plastics, to office materials, refilled ink cartridges, repurposed

furniture from Habitat Restore, recycled materials for the animal shelters and beverage 6 packs for easily transportable plant containers for people picking up plants at the greenhouse or Farmers Market. On our farm, everything has a purpose. We keep sheep so we don't have to mow. The chickens range free plucking up bugs and working through manure. The llama guards the sheep and the chickens.

Welsand appreciates a super-hot chile, but she prefers one that packs as much flavor as it does heat. Her favorite is the Arrivivi Gusano from Bolivia. "It's a little white chile," she says. "It's very hot but with fantastic flavor."

Dry temperatures enhance the heat of a pepper. When the plants get stressed from lack of water, that increases the capsaicin -- the thing in a pepper that gives it its heat. "Some people don't water their peppers on purpose," she says.

Note: I have ordered transplants for several years from the Chile Woman. Last year the transplants were \$3.50 apiece – It is fun to try different peppers from all over the world. <https://www.thechilewoman.com/>



**Brushwood
Nursery**
Clematis Specialists

I have always loved clematis because they can really brighten up a landscape and add interest and color. With proper care, they can live quite a long time. I prefer what I call the jackmanii type clematis as these types (which flower on new growth each year) only require cutting back to ground level or slightly

above each early spring. Other clematis types flower on old wood, so they may only be lightly pruned each year. Over time, these types of clematis only have flowers and foliage on the top portion of the plant. I have never ordered from this nursery, but they do offer larger container size which is important when planting clematis. The plants are not cheap, but I would rather have a larger root zone. Here is their ad below:

I try to locate clematis vines so they receive about a half day of full sun, with light but not baking sun for the rest of the day. I have found that clematis do poorly when soil is too hot and dry, or too cool and wet. Amend an area where one will plant, so the roots can spread in rich soil. Overwatering clematis on clay soil can develop clematis wilt – a fungal disease with no cure.



R.H. Shumway's

R.H. Shumway is an heirloom seed company that was started in 1870 in Rockford IL. The business was in Rockford until the late 80's when it was purchased and moved to South Carolina. In 1999 it was again moved to its current home in

Randolph, WI. Shumway specializes in heirloom varieties of vegetable, flower and farm seeds. Many of the farm seeds were developed in the 40's and 50's and are some of the earliest hybrids used by farming. Many of the vegetable varieties date back to the turn of the century with improvements due to selection. The catalog is literally a work of art.

If you have a favorite seed company or online nursery, send me an email or text with the company, their email, what they offer, and why you like them to kemeryr7@frontier.com or 260-431-6893

A Late Note: At present, these seed companies and nurseries that I have done business with over the years were still taking online orders. Some state that their shipping will probably be delayed. There are probably more companies still out there taking orders.

Brighter Blooms <https://www.brighterblooms.com>

Gurney Seed <https://www.gurneys.com/>

Park Seed <https://www.parkseed.com>

Stark Brothers <https://www.starkbros.com>

Territorial Seed <https://territorialseed.com>

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds <https://www.rareseeds.com>

Tomato Growers Supply <http://www.tomatogrowers.com/> seeds and transplants

Totally Tomatoes <https://www.totallytomato.com/>

Homemade Weed Control

I have been once again asked to provide this homemade control for weeds by readers. Keep in mind this only burns down plants, it doesn't travel within the plant like systemic herbicides such as glyphosate (Round- Up). Since many folks don't want to use Round-Up because of health concerns, this can be an alternative control for common weeds.

People still need to be careful, wearing gloves, eye protection, long sleeves and pants when spraying. This will also damage desirable plants, so use pieces of cardboard to prevent spray drift.

Plants will grow back usually so several applications may be necessary. One can also use this without Epsom salts, as the salts might damage soil if used repeatably.

1. Mix a gallon of five-percent household white vinegar with a cup of Epsom salt and stir until the salt is completely dissolved.
2. Next, add a tablespoonful of Dawn dish soap to act as a surfactant. Surfactants help solutions adhere better to their targets upon contact. Again, stir the mixture for nice blend.
3. Transfer the solution into an empty plastic spray bottle. Then proceed to spray all weed plants growing on your patio.

The Early Weeds are Here

It amazes me how quickly weeds develop in the spring. After all, one of the definitions of a weed is a plant that does really well in a place we don't want it. It's a rather simplistic definition, but many weeds outcompete other plants just by getting a head start on their neighbors.

Chickweed is already getting a good start in my garden. Actually, it got its start last fall, where the seed germinated – got a bit of a start- and then took a rest during the winter until early spring- when it resumes growth and produces its tiny white flowers. Chickweed is more annoying than anything, as the dense carpets in a garden bed are relatively easy to remove. In a lawn chickweed is a more annoying problem.





Henbit is another winter annual which is pesky as the season develops. This plant starts out innocently, with scalloped small leaves that don't look like they will be a problem at all. In the spring, the plant puts on quick growth and can take over a garden space. Fortunately, henbit is easy to pull or hoe, but if you cultivate and or mulch your garden now, you won't see much of it at all.



Henbit seedling

Goats are “Taking Over the Town”

It is interesting to observe how quickly animals have learned that many towns and cities are pretty much deserted these days due to social distancing. It is like the animals get together and say “Hey! The humans are gone! Time to party!” Gone are the quests to find food in decreasing habits, crazy traffic and pollution.

So, it is no surprise that goats are roaming in Great Britain. Maybe a baker's dozen of goats can bake up delicious perfect recipe in 2020's version of “The Great British Baking show” that I have been binge watching, as are countless other shut-ins. No wonder flour is scarce- everyone is making perfect “biscuits” (British for cookies).



CNN News: A coastal town in north Wales has found a whole new meaning to the phrase herd immunity, after goats were spotted roaming its quiet streets. It comes just days after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson introduced tighter restrictions around social movement last week in a bid to limit the spread of coronavirus.

Residents spotted herds of goats strolling around Llandudno on Friday and over the weekend, after more than a dozen of the animals ventured down from the Great Orme headland and roamed the streets of the coastal town.

Videos and pictures shared online show the goats grazing on grass from church grounds, flower beds, and residential properties.



They are referred to as Great Orme Kashmiri goats, whose ancestors originated from northern India. Town resident, Carl Triggs, was returning home after delivering personal protective equipment masks when he saw the goats. "The goats live on the hill overlooking the town. They stay up there, very rarely venturing into the street," he told CNN.

Mark Richards, from hotel Lansdowne House, told CNN: "They sometimes come to the foot of the Great Orme in March but this year they are all wandering the streets in town as there are no cars or people." "They are becoming more and more confident with no people," he said, adding that it

saves him cutting the hedge. But local councilor Penny Andow told CNN she has lived in the area for 33 years and has never seen the goats venture from the Great Orme down into the town.

My Spring Integrative Garden

One of the issues gardening will have this spring is how to obtain the materials they need to plant and maintain their landscape and gardens.

Since I am a boomer with pesky underlying health issues, I don't plan on making many-if any trips - to the garden center or nursery for supplies and plants - unless they change purchasing practices that involve purchasing, delivery, or pick-up that involves me not coming in direct contact with people - especially potentially pestilent people.



This year, I am beginning to eliminate some raised beds, because I just don't grow as much food now as when there were two people to feed. Now, it's just me, bad knees and all. Garden chores such as weeding, mulching, and planting are much more difficult nowadays. The other thing is a few of my raised beds are now more in shade than sun. That is bad for growing many plants who prefer sun. In addition, I had to place various types of fencing around my raised bed to keep critters of various sorts from using my raised beds as a playground and a cafeteria - making access to the garden more difficult.

This year, I am planning on adopting a variety of garden strategies when re-doing a raised bed (I call it a Supersized raised garden). I plan to add to the bed height by using existing cheap wooden garden fence and heavy cardboard to raise the height of the beds for better access by me - the boomer gardener - and denying access to critters who are not concerned in the slightest whether I enjoy the food or beauty offered by my raised beds.

In addition, given this valuable opportunity for more work, I will use integrative techniques to prepare the heightened space with better soil. Remember, this effort is for my sanity and peace of mind in this time of social isolation.

On top of the existing soil, I plan to add charred remains from my campfire last year. I didn't use store-bought charcoal, just sticks from trees and shrubs in my landscape. I have no walnut trees, which is good, as that residue in the wood is toxic to many vegetables. This concept of "bio-char" is based on rain forest gardens established by native Amazonians to grow vegetables. This dark earth is great for soil. I don't have a lot of biochar, but a little goes a long way.



I will also adapt the principle of Hugelkultur by adding a layer of unburned twigs or small logs to the bottom of the raised bed. Hugelkultur has been used in Eastern Europe for centuries. It is a German term that translates "mound culture" or "hill culture" and was probably developed over time and out of necessity to improve farming conditions in rugged and mountainous regions. There are various ways you will find this spelled...hugelkulture, hugelculture, etc. This is a horticultural technique adopted by permaculture advocates where a mound constructed from decaying wood debris and other compostable biomass plant materials is later (or immediately) planted as a raised bed. In theory Hugelkultur helps to improve soil fertility, water retention, and soil warming, thus benefiting plants grown on or near such mounds. Since my

23 and Me says I am about 23 percent Germanic; I feel a need to use this practice, Ja,,,,,dis iss gut.

I will then add a layer of existing moist leaves to the bed using the practice of lasagna gardening. I love lasagna, even though acquiring simple things like spaghetti sauce and organic ground beef has been an issue lately. Finding taco



sauce of all things, has been unbelievably difficult. I envision someone's basement filled to the brim with Ortega taco sauce – just in case a world apocalypse occurs.

I will top the bed with compost and growers mix from a few containers I have that I planted last year with annuals. Honestly, I knew better – watering containers every day or so in summer drought has become more of a bother than a benefit. I do plan to grow a few veggies and plenty of flowers, adapting both companion planting and attracting pollinators to my space. I will use seed and a few transplants acquired from the Internet instead of purchasing from a garden center. Frankly I had terrible germination rates from seeds purchased from box stores last year. I could see germination percentages listed on seed purchased from the Internet and look at reviews about the performance. I had great germination rates on most seed purchased ala online.

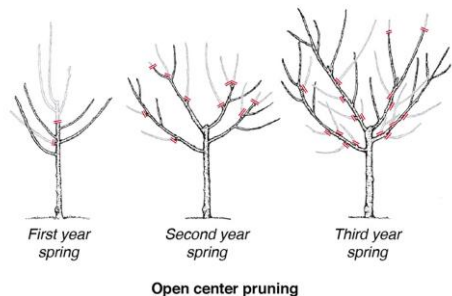
Only time will tell if my integrated organic raised bed will be successful. I could have just purchased pavers, wood, or cinder blocks to raise the existing bed. However, to purchase those items at a store puts fragile ole me at risk, and I kind of like the idea of reusing materials at hand for my integrated garden.

Cherry Trees

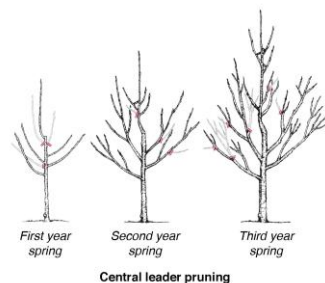
There are two kinds of large-fruited cherry trees to grow for our area. Sour cherries are .. sour.. and the trees tend to be larger and more cold-hardy than their cousin – the sweet cherry. As a rule, trees producing sour cherries are self-pollinating while sweet cherries are not and require more than one tree to produce fruit. Really, its never a bad idea to plant more than one tree when it comes to growing fruit. Even though sweet cherries are preferred, simply adding sugar to sour cherries can make them delicious in a pie – for example – just saying. Usually it takes about 3-5 years for a young tree to begin to produce fruit. Patience is needed – young grasshopper.

Cherry trees are very susceptible to root and collar rot, so they need to be planted in a spot (a mildly sloping area above grade) and the soil needs to be drain well. They also require about eight hours of sunlight daily, so you cannot plant them where they will grow in the shade of other trees You don't want them planted in low lying areas because these areas get more frost (which can damage or kill tender flower buds) during the early spring. Avoid planting early blooming, frost sensitive trees such as apricots, sweet cherries, and peaches on south-facing slopes because frost may kill early blossoms. A north-facing slope is safer for trees that flower early.

Sour cherries may be planted on south-facing slopes. Don't plant on top of a slope or hill as the trees be too exposed. Mulch is Ok to use but keep the mulch at least 6-12 inches away from where the trunk meets the ground. I like the idea of using clover as a mulch/cover to keep the weeds down, add nitrogen back into the soil, and drawn in pollinators to the area. If clover is not your thing, then add a circle of compost around the tree, and lightly mulch with shredded bark or pine needles over the top. Use an organic fertilizer with mycorrhizae and/or spray the tree – (leaves bark and all) with compost tea. Avoid overwatering the cherries when they are young. Less than a 2-inch trunk diameter tree would get by fine with approximately 5 gallons of water a week during summer dry periods.



In theory, pruning cherries differs based on whether they are sweet or sour. Early on the central leader of the sweet cherry is removed to create a cup-shaped open center tree. This is so sunlight penetrates to tree to make the sweet fruit even sweeter and to promote good air circulation through the tree. One can use branch spreaders or weights on the developing scaffold branches to achieve roughly a 45-degree angle. Notice the branches are chosen so they alternate on the tree – rather than being



located directly across from each other – especially on the sour cherry. After that, it is mainly an issue of keeping the side branches short enough, so the weight of the fruit doesn't break them. In addition, follow the general rule of pruning by pruning branches that grow straight up, that cross or cover others, and grow towards the interior of the tree. This is the one instance – because of a rather insidious disease called black knot – that I would use a pruning sealer on pruned cuts on a cherry. Make sure to sterilize pruners after each cut with disinfectant.

Central leader pruning is how most apple trees - and sour cherries - are pruned. The idea here is not to completely remove the central leader, but to repeatably cut it back – choosing another nearby branch near the top to become the leader every 2-3 years- so the tree never becomes too large to harvest. All the other pruning rules apply, except that the process of removing the central leader every two-three years promotes vigorous growth below. If you don't keep on top of the pruning, the tree will become overgrown and fruiting will diminish. Some experts recommend only light pruning on cherries in late summer because of potential disease spread, and in general it is not a good idea to prune over a third of the tree in any one season.

Cherry trees are susceptible to myriad of fungal diseases. Black knot, root and collar rot, and gummosis are the most destructive. In addition, a disease called brown rot can quickly overcome developing cherry fruit in wet years. The Ohio State and Cornell University have excellent publications about diseases of cherry trees .

The Illinois Extension service recommends these cherry cultivars. I would recommend dwarf varieties as they are easier to grow, maintain, and harvest. I would also invest in netting to protect ripe cherries from naughty birds.

Cherries (Tart)	'Montmorency,' 'Meteor,' 'Suda Hardy,' 'Mesabi,' 'North Star.' All are self-fruitful, so cross-pollination is not needed.
Cherries (Sweet)	'Black Tartarian,' 'Glass,' 'Rainer,' 'Stark Gold Yellow,' 'Stella,' 'Van,' and 'Windsor.' Plant any two for cross-pollination.

Here is Purdue University's pub on growing and selecting cherries

<https://ag.purdue.edu/hla/pubs/HO/HO-9.pdf>

Fixing Soil- More Organic Ingredients

Here's a list of more organic soil amendments you might want to look into to improve your raised bed soil quality:

Worm castings, compost, coir (coconut fiber), greensand, untreated grass clippings, cornmeal, alfalfa meal, clean straw and kelp meal are all excellent soil amendments. Some materials can be rather pricey, so they are best used in smaller scale situations such as raised beds. Even dried seaweed or algae from a pond or lake that has not had pesticides applied makes great fertilizer.





Coir is also used to retain soil in hanging baskets, and as an amendment in soilless soil mixes. The Curse of Oak Island binge watchers on the history channel will recognize that coconut fiber was used as layers in the original money pit, and in flood tunnels.

Besides compost tea, one can also make a “tea” of sorts by placing pulled weeds (no invasive weeds like quack grass or ground ivy for instance - or weeds with seeds) in a medium-sized trash container. Add some water and allow the mix to “blend” by stirring or chopping the mix. Pour the water around plants for a free

organic fertilizer. I have also used pulled spring weeds and used them as a natural mulch in-between and around veggies and flowers. I find it ironic that these pulled weeds can help prevent future weeds from growing.

Avoid the hype and advertising that suggests that materials like gypsum or lime are appropriate soil amendments for our area. Lime is a very alkaline compound, so adding it to lawns and gardens only makes an alkaline soil more alkaline. Plants prefer slightly acidic soil, so adding too much lime can be a disaster. Adding gypsum to soil works better in western soils. It also does nothing to improve the pH of soils. The Stevie Wonder song “Nothing plus Nothing means Nothing” comes to mind.

Gardening with Children

Gardening is a wonderful family activity for children and adults. The family can enjoy time outdoors in this period of social isolation – plus the family can grow fresh healthy vegetables to prepare and enjoy together. Following are some helpful hints garnered from over 15 years of working with Master Gardeners and the Master Gardener Youth program in Allen County, and working with teachers to provide youth gardening programs at many schools in Allen County.



For children over 7 years of age; let them take care of their own garden plot (s). Not only does this teach them responsibility, commitment, and fortitude, it also allows them to be creative and responsible for their decisions.

Keep it simple: Each young adult in our program had approximately 30 square feet of garden to plan and maintain. Raised beds made it easier for them to plant, water, and weed.

Let the young adults decide what they want to grow-within reason. There is nothing worse for a child to have all their decisions made for them by adults. They will quickly lose interest. Only by giving youth some ownership will they learn to be enthusiastic about their garden plots.

This is a great opportunity to research what plants grow well, how much space items will take up, cultural needs, etc. Work with your kids to problem solve and make good decisions. A good example of this is when asked what plants they would like to grow, many of the young adult might pick pumpkins or watermelons. The issue with these plants is that they take up a tremendous amount of space and will not be ready to eat until late in the year. If we grew larger vegetables, then we grew those plants in separate plots. For instance, the family might have a special area to grow the three Sisters, corn, beans, and squash, on a tepee made of sticks. One could try to grow a milk fed pumpkin in a special area as Laura Ingalls Wilder did in their pioneer garden.

Have the children research how large the plants will be at maturity. We found that the kids often picked too many plants for too small a space. The concept of square foot gardening works well for kids, as it gives them direction on how many plants will fill a space.

We found it was best to provide a short list of plants to pick from. Tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, beans, peas, lettuce, kale, are some good veggies that don't take up too much space. We used transplants of tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers.

Have the children make maps of their proposed plots and keep a small journal of planting times, varieties, and when the plants were first harvested.

Allow only organic pest control with supervision. Teach the children how to scout their plants, looking on the underside of leaves for any pests. We only allowed the use of Diatomaceous Earth (applied with a flour sifter) for mites and Mexican bean beetle on beans, and flea beetles on eggplant. Dipel dust was used for Tomato Hornworm and cabbage looper. Insecticidal soap was used for aphids. This is a good chance to teach Integrated



Pest Management, where one accepts some damage (everything needs to eat), protection of pollinators, and the need to work with and protect the environment.

Have the children water their plants and teach them the right way to water. We had the children dig near their plants to determine if the soil at the six to eight-inch depth was wet or dry. If the soil was dry, then the plant needed to be watered gently. Adults can also learn this simple yet very important skill.

Have the children help cook the veggies after harvesting. We found that many kids did not know how to cut vegetables safely or correctly. We found recipes that were delicious and simple to cook. That was one of their favorite activities.

If you believe that these concepts I have listed are just too much for a young adult to learn, please believe that kids continually amazed us with their ability to learn concepts that many adults were unable or unwilling to adopt. Give them a chance to be creative, responsible, and brilliant.

The whole point of gardening with children is to make it a positive and fun experience – not just drudgery and a chore. Make sure to praise often and let them know that THEY are responsible for THEIR awesome garden because learning how to grow your own food is a skill that lasts a lifetime.

Finally, we found that children under 7 preferred small tasks to perform with their parents, rather than more complex responsibility. Smaller children love to spend time with parents, and most love to help. Be patient, this time is a great time to grow together with your child.



The Chipmunk Story – Cuteness and a Hot Tub

It all began last year during the spring. I have a bird feeder outside my window so I can watch birds as I have coffee in the morning. My father used to love to watch birds as he grew older, and now I understand why. Certain birds arrive regularly to the feeder, and I even gave them names. Silly, I know.

In mid spring, I noticed unusual activity at the feeder. A cute little chipmunk was trying to scale the pole of the feeder to reach to tempting seed. He never made it, but his

antics brought me great amusement. The real fun began when I placed another feeder by the window and added mature sunflower stalks near the feeder for larger birds.

The chipmunk quickly learned that he/she could scale the sunflower stalk and jump to the actual feeder. I named the chipmunk “Sparky” because it had a lot of gumption and resourcefulness.

Many times, Sparky would take a tumble as she (as it turns out) made the leap from the stalk to the feeder. After a brief respite, and some chipmunk pondering, she would try again. The feeding birds seem amused and at the same time irritated by Sparky’s repeated efforts. One could almost see the fevered anticipation in Sparky’s eyes as she eyed the delicious seed—just beyond her reach.

Eventually, Sparky figured out how to leap from the stalk to the feeder. She would lay in deep bliss on her back as the irritated birds looked on—stuffing seed into her moth pouch for future use. Yes, life was good.

You might ask—Ricky, why didn’t you just remove the stalks and or set a trap for the chipmunk. Two reasons; Sparky was too cute, and she had also figured out how to reach the seed by wrapping her little legs around the feeder poles, to scale the poles with no assistance.

I looked forward to Sparky’s antics at the feeder each day. She wasn’t constantly at the feeder, so the birds still had their share. As summer progressed into fall, I noticed Sparky’s visits to the feeder had diminished. Eventually, she just disappeared—or so I thought.

Now I have a small hot tub on my patio which has been a real joy to relieve the pain from arthritis—and knee surgery a year ago. It’s also a great place to star gaze and relax from the incredible stress of retirement.

One evening in late fall, I opened to top of the tub in anticipation of another relaxing soak to find the water was ice cold. My hot tub wasn’t working. Oh boy.



Eventually I removed the cover of the tub that enclosed the pump area and found it was full of dirt—completely full. I had a friend help me excavate the soil in the compartment, and we found holes in the fiberglass and Styrofoam sides and insulation that looked suspiciously the size of a rat—or chipmunk. As it turned out, the hot tub provided a perfect winter home for the little chipmunk, who had somehow entered the tub from underneath, and chewed her way into and then through the tub to reach to pump area, which was a wonderful safe and warm haven where she could store her food for winter. The excavated soil in the compartment that caused the pump to burn out was also full of bird seed. Any jury in the world would convict Sparky of Hot Tub murder based on that evidence alone.

I wanted to put a snap trap in the compartment to trap Sparky but was persuaded to use a small live trap purchased from Amazon to trap and release her. Oh, and did I mention I had to purchase special heaters for the tub water and the compartment to prevent water from freezing and causing further damage—plus a special extension cord for high wattage and outdoor use to keep the water heated?

It took several attempts to finally trap Sparky—with first peanut butter and oatmeal baits, and ramen noodles. Finally, apple slices did the trick. Like I mentioned, Sparky was a pretty smart little creature.

It was too cold at the time to release Sparky back into the wild, so I kept Sparky in her cage for several days (feeding her apple slices and peanut butter) until the weather warmed up enough to release her in an undisclosed area.

She was released in an area near a walnut tree in a forest, where the ground was still littered with nuts. The thinking here is that she was probably smart enough to dig a burrow and store nuts for winter even though researchers suggest that many animals released into the wild do not survive. They probably haven't met Sparky.



Knowing her, she will have pilfered a portable heater, laptop and small TV to binge watch cooking shows during the winter months.

As she was released, I made a mental note to have her served in small claims court for the incredible, expensive damage to the hot tub. However, it was my fault. As an Extension Educator, I had written articles and advised people on the damage the little cute chipmunks can cause in and around a house.

Next year, If I see a chipmunk in my landscape, I will trap and release it where it can't do damage. Lesson learned....

A Relatively Quick Way to Determine Soil Drainage

Step 1: Dig a hole at least 12" in diameter by 12" deep, with straight sides. If you're testing your entire property, dig several holes – cover the holes so you don't end up on America's Funniest Home Videos.

Step 2: Fill the hole with water (before covering), and let it sit overnight. This saturates the soil and helps give a more accurate test reading.

Step 3: Refill hole with water to the top the next day. In our area, there may be still be water in the hole from the first filling.

Step 4: Measure Drainage Every Hour ... measure the water level by laying a stick, pipe, or other straight edge across the top of the hole, then use a tape measure or yardstick to determine the water level. Continue to measure the water level every hour until the hole is empty, noting the number of inches the water level drops per hour. Again, in our area, the hole may still have water even after many hours.

The ideal soil drainage is around 2" per hour, with readings between 1"- 3", which is generally ok for plants that have average drainage needs. If the rate is less than 1" per hour, your drainage is too slow, and you'll need to improve drainage or choose plants tolerant of wet soil. If drainage is more than 4" per hour, it's too fast.

This is particularly valuable to determine drainage in a lawn. If your drainage is poor because of clay soil and compaction, as it usually will be, then core aerate every spring or fall until the drainage improves.

If your vegetable or flower garden has poor drainage, then it is probably time to consider raised beds.

Wilbur Scoville – Bring on The Heat

People have known about the tongue-burning, tear-inducing qualities of peppers long before Columbus reached the Americas. Before Wilbur Scoville, however, no one knew how to measure a pepper's "heat"..

Born in Bridgeport Connecticut on January 22nd, 1865, Wilbur Lincoln Scoville was a chemist, award-winning researcher, professor of pharmacology and the second vice-chairman of the American Pharmaceutical Association. His book, *The Art of Compounding*, makes one of the earliest mentions of milk as an antidote for pepper heat. He is perhaps best remembered for his organoleptic test, which uses human testers to measure pungency in peppers.

Here's how the test worked: Dried pepper was dissolved in alcohol to extract the heat components (capsaicinoids), then diluted in a solution of sugar water. Decreasing concentrations of the extracted capsaicinoids are given to a panel of five trained tasters, until a majority (at least three) can no longer detect the heat in a dilution. The heat level is based on this dilution, rated in multiples of 100 SHU (Scoville Heat Units).

A weakness of the Scoville organoleptic test is its imprecision due to human subjectivity, depending on the taster's palate and number of mouth heat receptors, which vary widely among people. Another weakness is sensory fatigue as the palate is quickly desensitized to capsaicinoids after tasting a few samples within a short time period. laboratories.^[11]

A more boring way to determine Scoville Heat Units was developed by scientists in the 1980s, using high-performance liquid chromatography, which measures the concentration of heat-producing capsaicinoids. The results result then are converted to Scoville Heat Units. These units are calculated from "parts per million of heat" and are often listed in catalogs and groceries for consumers. Any pepper registering over 80,000 Scoville Units are so hot they should be sold with a disclaimer. 25,000 to 70,00 units are pretty darn hot, 3,000 to 25,00 moderate, and 700 to 3,000 only mildly pungent. How utterly organoleptic....



"Just give me the ham on rye."

Shrooms (Adapted from a news release by the Mushroom Farmers of Pennsylvania (MFPA)).

Nearly two-thirds of the white button mushrooms consumed the United States come from the 68 Pennsylvania (PA) mushroom farms, according to the U.S.

Department of Agriculture National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS). White button mushrooms are by far the most popular, however mushroom growers in the state also produce other varieties. Specialty mushrooms, including Shiitake, Oyster and others totaled more than \$96 million in sales last year, according to NASS,

with PA farmers making up a significant portion of those sales. Last year, Pennsylvania farms produced more than 577 million pounds of white button mushrooms, which accounted for nearly \$560 million in sales.

"From Philadelphia to Phoenix, chances are if you eat mushrooms on your pizza, in your salads or as part of your burgers, they come from Pennsylvania mushroom farms," said Lori Harrison, Mushroom Farmers of PA (MFPA) communications manager.



Pennsylvania mushroom growers have William Swayne to thank for the long tradition of mushroom growing in the state. A successful florist in Kennett Square, PA, he conceived the idea of growing mushrooms beneath his

greenhouse benches. The results were encouraging enough to make him decide that a separate building would make it possible to control the growing conditions for mushrooms. He built the first mushroom house in the area and made it a commercial success. Soon others joined in their own mushroom growing businesses and the 'Mushroom Capital of the World' was born.

Today, all of the 68 mushroom farms in Pennsylvania are owned and operated by local families, and all but a few are multi-generational - mom and pop farms passed down to sons and daughters, nephews and cousins.

The life of a cultivated mushroom requires sterile conditions, so the entire growing process begins in a laboratory. The spores, or natural seeds of the mushroom, are so tiny that a person cannot handle them. Instead, lab personnel inoculate sterile cereal grains with the spores and incubate them until they develop into a viable product. These grains become "spawn," which can then be sown like seed.

Growers carefully prepare the basic growing medium for mushroom production. Called substrate, it's a key material in mushroom production. The substrate is made up of recycled materials like hay, straw, corn cobs, cocoa shells and horse or chicken manure. Once the substrate has been prepared and pasteurized to kill any pests, the material is placed in wooden trays or beds and mixed with the spawn. A top layer of peat moss is added. From this point, it takes about three weeks to produce the first mushrooms for harvest. Throughout the growing period, mushroom farmers play the role of Mother Nature, manipulating water, airflow, temperature fluctuation and more to maximize mushroom growth. Mushrooms mature at varying times, so picking by hand is continuous for two to three weeks.

Ricky's Comments

More than 60 years the Brighton Mushroom in northern Indiana was built by Campbell's Soup Co. to grow mushrooms for its soups... It was a huge operation that employed hundreds of workers that eventually closed. The mushroom compost they used to just give away was exceptional...

It is interesting to learn about how mushrooms are grown, and that almost all mushrooms are grown in Pennsylvania. This article also serves to illustrate how acronyms have taken over the world. I don't know how stupid the authors believe the general readers are when they list the acronym for the state of Pennsylvania (PA) directly after the name of Pennsylvania in the article (ART). Years from now when I see (MFPA) listed in some obscure publication, I will exclaim to friends "Oh it's the Mushroom Farmers of PA!! All will bow before me with my superior knowledge! Yes, I do foresee me – answering a final Jeopardy question under the category "Obscure Acronyms" – winning over a million dollars with my one brilliant answer "What is the Mushroom Farmers of PA? ...

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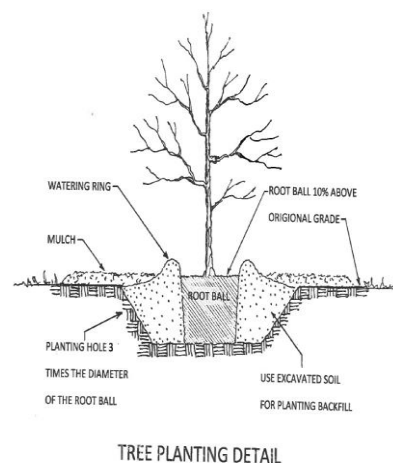
ATD: At The Doctors
BFF: Best Friend Fell,
BTW: Bring the Wheelchair,
BYOT: Bring Your Own Teeth,
FWIW: Forgot Where I Was,
GGPBL: Gotta Go Pacemaker Battery Low,
GHA: Got Heartburn Again,
IMHO: Is My Hearing-Aid On,
LMDO: Laughing My Dentures Out,
OMMR: On My Massage Recliner,
OMSG: Oh My! Sorry, Gas,
ROFLACGU: Rolling On Floor Laughing And Can't Get Up
TTYL: Talk To You Louder.

Yes viewers... he is the only person in the universe who could answer this question, and I... Alex Trebec will have a statue of Ricky placed in my living room....to admire .audience gives standing ovation... confetti floats in the air....

Planting Trees and Shrubs Properly

Here is a diagram to show folks how to plant trees and shrubs properly. Key points: Plant the flare of the tree or shrub above grade. Keep mulch at least 12 inches away from where the trunk of the tree meets the ground.

Here is a big long link to a publication I wrote when I still worked for Purdue Extension entitled: Root Flares and Volcano Mulching. Enjoy....

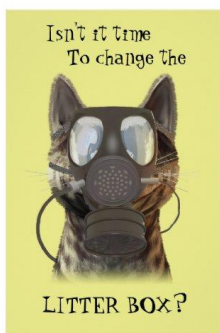


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Hoggles' Demented Cat Logic Logic



To my caregiver: In the spirit of social distancing and safety, I am showing pictures of fellow felines wearing the proper protective masks in this current crisis. We all want to say social distancing is usually not an issue with cats, and most of the time we just want to be left the \$\$!@ alone.



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