

Home Horticulture - Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks - October 2020

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Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks / 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.

Salvias - More Than Just Sage

One of my goals this spring was to use more plants that drew hummingbirds and butterflies. In May, I found an online nursery in California called Flowers by the Sea that specialized in Salvias- or sage for short.

I had grown common sage as an herb for cooking but began growing Pineapple sage and a sage called "Lady in Red" for their ornamental value. Both plants were popular with hummingbirds.



Flowers by the Sea carries more types of sage than I had ever seen before. Although many types were already sold out in this pandemic year, I decided to try out a few varieties I had never heard of before.

Many sages are native to the Mediterranean region and are used as fresh or dried culinary or medicinal herbs.

In medieval Europe, sage was thought to strengthen the memory and promote wisdom.

Sage was used by the Romans to help one better digest fatty foods., but it was also used it as a poultice on wounds to stop bleeding, and as a tea for sore throats and hoarseness.

The Egyptians used sage for fertility, while in France, sage was grown prolifically and used in tea. Emperor Charlemagne had sage planted in Germany in 812 AD to use in trade and likely for medicinal purposes

The ancient Greeks and Romans first used sage as a meat preservative. They also believe it could enhance memory.

English herbalists believed that the state of sage in the garden determined how well a business would prosper. Less sage meant a failing business, while more sage meant prosperity/

The Chinese appreciated the medicinal qualities of sage and use it for stomach, digestive and nervous system issues. It was considered useful for typhoid fever, liver, kidneys, colds, joint pain, and more. .

There are also sages that are native to the southwestern United States and Mexico. Sage is one of the most important Native American ceremonial plants, used by many tribes as an incense and purifying herb.

Sage is burned as a spiritual cleanser before many traditional ceremonies and is also one of the herbs frequently included in medicine bundles and amulets.

Most sages are not reliably hardy in our area and are grown as annuals. A few varieties are hardy to zone 5.

Sages are easy to grow, as most prefer dry sunny sites – though a few can grow in partial shade in our area. Sages from the Americas actually prefer dry well-drained desert soils, and most sages from the Mediterranean regions also prefer poor gravelly soils. I have found using transplants is preferred, as many types have long growing seasons until they flower in our area.

Here are some sages I grew in my garden this year.

Salvia darcyi x splendens 'Roman Red' This hybrid sage reached about 2-3 feet in height and has produced flowers from mid-summer into the fall. I like that the flowers are a true bright red and do not fade.



Salvia BODACIOUS 'Rhythm and Blues'
(Rhythm and Blues Anise-Scented Sage)

Introduced in 2017, this variety is a superior version of the older standby 'Black and Blue'. Easy to grow and rewarding, this is a hummingbird favorite. A real standout in the garden, and it benefitted being near other plants that helped support it.

(Elk Giant Chiapas Sage) This plant truly is a giant – reaching 4-5 feet in height with about the same dimensions in width. The picture does not do the flowers justice, as the 2-3-foot hot pink spikes were adored by the hummingbirds. The flowers are extremely long-lasting. Because of its spread it is not suitable for small areas. I grew it in a raised bed in full sun with tall blood-red celosias – awesome.



Salvia x guaranitica 'Purple Majesty'. (Purple Majesty Sage) This exceedingly long blooming herbaceous perennial is a cross between Salvia guaranitica spp (Anise-Scented Sage) and Salvia gesneriiflora (Mexican Scarlet Sage). Salvia guaranitica is native to a wide area of South America, including Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. It is a perennial subshrub growing 4 to 5 ft tall, spreading into a large patch through its spreading roots. The leaves are ovate, 4 cm long and nearly as wide, with a fresh mint green color, and an anise scent when crushed. The inflorescences are up to 25 cm long with flowers in various shades of blue, including an uncommonly true blue. In cold regions, flowering begins in mid- summer and continues until frost. I grew this one in an area with part sun, and it did form a wide patch and reached about 3-4 feet in height. It does indeed flower for a long period, and the hummers love this one also. To me this and

Chiapas sage were the best performers of the bunch.



Salvia transsylvanica is a herbaceous perennial native to a wide area from north and central Russia to Romania. It is native to central Romania (in the Transylvanian Alps) and was introduced into horticulture in the 1980s. I have always longer for a plant that occupies the same region as vampires.

Salvia transsylvanica puts out several 2 feet stems from a basal clump of leaves. The leaves that grow on the stem vary in size—being larger at the bottom—with the upper side being dark yellow-green and the underside pale with yellow veins. The leaves are very scalloped around the edges.

The flowers have a rich violet color, growing in loose whorls. Many flowers bloom at once, giving the plant a very colorful and striking appearance.

This salvia is hardy to our area and only produced a few flowers this year. I will see what happens next year.

A Great Year: For Chipmunk Mischief

It seems as if every year there is one critter that has a high population. Is it the weather, the amount of food resources, or just happenstance? I remember squirrel populations out of control circa 2016 when there were so many squirrels they stripped bark off of trees in an effort to find food. There have been high populations of rabbit, deer, ground hogs, skunks in certain years.

Chipmunks are small cute creatures, and some folks believe they are so small and cute they can do no real damage in a landscape and garden. Oh contraire, last winter a family of chipmunks did about \$700.00 damage to my hot tub when they decided the hot tub would make a nice well-protected warm place to set up housekeeping.

As it turns out, they are lousy housekeepers, completely filling the area where the pump was with nuts and cleared dirt from their tunnels.

This year, I decided to be more vigilant regarding chipmunks. I eliminated potential food sources (bird feeders) deciding no bird was worth \$700.00 just to watch it gorge on expensive seed. Sparrows in particular are spoiled birds, casually flipping unwanted seed on the ground to get at the seed they really like. Somehow, I was





reminded of my younger years when my mother prepared different meals for me and my sisters when we came home from school. Of course, this was a woman who prepared sugar sandwiches for us when times were tough. My spoiled food preferences changed after I married.

This season I have trapped 20 chipmunks in my yard. Evidently the word got around in the chipmunk population that my yard was a Mecca for all creatures great - and in this case – small and cute.

Some folks use snap traps to kill chipmunk invaders. Others use live traps and relocate the creatures far away in an effort to give the cute creatures “a chance” at a normal happy life. I have friends who do not like critters being killed, so in deference to them, I took the chipmunks to a wooded wild area several miles away where any chipmunk should be happy and prosperous.

I remember telling the chipmunks to find a home, and later on, to seek out the many family members who now occupied the woods. Most would climb a tree after being released, laughing at me as I drove away.

Every time I would take a chipmunk away to its relatives, I would think” This has got to be the last one – how can there be any more around in my neighborhood?”

However, as the season progressed, I would sit under my pergola and watch as new fearless chipmunks would explore my backyard, often scurrying behind me in search of food or shelter. Sometimes I dog babysit for a friend, and the dogs simply bask in the sun and watch as the chipmunks cavort around the landscape. It is maddening.

Sometimes I wonder - even though the drop off forest is miles away - have the chipmunks made a long journey home to my backyard much like the cat and dog in the long ago tearjerker Disney movie “The Incredible Journey”? Or are the chipmunks part of some clan like the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s – whose family tree is a straight line?

Perhaps the chipmunks are part of some secret cult society whose goal is to destroy humans and take over the world. Anything is possible. Nowadays I live in fear that this chipmunk invasion will never end – and chipmunks will win and take over my yard.



I can see it now, an empty shorted out hot tub, a yard filled with small entrances of chipmunk burrows much like a prairie dog or meercat colony – chipmunks using my stove and barbecue to roast nuts over an open flame, using my computer to order bird seed from Kroger for delivery, watching Animal Planet on my TV, and listening to the “Chipmunks” on my stereo. It is hard to sleep nowadays.

Goldenrods

Goldenrods are native perennials with characteristic yellow-gold flowers that appear in autumn in our area. They are found almost everywhere - in woodlands, swamps, on mountains, in fields, prairies, and along roadsides

They have traditionally been overlooked as a choice for most landscapes, and it is hard to understand why.

Goldenrod plants provide nectar for migrating butterflies and bees, encouraging them to remain in the area and pollinate your crops. Planting goldenrod near the vegetable garden can draw bad bugs away from valuable vegetables. Goldenrods attract beneficial insects as well,

Its genus name 'Solidago' is Latin for "to make whole," a reference to its medicinal properties. Both Native Americans and the early settlers used Ohio goldenrod medicinally and to create a bright yellow dye. Thomas Edison harvested the natural substance in the plant's leaves to create a substitute for synthetic rubber. Besides being a great pollinator plant, goldenrod is a good choice for cut flowers as the color holds well in fresh cut flowers and it retains its color and shape in dried flowers. According to the USDA, goldenrod was used to treat diarrhea, fevers, the flu, and to counteract love potions. It is also great for wildlife and livestock as cattle, sheep, horses, and white-tailed deer will forage on goldenrod.

Many gardeners still believe goldenrod is the cause of summer allergies. It is actually ragweed that is to blame – whose tiny flowers release allergy-creating pollen at the same time that goldenrod blooms. I think that many gardeners also believe that goldenrod will "take over" a landscape – when in fact it is a clump-forming perennial just like many other perennials in a garden.

Growing and planting goldenrod is easy, as this plant will survive just about anywhere, though it does prefer to be grown in full sun. Goldenrod also tolerates various soil types as long as it's well drained. Goldenrod care is minimal once established in the landscape, with plants returning each year. They require little, if any watering, and are drought tolerant. Clumps need division every four to five years. Cuttings may also be taken in spring and planted in the garden.

Experts at the Chicago Botanic Garden conducted a five-year evaluation of goldenrods. The study gave top marks to the following goldenrods:

Solidago 'Baby Sun': This low-growing, early blooming goldenrod remains upright and rarely flops, even after flowering. Its short, 2-foot stature makes it a good choice for small-space gardens. It blooms from early July to mid-August.

Solidago flexicaulis 'Variegata': A good selection for semi shaded wooded areas with its bright, variegated foliage, this cultivar grows taller than 4 feet and has a spreading nature. It blooms from early September to mid-October.

Solidago 'Goldkind' (Golden Baby): Comparable in size to 'Baby Sun', 'Goldkind' is a good choice for high flower production, sturdy habit, and disease resistance. It blooms from late July to September.



Solidago rigida: One of the tallest goldenrods at over 5 feet, this stiff goldenrod remained upright and clump forming throughout the trials. The gray green foliage contrasts nicely with its flat yellow flowers. It blooms from late August to early October.

Solidago rugosa 'Fireworks': This one received the highest ratings due to its fine-textured foliage and arching stems bursting with tiny yellow flowers. This selection is a slow spreader that stays under 5 feet. It blooms mid-September to late October.

Solidago sphacelata 'Golden Fleece': The most compact of all the goldenrods, at under 2 feet, it will spread slowly to over 3 feet. It blooms from late August to late October.



Halloween or Pumpkin Spider compiled and edited from an article by Susan Kennedy University of California Berkeley

Halloween Spiders are brown to orange spiders, with yellow, white and black markings and distinctive patterns on the back of their abdomen.

Halloween spiders are also called Cross Orb-Weaver,” “European Garden Spider,” and “Pumpkin Spider”, depending on the region you live at.

They are called Halloween or Pumpkin spiders in our region because they tend to show up in late summer and fall. They are mid-sized to large spiders of 2-3 inches in length. Females are much larger than males and have been known to cannibalize hopeful suitors who approach them to mate. It is tough to be a male in the insect world. They are not native to the U.S., but they have naturalized across the U.S. and into many parts of Canada. Halloween spiders can be found in both natural areas (like woods and parks) and urban environments.

You are most likely to find these spiders on their characteristic “orb webs”: those beautifully geometric, Charlotte’s Web-style constructions of spiral-shaped silk supported by spokes radiating from a central hub.

Halloween spiders are predators which feed on insects such as flies, beetles, and aphids. The spiral on the web is made of sticky silk, and insects are trapped when they wander into a web. The insects struggle, creating vibrations through the web. The spiders, although they have poor eyesight, are incredibly sensitive to vibrations, and by resting in the center of the web – where the “spokes” converge – the spiders can detect exactly where to find the prey based on which silk strands are vibrating.

The spider then uses a combination of biting and silk-wrapping to immobilize the hapless prey before settling down to eat. Since this whole process damages the web, Halloween spiders build a fresh web each day, eating the old one to recycle the silk.

Some people may find Halloween spiders creepy or frightening, and these spiders do look formidable when they are fully grown (not to mention that we usually see a lot of them around Halloween!). However, there is no reason to fear these autumnal creepy crawlies. Although they do possess venom – as do almost all spiders – the venom’s function is to paralyze insects, not to hurt large vertebrates like us. And while a bite from one of these guys might be painful and cause a small localized reaction (much like a bee sting), the chances of being bitten are remote.

Houseplant Tips and Tricks

Watering houseplants properly is important for happy indoor plants. Overwatering is perhaps the leading cause of houseplant death.

Experienced greenhouse workers can simply lift a plant pot and determine if a plant needs water. Here's a method you can try. Water the plant until water comes out of the drainage holes. Weigh the plant on the bathroom scale. Allow the plant to dry out. Weigh on the scale again. Water when the weight of the plant is the same as dry, or over a period of time, learn how to lift the pot and determine when it is a "dry weight" to know when to water.

Most gardeners use water from their wells or use city water to provide moisture to landscape, garden, and indoor plants. Many times, our plants suffer as a result because the quality of our water isn't so great for plants because of high salt content, high alkalinity, and the addition of fluoride. In addition, don't use softened water to water plants



Snake Plant or Mother-in-laws tongue, is remarkably hard-to-kill houseplant.

Watering plants with softened water can create drought-like symptoms in plants (leaf scorching and or wilting) because of the high sodium levels in softened water. Fluoride can also be unhealthy for plants. Many houseplants are very sensitive to even small amounts of fluoride. Fluoride is the reason many houseplant leaves turn brown at the tips or leaf margins. The solution here is to allow the water to sit out (after drawing) overnight before using – or to use distilled water to which fertilize is added.

Probably the most important and most ignored aspect of city or well water in our area is the pH of the water. PH is a measure of how acidic or alkaline a substance (like water or soil) is. The pH scale is expressed in units from 0-14., with acidic being lower than 7 and alkaline being over 7. Most plants prefer to grow in a media that is slightly acidic (a pH of around 6.0 to 6.5). Unfortunately, our water (both city and well) usually is very alkaline. In fact, sometimes city water can have a pH that runs anywhere from 8.0 to 9.0. Plants have a difficult time using nutrients when the water or soil pH is too alkaline. No wonder many of our plants struggle!

Folks can purchase relatively cheap pH testing meters to find out how alkaline or acidic their water is. These meters can sometimes be found at garden centers or can also be ordered from catalog suppliers that specialize in nursery and greenhouse products.

One can make alkaline water more acidic by adding common vinegar to water destined for plant use. In general, 1 teaspoon of vinegar per gallon will reduce the pH of water 1 point. So, if you have a water pH of 9, one would have to add at least two teaspoons of vinegar to bring the pH down to 7. Obviously, a meter would be more exact.

Plants will definitely need less water and fertilizer during the winter months. One way to feed houseplants like the professionals is to constantly feed plants with just a bit of fertilizer at each serving. Use ¼ strength liquid-soluble fertilizer mixed with a gallon of distilled water. Use this at each watering to "feed" your houseplants.

Garlic Chives – Compiled and edited from an article by Susan Mahr, University of Wisconsin – Madison

Garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*) are a member of the onion family and are native to southeastern Asia. They are known by several common names including garlic chives, Chinese chives, or Chinese leek. Although garlic chives are mostly used as an ornamental in North America, they are edible – and actually very good on pizza.



This herbaceous perennial is hardy in USDA zones 3-9. It forms slowly expanding clumps of gray-green foliage 10-20" tall. Each elongate, poorly developed bulb is attached individually to a stout rhizome similar to that of an iris and produces 4-9 leaves. The narrow, flattened, strap- or grass-like leaves arch downward at the tips, forming a fountain of green that remains tidy and attractive throughout the growing season. Cutting the leaves back encourages new growth. Leaves can be harvested to eat anytime they are green.

The flowers of garlic chives are attractive to butterflies, bees, and other pollinators. They are good for cutting and the seed heads can be cut for dried arrangements. The bees went wild on this plant in my garden.

Because it self-seeds very readily and produces seed prolifically (like many ornamental onions), it is best to cut off the flower stalks as soon as they have finished blooming to prevent spread. In my backyard, I want the chives to spread to serve as a groundcover and competitor to my ground ivy. I have found that garlic chives take longer to spread in heavy clay soils. If you plant them in a raised bed with rich soil – they will spread.

If you are worried about spread, then garlic chives can be grown in containers which can be brought inside over the winter for a supply of leaves for cooking.

The flavor of the leaves of *A. tuberosum* is subtle, like very mild garlic, while the narrow bulbs are strong and sharp when eaten raw. The leaves are used similarly to the way chives or green onions are used. They can be added to salads, egg dishes, soups, or stews. Garlic chives are used in stir fries and other dishes in several oriental cuisines. The flowers are also edible, so can be used as a garnish or added to salads.

The Leaning Tower of --- Spruce

Many evergreen trees have fibrous root systems – meaning they lack the thicker brace roots that many deciduous trees have to hold them steady in the soil.

Colorado blue spruce pictured here sometimes have difficulty establishing a vigorous root system when they are stressed – either by our climate – which is too hot and humid and wet for their liking. Think Rocky mountain slopes and a cool Colorado climate where this tree is native.

Homeowners can add to the stress by planting Colorado spruce improperly – in this case covering the root flare of the tree – and planting it in a landscape bed that has been heavily amended with a loose organic soil. They prefer forest soils- in the mountains.

The result is a leaning tower of spruce- where heavy rains and winds experienced in a storm literally blew this tree with a poorly developed root system right over.

I know what you are thinking- can the tree be saved? Sometimes the tree can be winched upright and braced – if one can figure out the complexities of using a come-along. The root flare can be exposed, and the tree watered in times of drought – maybe it can be coaxed to remain upright after several years. All of this of course can be very pricey- as a certified arborist is needed. Since it is near Halloween, one could hire a coven of witches to attack ropes to the tree to right it, or maybe cast a re-leaning spell. - the possibilities are endless.



Hoggles' Demented Cat Logic

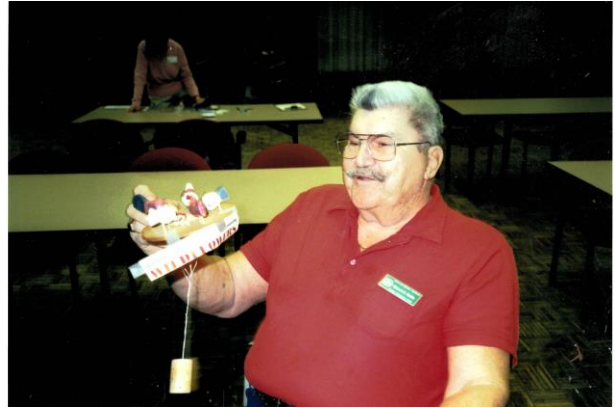


To my caregiver: I know you are disappointed .. but I just am too exhausted with eating, patrolling, and coordinating my nationwide cat kingdom to worry about chipmunks.....

More Memories of Extension – Great People



Master Gardener Lana Higgins is a Daylily / Iris breeder and expert -and very funny.



The first time I met Master Ggardener Bob Smith, he kicked me in the shins because he thought I wasn't paying attention. I kicked him back... Bob was great answering gardening phone calls from citizens.



Master Gardeners Leslie Verhota and Bernice Mertz in the early Patio garden. Bernice lied about her age because she thought I would keep her from participating in the MG training. She was wrong.



Master Gardener Ann Callow had her own greenhouse and perennial gardens that served as a source for the early plant sales at the office.



Master Gardener Sandra Stackhouse transferred to our program from Wisconsin. She helped plan the original Terrace Hydrangea Garden.



Facts and Myths about Hedge Apples and other “Natural” Spider Controls

compiled from University of Nebraska - Dr. Barbara Ogg.- and Michelle Miley - freelance writer

Commonly known as hedge apples, the fruits of the Osage orange tree supposedly have spider-repelling properties. So many people believe that these green, bumpy fruits repel spiders that grocery stores and farmers' markets stock these "spider balls" every fall even though they're inedible.

Experts have observed that spiders willingly weave their webs on Osage orange trees and on hedge apples themselves. Okay.....

Researchers at Iowa State University recently found that the Osage orange failed to repel spiders but did repel some cockroaches and mosquitoes. The repellent properties came from compounds inside the fruit, however, and were ineffective when the fruit remained whole. It was also noted that the Osage orange was only effective against these insects if large amounts of it were placed in small spaces. Researchers also cautioned citizens to be careful handling Osage orange fruit, as the milky white juice inside hedge apples is a skin irritant, so always wear gloves when handling them and keep them away from pets and children.

I have always found Osage orange trees to be fascinating. Osage-orange is native to a small area in eastern Texas, southeastern Oklahoma, and southwestern Arkansas. This region is the home of the Osage Indians which gives the tree its common name. Settlers planted Osage orange extensively in the Midwest as a living fence because, when pruned into a hedge, its thorny foliage provided an impenetrable barrier to livestock. The development of barbed wire curtailed its widespread planting, but many Osage-orange trees can still be found in fence rows. The Osage-orange is dioecious, meaning that male and female flowers are produced on separate trees. Female trees produce 3-to 5-inch diameter fruit which ripen in September or October and fall to the ground. Falling fruits have injured people and are disastrous to windsheilds.

The wood is extremely hard, heavy, durable and shrinks or swells little compared to the wood of other trees. The wood is used for fence posts, treenails, furniture, and archery bows. In fact, many archers consider the wood of the Osage-orange to be the world's finest wood for bows. This tree also produces a bright yellow dye which can be extracted from the wood.

In addition to hedge apples, an internet search for natural spider repellents will turn up thousands of results claiming that chestnuts naturally repel spiders as will peppermint oil and lemon oil.

When tested, **peppermint oil and chestnuts** did both prove to repel some spiders but worked only on spiders in two families. Lemon oil was completely ineffective as a repellent.

To try peppermint oil on your spiders, simply add a few drops of the oil to a spray bottle filled with water and spritz the foundation of your home as well as in your basement, crawl space, attic or other areas where you find spiders. To use chestnuts, score them with a sharp knife and then place them around your home. Use caution with children and pets, though, because many chestnuts are a choking hazard, and some are poisonous.

The Mercury Retrograde:

Occasionally I look at online horoscopes to see what is in store for me. I don't really believe in the forecasts, as many are so general that they would predict even a chipmunk's future. *In thick gypsy accent: I see for you a future where it is warm, safe, and you are content... like under a hot tub for instance..."*

One thing I dread are Mercury retrogrades. According to the Farmer's Almanac, three times a year, it appears as if Mercury is traveling backwards in relation to the zodiac. We refer to these periods as times when Mercury is in retrograde motion, or simply "Mercury retrograde." These times in particular were traditionally associated with confusions, delay, and frustration. Think email blunders and frazzled travel plans – at the very least.

The planet Mercury rules communication, travel, contracts, automobiles, and such. So, when Mercury is retrograde, remain flexible, allow extra time for travel, and avoid signing contracts. Double check your email responses, check in with reservations before you take that trip. Review projects and plans at these times but wait until Mercury is direct again to make any final decisions. You can't stop your life, but plan ahead, have back-up plans, and be prepared for angrier people and miscommunication.

Some people blame Mercury retrograde for "bad" things that happen in their lives. However, according to "see the glass half full" astrologists, this is an excellent time to reflect on the past and review where you put your energy in your life.

Mercury's last period of retrograde motion in 2020 lasts from October 14 to November 3. Oh joy..

I find it entertaining to blame everything on Mercury retrogrades. A squirrel chews through a transformer at a main power station and citizens are without power for eons... Yep..the Retrograde.

My Internet router has suddenly failed resulting in endless phone calls to my Internet provider who doesn't really want to make it easy for anyone to talk to a real person to solve the issue, and then promises to send a technician in 2 weeks ..who never arrives.. Yep...retrograde.

I am traveling the speed limit when suddenly a beat-up rusty Yugo subcompact with incredibly large loud mufflers spewing a poisonous vaporous toxic smoke roars past me from the inside lane doing 70 mph in a 35 mpg zone whilst the driver flips me a very common rude hand signal,, the thumping bass from the stereo reverberates and shatters windows nearby... Retrograde..

Against all odds, I hope everyone has a GREAT October!

Can I bite someone...



...and blame it on Mercury retrograde?

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