

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

and Home Horticulture

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



The Bird Who Loved Himself

Recently, I was having my morning coffee when I heard a strange thumping sound coming from my office area on the south side of my house. It sounded like someone was tapping on the window.

I entertained the idea that it was a delivery person making sure I was home, a neighbor coming to complain about the bags of soil waiting to be emptied in my garden beds, or someone trying to sell me toilet

paper futures. I even thought it could be the chipmunk clan I relocated last year coming back to torment me for another season.

I finally got up and checked out the office. Flying up and pecking the window was a rather plump robin. It wouldn't stop flying up to the window. My dogs in the neighboring room slept soundly - not caring about the bird interloper. I keep thinking that if indeed an actual burglar broke into my house, the dogs would just wag their tails and beg for food or petting.

I used to receive complaints about birds flying into windows from folks who would call the Extension office when I was Educator there. As it turns out, birds have two reasons for flying at windows. They are either a woodpecker trying to excavate a nest cavity - or in this case- they are confused male birds (pick your species) thinking the reflection of themselves they see in the window is a potential mate.

It is sad when one thinks it over. Here is a male robin following its instincts to mate in the early spring. It is desperate for love and affection. Flying by a house it sees what appears to be the best-looking robin in the entire world. It flies into the window over and over again trying to get the potential mate's attention. There have been cases of lovesick birds breaking windows, depriving the owners of much needed sleep with their activity, and even injuring themselves with this courting behavior. It is true when some say that love hurts.

There are ways to discourage the male birds from flying into and pecking at windows. One can hang bird reflective "scare" tape over the window in an effort to reduce the reflection and make it harder to fly past and into the window. Regular ribbon or string also can work.

Another nifty solution is to put something on the inside of the window to cut down on the reflection or intimidate the bird. I encountered this solution once when I was visiting a home on a site visit to find out what was wrong with a tree. Many times, I would receive permission to visit a home when the owners were not there as many folks worked during the day.

In this case, I had received instruction to let myself into the backyard to look at the tree. I entered the yard after opening the gate and proceeded over to the tree. I looked towards the house as I was heading



towards the tree and my heart nearly stopped. It looked like someone was standing at a window and looking at me in a threatening way. Was there a burglar in the house I wondered? I pictured the headlines: *Horticulture Educator Murdered as he Innocently Tries to Help Sick Tree.*

Maybe folks would bring flowers to set near the tree. I might even make the eleven PM. News.

The I looked closer. The person hadn't moved since I noticed him standing at the window. Hmmm.. I thought as I edged closer.

As it turned out, someone at the home had placed a life-sized cutout of John Wayne in the window. I found out later that the homeowners had placed the poster cutout in the window to discourage a lovesick bird who kept flying into the window obsessively.

The homeowners neglected to tell me John Wayne was guarding the house, thinking evidently that placing a six-foot four-inch cardboard cutout of John Wayne in a window wasn't anything out of the ordinary. Why worry about a Ring doorbell or security camera? Big John will make things right - Little pilgrim.



Early Loopers

I have already seen a cabbage looper moth patrolling my landscape, looking for any broccoli or cabbage plants to chew on. This year I have no Brassica family members for them to attack, If I did, I would dust them with Dipel Dust, an organic powder that gives the caterpillars (hatched from eggs laid by the moth) a big tummy ache. The Dipel also works great to control Tomato hornworm and Colorado potato weevil larvae.



Pine Straw

It was my third season tending the Horticulture Gardens at Purdue University. I always had part time jobs when I attended Purdue. As an older student with a family, it was tough to make ends meet. I loved tending the gardens, especially in the summer when most other students were gone.

I had noticed over time that the darker bark mulch that we used every year made it tough for the plants as it absorbed the heat. It also robbed nitrogen from the soil and added more heat as it decomposed.

This year, I received permission to use a different mulch – pine straw mulch. At this time, it was a radical idea. I have to give credit to my boss, Rosie Lerner, the Consumer Horticultural Specialist at Purdue, for allowing me to go ahead with this crazy notion.



At the time Purdue had many groves of pine trees on campus. Under those trees was thick pine straw. Brown gold in my opinion. My reasoning for using the pine straw was that the straw mulch would reflect heat from the sun instead of absorbing heat - keeping the flowers and veggies cooler.. I liked the appearance of the straw over heavy bark mulch. I knew that some research had shown that pine straw mulch helped to acidify the soil, and that was a good thing since clay soils found in that area were highly alkaline. Plants in general do best in slightly acidic soil.

I mostly drove one of the department vehicles to get the mulch around campus. In this case it was a 1947 Ford truck with three on the tree, no power steering, and no power brakes. It was an adventure.

I must admit the weather was great that year. In my mind, the plants were happier. Many visitors to the Gardens that year loved the appearance of the mulch. It did work to conserve soil moisture and to suppress weeds. I found out later that pine straw actually does suppress some weeds, especially grassy weeds - another plus.

Nowadays I recommend pine straw as a mulch in many situations, especially around plants such as Hydrangeas, tomato and peppers, rhododendrons, azaleas, and Dogwoods.

Fact: It is a felony in North Carolina to steal pine needles.

Don't Squeeze the Charmin

Remember when red or blue bears did not sell Charmin toilet paper on T.V.? For about 25 years during the 60's ,70's, and 80's, Mr. Whipple was the "go to" guy when it came to selling Charmin toilet paper,

Mr. George Whipple was a fictional supermarket manager featured in television commercials, radio, and print advertisements that ran in the United States and Canada from 1964 to 1985 for Charmin toilet paper. Typically, Whipple scolded customers who "squeezed the Charmin," while



hypocritically entertaining such actions himself when he thinks no one will notice. The character and catchphrase were created by John Chervokas of the agency Benton & Bowles.

In 1978 Mr. Whipple was named the third best-known American — just behind former President Nixon and Billy Graham. "Please don't squeeze the Charmin!" was named the most recognizable advertising slogan.

Mr. Whipple's character was played by actor Dick Wilson - born on July 30, 1916 in Preston, Lancashire, England as Riccardo DiGuglielmo. He was an actor, known for The Magical World of Disney (1954), The Twilight Zone (1959) and Mathnet (1987). He died on November 19, 2007 in Woodland Hills, California, USA. Riccardo was the father of Stuart, Wendy, and actress Melanie Wilson, and grandfather of three.

His father starred in a vaudeville minstrel show and his mother was a singer. Riccardo became a radio announcer as a teenager, and comic dancer in vaudeville before enlisting in the Royal Canadian Air Force early in World War II and serving as a fighter pilot against the German Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain in 1940. He became a US citizen in 1954.

Riccardo was employed as an acrobatic vaudeville dancer in New York City before heading to California for movie and TV work. He went on to build a considerable resume as a character actor on radio, stage, film, and TV. He appeared in 18 episodes of Bewitched - seven times playing a drunk. He said in real life he never took a drink in his life.

In appreciation for his over 500 performances of the highly recognizable Mr. Whipple character, Procter & Gamble provided Wilson with a free lifetime supply of Charmin toilet tissue. I bet he was thrilled.

Riccardo once said that commercials were the hardest thing to do in the entire acting realm. "You've got 24 seconds to introduce yourself, introduce the product, say something nice about it and get off gracefully. I've done thirty-eight pictures, and nobody remembers any of them, but they all remember me selling toilet paper".

Phenology - or using Growing Degree Days to Track Pests



**Eastern Pine
Sawfly**

Phenology is the study of recurring biological phenomena and their relationship to weather. Bird migration, hunting and gathering seasons, blooming of wildflowers and trees, and the seasonal appearance of insects are examples of phenological events that have been recorded for centuries.

Because the development of both plants and insects is temperature dependent, experts can accurately track the environmental factors that determine when insects are active. For this reason, plant phenology can be used to predict insect emergence.

Indeed, the use of plant phenology to predict insect activity is an old practice, with recorded observations dating back at least 300 years. Research at The Ohio State University has shown that plants bloom and insects emerge in virtually the same order every year, no matter what kind of weather occurred that winter or spring.

The OSU GDD calendar is based on growing degree days where insect pest emergence is based on the amount of growing degree days in any area- and then correlating the emergence of those insects with the blooming of trees and shrubs. Pretty cool eh?.

To use the calendar whose link is shown below, pick the zip code of any Ohio county that is located close to your county in Indiana – or at least the same latitude. The calendar will then list a comprehensive table that lists what pests will emerge at certain GDD and the shrubs and trees that will be blooming then.

You may not know all the pests listed, but one can look them up on the Internet and look for them in your landscape. The first big pests are Eastern Pine sawfly and Zimmerman Pine moth which can be very destructive for pines.

You can also figure out GDD yourself by recording low and high temperatures beginning in spring to get an even more accurate picture of pest emergence.

1. Growing Degree Days = (max. + min daily temperature) / 2 - Base temp.(in this case 50) If answer is negative, assume 0.
2. Example: Calculate GDD given 65 degrees max. and 40 degrees min. $(65 + 40) / 2 = 52.5$ degrees
3. $52.5 - 50$ (GDD vase temperature) = 2.5 GDD degrees.
4. You can use the accumulated Growing Degree days with charts such as the GDD Calendar (link below) to see when pests will emerge in your area. [GDD - Calendar \(ohio-state.edu\)](https://gddcalendar.ohio-state.edu/)

A way to track crabgrass emergence and other broadleaved weeds is to use a GDD tracker developed by Michigan State University.. <https://gddtracker.msu.edu/>

A Few Examples:(based on Hicksville, Ohio Zip code)



Gypsy Moth caterpillar

Gypsy Moth eggs will begin to hatch when redbud and crabapple trees begin to bloom in our area. Keep in mind that it takes a bit for damage to appear on oaks from the caterpillar after the eggs hatch.

Honey locust Plant bug will begin to appear around the time that common lilacs bloom. If you have a honey locust tree on your property, look closely at the leaves when lilacs are blooming. You might be amazed - or creeped out - at what you see.



Honey Locust Plant Bug



Bagworm

Bagworms usually begin to appear just before Catalpa trees bloom.

Japanese beetles usually appear just after little leaf lindens begin to bloom in our area.

Magnolia scale will appear after Rose-of Sharon blooms.



Magnolia Scale

5 Easy – To- Grow Perennials

April is planting month. It really is the best time to plant trees and shrubs, turfgrass, cooler-season vegetables and annuals, and perennials. In the early 1990's perennials were the next “new” thing in American gardens. Before that annual plantings were more popular to add color to a landscape.

Perennials were marketed on the idea of low maintenance. The message was just plant them and forget them.

I don't know where it went wrong. Suddenly, perennials became the fashion of many households. Martha Stewart promoted the idea of creating gardens that everyone would be envious of.

Gardeners found out after a few years that perennial gardens were anything but low maintenance. Perennials spread, they needed division, mulching and fertilizing - and unfortunately, weeds were a big issue – especially creating the cottage-style gardens Martha Stewart and other garden magazine authors were famous for.

Pretty soon, perennial gardeners lamented that they couldn't take a vacation because they were just “a little behind” on weeding, mulching, and dividing their perennial gardens.

Perennials are not all bad, it is just how we used them in a less-than sustainable fashion. My opinion is that we should mass-plant perennials in a landscape to reduce the time it takes to maintain them - and to use perennials that grow well without spreading rampantly in mass groupings. The fancier perennials that do not cover well should be planted in a separate area with richer soil where we can devote more time to their care-if we so desire. I do not care to spend time on more difficult to care for perennials, so I will pass.



Day lilies are one perennial that can be easy care. They can grow well with little care even in clay soils. I prefer vigorous day lilies that have ample foliage. I like even the orange Tawny day lilies that we see naturalized along highways in our area. I plant them close together - no farther apart than their mature height so weeds are suppressed.

Little Bluestem and Switchgrass for starters. Many ecovars with special characteristics exist in the trades. I know the native purists will disagree, but many ecovars can be very useful in landscapes. Plant a lot of the grasses close together so weeds become a non - issue.

Some Native Grasses can be very low maintenance when established. I prefer



A Neglected Perennial Garden

False Sunflowers are an extremely overlooked native perennial that can spread to cover larger areas – yet not be so rampant they can't be controlled. False sunflowers feature triangular-shaped leaves and branching stems that allow the plants to grow in a bushy habit. The double or single daisy-like, yellow-orange flowers surround a cone-shaped, golden-brown center disk.

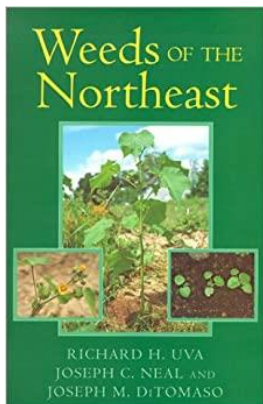
Large Hostas combined with **Ferns** can cover shaded areas quite nicely. Use blue foliage large hostas with native ferns. The blue hostas are less likely to be slug magnets,



One groundcover I have been trialing is **garlic chives**. This aromatic herb can fill in areas over time and is an absolute bee magnet.

Some native prairie penstemons (Husker Red being one), native bee balm, native coneflowers, and some salvias can also be mass-planted to create a low maintenance area.

Early Weeds



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.

A very good reference source for common weeds is a book called *Weeds of the Northeast* by Uva, Neil, and Ditomaso. I prefer to have a ready, hands on source to look up common weeds. This book is easy to browse quickly and contains additional ID and cultural information for tougher weeds to identify like the grassy weeds. The book does not include control options.

Ground Ivy is already filling in and around my raised beds. It is disappointing because my raised beds are at least 3 feet above ground level. Yet somehow ground ivy has made it in the beds. Last year I pulled it up by the roots. It did little long term good. Ground Ivy is a member of the mint family, and so any little piece of a root left in the ground quickly becomes re-established. It is a vexing problem, as if I apply a herbicide (which I prefer not to do), I will kill any emerging seedlings this spring. I will probably pull it up again to keep it at bay.

Chickweed is already getting a 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.





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 – produces violet/pink flowers - 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 as much of it.



Henbit seedling



When you look around the forest or forested landscapes this early spring, you may notice one larger shrub budding and leafing out early. Amur Honeysuckle is a nasty invasive plant from central China that can completely take over forest and landscape. This large shrub flowers early and birds will eat and distribute the seeds inside the numerous berries.



The Pretentious Perennial Gardener - *With Marta Stewart.*

Classical music plays as clips of fabulous pristine perennial flowers fill the screen, with the host Marta Stewart involved with clipping flowers and placing them in a \$2,000.00 handmaid Egyptian reed basket.

With clipped precise speech: “Greetings everyone, I am Marta Stewart, and today on the Pretentious Perennial Gardener we will tour my fabulous and world renowned perennial gardens at my New England estate located at the veeerry exclusive Martha’s Vineyard – named after me - of course”.

“With the help of my obedient assistant Greta , we will” (stops suddenly) “Greta! Heel!” (*Greta stops*) ...*Marta looks at camera as she hand- feeds Greta a small cupcake.*

“I find it necessary to carry small treats - baked by me of course - that are made with honey – organic almond flour, and breadseed. The opioids in the bread seed help keep my helpers calm and obedient.”

“Our first plant to feature today is the lovely, yet often overlooked Goats beard. Goats beard is a shade plant whose fernlike foliage and wispy white blooms lend airiness to gardens and look especially stunning en masse.”

As Marta continues to talk a gate opens in the background and several small pygmy goats wander into the garden. Several young boys are seen running off in the distance....



Marta continues... “This is Guinea Fowl Goats beard- a rare and unusual--- *Pauses.....* Oh.. what cute little goats... I wonder how they ...”

The little goats begin to eat the perennials hungrily, and are head butting the camera crew and production assistants trying to chase them away - more goats pile in to voraciously eat the plants.....Soon the garden plants are trampled or eaten

Commercial.....

After the break... A stressed Marta appears... “Sorry for that interruption folks, it seems the neighbor boys were being a bit naughty—They will be fine after my lawyers serve their parents with a million - dollar lawsuit...”

“We have moved to the south garden where we” Marta steps on a long-handed rake which smacks her squarely in her forehead.....

Commercial break...

Marta re-appears on camera. A large plaster of Paris bandage has been applied to the center of her forehead.



“We are back again...I have had my assistant who carelessly left the rake on the ground placed in a large dog cage where she will be taken to the edge of town and told to leave and never return again... “

“Anyway, lets resume shall we?... Our next plant is a woodland plant called black snakerootIn the 19th century, the root was used to treat snakebite, inflamed lungs, and pain from childbirth”.....”Oh look.” “What a cute little brightly colored snake”... “Ow!” Marta jerks back her hand....

Long Commercial break...

Marta reappears on screen – this time her left hand is heavily bandaged - she appears slightly woozy..

“Sorry folks,, it seems as if that cute little snake was actually a baby coral snake—I will be totally fine after the antivenom fully takes effect”... Wavers slightly.. “It is important to stress that wearing thick gloves in the garden is important, and of course my designer line of exclusive and veeerry expensive garden gloves can be found at the best retailers everywhere,,,

“My crew has set up this little table in the north garden where I will demonstrate how to divide my veeerry expensive one-of-a kind daylilies... we start by” Swats away an ant on her arm. “Oh! That ant bit me”! I think it will leave a mark”- I will have to use my exclusive calendula ointment to”..

The camera pans to Marta’s other arm, covered with ants.....She howls in pain as the ants continue to bite...

Commercial break,, Another commercial break....Another commercial break..

Marta appears once again in front of the camera—both arms are heavily bandaged---

“Well, it seems as if my crew put me in a spot where a nest of fire ants happened to be located. The ants of course happened to be attracted to the honey and breadseed in the muffins I had filled my pockets with”.....

“Now it appears I am covered with bread seed and honey after that little incident, and will need a long bath in my super luxurious bath, but for now I will press on and attempt to divide this lily with one hand”....

A seagull lands on the table.... - quickly followed by more and more seagulls. They are feeding hungrily on the bread seed cakes..... and beginning to show intense interest in Marta... .

The last shot of the episode is Marta running off in the distance as the credits begin to roll- she falls and is immediately covered by the entire flock of seagulls .. I guess seagulls really like honey and breadseed...

...

Some Pest Problems are Almost Impossible to Solve

There - I've said it. The unthinkable. I am a person who believes that there is no problem that is NOT solvable. I spent my career in Extension trying to help people solve their sometimes-impossible issues with landscape and garden plants.

Unfortunately, some pest issues are very, very difficult - if at all – to solve – especially if one has few resources to hire professionals – or insists on only organic options.

Zimmerman Pine Moth:

The Zimmerman pine moth has a one-year life cycle. Through winter it survives as a first stage caterpillar, sheltered in a tiny cocoon attached to the bark surface. In early spring, usually sometime between mid-April and early May, the caterpillar emerges from the cocoon and begins to tunnel into the tree and feed on the inner bark. Certain pines, particularly Austrian and Scotch pines, are particularly susceptible to this insect – though native white pines are also attacked.

Tunneling may first occur around the branch tips and within the shoots, sometimes causing twig dieback. Later, most will be found at the base of branches, tunneling into the whorl area where branches meet the trunk. The caterpillars are generally dirty white or gray, occasionally with some pink or green. They often can be found underneath masses of freshly produced pitch.



Mass of fresh pitch produced at an area of a Zimmerman pine moth feeding wound. Photograph courtesy of David Shetlar, The Ohio State University



When full-grown, the caterpillars transform to the pupal stage, remaining within the tunnel. Later, the adult moth emerges, typically in late July and August. After mating, female moths lay eggs, often near areas of earlier wounds. The eggs hatch about a week after being laid. The newly hatched caterpillar feeds for a brief period on the surface of the tree, before excavating a shallow pit and spinning the protective cocoon within in which it remains until the following spring.

Zimmerman pine moth may be controlled with insecticides that are applied in early spring and late summer to the surface of the tree during periods when the caterpillars are still on the exterior of the tree. There are no insecticides that can kill the insect after it has tunneled within the tree. In my opinion, there is no way any homeowner can or should try to control this pest by trying to spray a large tree. In addition, one must have the resources to pay a professional to apply conventional (and not particularly earth friendly) insecticides to the tree twice a year.

Pine Bark Beetle

This group of little beetles can cause huge issues to both Austrian and Scots pine, but also to Eastern White Pines and sometimes spruce in our area. This spring, one can already see the damage done last year by bark beetles as many pines are brown or already are as brown as toast. The most damaging bark beetle species attacking pines are native engraver beetles, also known as pine bark beetles. Pine bark beetles prefer to attack stressed trees. In my opinion, due to climate change and poor urban soils, there are few pines in our area that are not stressed.



Examples of Pine bark Beetles - LSU

It all begins when the tiny beetles find a stressed tree or move from one stressed tree to another. Bark beetles emit a chemical signal, or aggregation pheromone, which attracts more bark beetles to the tree under attack. The bark beetles' tunnel under the tree's bark and begin chewing on the growing part of the trunk, called the cambium layer. It's this layer that produces new cells that allow the trunk, branches, and roots to increase in diameter each year.

Trees that are under attack often fade from the top down. Needle color will turn from bright green to light green, then to yellow, and finally reddish brown.

The initial signs of attack are pitch tubes and/or boring dust. The pitch tubes are small masses of pitch, which are usually whitish in color and can be mixed with reddish boring dust or frass. Often trees under attack will have lines of sap running down from small holes in the bark. Other pines will only have dust at the base of the tree.



After the female bores through the bark she excavates a characteristic tunnel called a gallery and lays eggs in niches along the sides. Larvae feed by chewing and excavating their own galleries at right angles to the main gallery. Mature larvae pupate in an enlarged cell at the end of their feeding tunnels. The feeding galleries caused by larval feeding look like engravings – hence the other name for bark beetles - engraver beetles.



Adults eventually emerge and chew through the bark to the tree's surface. This process may take weeks or months. There may be one or several generations of bark beetles per year. Adult bark beetles may be present from spring through fall.



Beetles often also carry pathogenic fungi such as blue stain that are deposited in the vascular system of the tree. These fungi quickly multiply and clog the water conducting vessels of the tree which hastens its death. All infected trees must be destroyed – not stored – to help prevent the beetles from spreading.

Sound like a fun pest? Again, the only way to try and control this pest is to have infected trees sprayed once a year or more by a professional. Experts always say that keeping a tree as healthy as possible will prevent bark beetle infestation, but in my opinion this is very unrealistic.

Cystospora Canker

Cytospora canker is one of the most common fungal diseases of Colorado blue spruce. This disease can also affect Norway spruce as well as Douglas-fir. Trees that are 15 years old or older and are at least 20 feet high most typically show symptoms of this disease.

What does Cytospora canker look like? Cytospora canker usually first appears on lower branches and progresses up the tree. Individual upper branches may show symptoms as well. Needles on infected branches turn purple, then brown, and die. Diseased needles eventually fall off and the infected branches die. Infected branches often produce a bluish-white sap that oozes somewhere along their length.



Cytospora canker is caused by the fungus *Leucocytospora* which survives in infected branches. Spores of the fungus are spread by wind, rain splash, insects, birds, and mammals. Perhaps the easiest way to avoid Cytospora canker is to avoid planting Colorado blue spruce, because in our area, it is only a matter of time before blue spruce become infected. Some experts claim that the disease only damages stressed blue spruce, and that healthy trees are not killed. I have rarely seen this to be the case in our area. The choice for most homeowners is to have the tree sprayed yearly and hire someone to take the steps necessary to keep the trees healthy as possible. I have seen this disease become an absolute burden to seniors who have large, infected spruce on their properties and have no resources to either have the trees sprayed, or to have the trees removed.

Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic



To my caregiver: I made you these breadseed cakes in an effort to keep you docile and drugged so you will be obedient and willing to serve all my needs

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