

# *Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks* **and Home Horticulture**

**August 2021 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](mailto:kemeryr7@frontier.com).

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## **Rust**

Folks have called or texted me recently complaining that their shoes are covered with a rust-colored powdery substance when mowing the lawn. Aliens visiting the lawn? Nope - just a fungus called - appropriately- rust.

Turfgrass rust is a fungal disease that causes lawns to appear yellow or orange when viewed from a distance. The rust fungus produces powdery orange spores that are easily transferred from leaf blades to shoes, pant legs, or mowers.



Initially, diseased plants show yellow spots on the leaves. With time, these spots enlarge and the fungus breaks through the outer leaf surface. By the time the powdery orange spores of the fungus are exposed, it's obvious how "rust" got its name.

Rust tends to show up in mid-summer, especially when grass growth has been slowed by stresses such as drought, low fertility, close mowing or compaction. The rust fungus thrives when temperatures are moderate (68 to 85 degrees F) and leaves stay wet for extended periods. Long dew periods or night watering can create moisture conditions ideal for infection.

Rust is also more prevalent in lawns installed many years ago with cheaper less expensive grass blends not resistant to diseases. It is also prevalent in lawns where fertility levels are low.

Normally rust doesn't kill or even damage a lawn. However, recently established lawns or severely stressed lawns can be damaged or killed by rust.

### **Ricky's Rust Tips:**

Apply fertilizer during a cooler period before or just after a rain to help the lawn "outgrow" the fungus.

Clean the mower blades after a mowing – especially if some areas of lawn are not affected.

Don't irrigate lawns in the evening or night as that can spread disease.



This is the type of rust I am more familiar with.

Apply a fungicide especially labeled for lawn use for rust - only if significant damage is present. The fungicide will have to be applied several times before temperatures decrease in the fall. Generally, fungicides are not recommended for rust control except in special situations.

If rust is a recurring problem year after year, then it may be time to renovate and re-seed the lawn with a premium disease-resistant turfgrass blend.

## Late Summer / Fall Tasks

August and early to mid-September are great times to plant most woody trees and shrubs and perennials. It is important to make sure the plant roots are teased apart as the plants certainly will be root bound. Planting a bit earlier gives the plants time to establish some roots before the winter.

I would wait to cut back perennials until October or even November this year. Cutting back too early can stimulate growth that might be zapped by cold temperatures later. One can also wait to cut back in very early spring next year.

In September, give your amaryllis bulbs a 10–15-week rest period by placing the plant on its side - either outdoors until the first frost or inside in a cool basement. Do not water at all. Trim back the foliage a bit. Once the plant has received its rest period; place the plant in a sunny window and begin to water again. If you time things right the plant can once again bloom at Christmas.

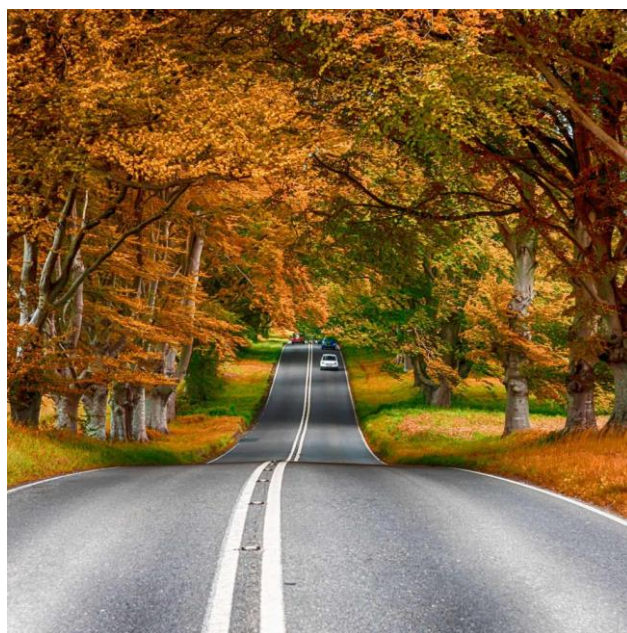
Mid-August to Mid-September is the optimal time to renovate and re-seed the lawn. Rent a slit seeder and use a premium bluegrass blend to re-seed an existing lawn. Fall is also a good time to core aerate the lawn. Fertilizer applications in late August / early September and once again in late October/ early November are the best “bang for your buck” applications for a healthy lawn next year.

Be on the lookout for potential grub damage to lawns where the adult Japanese beetle populations were high. Sections of the lawn could turn brown and lift like a carpet, revealing the grubs.

Plant spring bulbs when temperatures are reliably in the forties during the day.

Dig any tender plants such as Cannas or Dahlias at the same time. Allow the roots to cure outdoors for 2-3 days, and then place the roots in boxes that are filled with sawdust or newspaper. Keep the packing material slightly moist and place the storage container in an unheated garage or similar building.

Many experts recommend digging and diving bearded iris rhizomes in August. If bearded Iris becomes too crowded - flowering can be reduced.



# Dog Days

The Farmer's almanac lists the traditional timing of the Dog Days of summer as the 40 days beginning July 3 and ending August 11 - coinciding with the ancient rising of the Dog Star, Sirius. The term "Dog Days" was used by the Greeks and Romans who called these days *caniculares dies* (days of the dogs)) after Sirius, the brightest star in the heavens besides the Sun.



Popularly believed to be an evil time "when the seas boiled, wine turned sour, dogs grew mad, and all creatures became languid, causing to man burning fevers, hysterics, and phrensies". The ancients sacrificed a brown dog at the beginning of the Dog Days to appease the rage of Sirius, believing that the star was the cause of the hot, sultry weather

In ancient Egypt, Sirius appeared just before the rainy period when the Nile River would flood, so they used the star as a "watchdog" for that event. Since its rising also coincided with a time of extreme heat, the connection with hot, sultry weather was made for all time:

Many people believe the phrase is in reference to the conspicuous laziness of domesticated dogs (who are in danger of overheating with too much exercise) during the hottest days of the summer. When speaking of "Dog Days" there seems to be a connotation of lying or "dogging" around or being dog tired" on these hot and humid days.

## Look for Mimosa Webworms

Mimosa webworms are small (up to one inch long), slender caterpillars that web up the foliage of some honey locust trees in late summer in our area. The caterpillars are grayish to dark brown with five white stripes and are sometimes tinged with rose or pink. When disturbed, these webworms are extremely active and thrash violently before dropping down on silk strands.



Mimosa webworm was unintentionally introduced from China into the United States during early 1940s. During this same period improved (thornless) varieties of honey locust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*, were planted as replacements for American elms killed by Dutch elm disease in these landscapes. 'Sunburst' honey locust is reported to be very susceptible to attack by Mimosa webworm where 'Moraine', 'Skyline', and 'Shade master' are less so. It is surprising such a small insect can cause so much damage, but heavily infested trees may have every leaf webbed up, skeletonized, and brown by late-summer. Trees ravaged for several years in a row may be severely stunted or may even die. This pest is a problem wherever honey locust is used as a landscape tree.



**Ricky's Notes:** This pest appears to be sporadic in our area, and some years Mimosa webworm can be more of an issue. Large trees should be treated by a professional.



# Meth Crazy Crocs

Police in Loretto, Tennessee added an unusual warning on their Facebook page about a routine drug bust. They issued a plea to people living in area to not flush drugs down the toilet, saying “They’ve had enough methed up animals” to deal with recently.



Part of the actual post reads: *On a more or less serious note: Folks...please don't flush your drugs down the toilet. When you send something down the sewer pipe it ends up in our retention ponds for processing before it is sent down stream. Now our sewer guys take great pride in releasing water that is cleaner than what is in the creek, but they are not really prepared for meth. Ducks, Geese, and other fowl frequent our treatment ponds, and we shudder to think what one all hyped up on meth would do. Furthermore, if it made it far enough, we could create meth-gators in Shoal Creek and the Tennessee River down in North Alabama. They've had enough methed up animals the past few weeks without our help. So, if you need to dispose of your drugs just give us a call and we will make sure they are disposed of in the proper way.*

**Ricky's comments:** Wow: Gators are ill-tempered and nasty on their own – a meth-up gator even worse. Imagine a gator headed towards you in a retention pond travelling faster than the speed of light. Imagine ducks and geese battling it out over turf rights in the retention pond. Blood will be spilled, my friends.

**But this story gets better: read the follow-up newspaper article about the helpful fun folks at the Loretto police department.**

LORETTO, Tennessee -- A police department in Tennessee clarified that **they were joking** after their Facebook post about "meth-gators" went viral. In the original Facebook post, the Loretto Police Department Police asked people to stop flushing drugs down the drain for fear of what they called "meth-gators." The post said that sewer pipes go to treatment ponds where you'll also find ducks, geese and alligators. They wrote that the Tennessee River down in North Alabama, "had enough methed up animals the past few weeks."

Earlier this month, the department arrested a man for trying to flush drugs down the drain at his home. The satirical post about the arrest warned if the drugs made it far enough downstream, they would end up being consumed by gators. The authors of the post said they "shudder to think what one all hyped up on meth would do." The police department's **most recent Facebook post reads:** *"Let us be perfectly clear: the meth gator was a humorous illustration used to highlight the dangers of flushing drugs and other substances down your toilet. Alas, the meth-gator is not real. Let's say that again: **THE METH GATOR IS NOT** (at this time) **REAL.**"*

The police department said this is not their first humorous post. They also said that they will be selling merchandise based on their humorous posts, and they plan to donate the proceeds to charity.

**Ricky's additional notes:** Hahahaha... I love it. I read the original post to several friends, and they all believed the original story. Great idea to alarm the general population about alligators even more dangerous than “normal” alligators. This is by far one of the stupidest Facebook posts – especially from a police department - that I have ever seen.

# Purple Loosestrife

*compiled from New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Michigan State Extension*

I have seen purple loosestrife planted in gardens around the area. I understand - it really is a pretty plant. I once told a person long ago when they tried to explain why a large purple loosestrife was planted by their front entrance that “Even coral snakes are beautiful, ma’am, but I wouldn’t have one sitting by my front door”

Purple loosestrife is a serious pest to native wetland communities where it out-competes native plants. Native plants are vital to wetland wildlife for food and shelter.

Native to Eurasia, purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) now occurs in almost every state of the US. It was introduced to the east coast in the early 1800s, possibly as seeds in ship’s ballast or as an ornamental. Now the highest concentrations of the plant occur in the formerly glaciated wetlands in the Northeast and Midwest. In the West, purple loosestrife invades irrigation projects. In all areas of the country, purple loosestrife also tends to occur as a monoculture in wetlands, ditches, and disturbed wet areas. It requires open, moist, and bare substrate for initial establishment. The dense colonies that result can displace native vegetation and wildlife.

Purple loosestrife’s ability to spread contributes to its success as an invader. One adult purple loosestrife plant can produce 2.5 million to 2.7 million seeds annually. Seeds are roughly the size of ground pepper grains and are viable for many years. They may remain dormant in the soil until conditions are right for germination. These seeds are easily dispersed and transported by water, wind, bird feathers, animal fur, footwear, boats, boat trailers and car tires. Purple loosestrife is also capable of resprouting from broken stems, underground roots and plant fragments. If mowed, the cut stem pieces will send out new roots and form new plants.

Lyth’rum comes from the Greek word *lythron*, which means “blood”. The word refers to either the color of the flowers or to its reputed ability to help stop bleeding. *Salicar’ia* means “resembling a willow”.

In Indiana, the sale or cultivation of ALL forms of purple loosestrife (any variety, species, horticultural variety, cultivar), whether reportedly sterile or not is prohibited.

Biological control methods have helped control purple loosestrife, but I still see it trying to spread in waste areas. I have even seen it growing out of asphalt! As tempting as it is to grow, this – like a coral snake - is better left alone.



**News Flash!** It is absolutely NOT TRUE that this kangaroo is kicking a large man into a river... but it is funny anyway.

# Fall Webworm

As the end of summer looms, fall webworms will soon be webbing the ends of branches near you soon. A big, showy bag of webbing appears over the end of a branch on a shade, fruit or ornamental tree. Inside, the hungry fall webworms are devouring all the leaves. This has encouraged tree-owners around the state to try risky and sometimes dangerous methods to get rid of the webbing.



*Increasingly Drones are being used by individuals or government agencies of some countries (cough – China) for pest control. I don't know if this is a such a good idea....*

The caterpillars construct a web over the end of the branch, enclosing leaves. They feed inside the web, enlarging it as they feed. The webworms also have Euchre tournaments during rainy periods. If the web is white, the nest is new. If it is tan or brown, there are no larvae around – or the webworms have lost all the cards.

On large trees, fall webworms are annoying, but not a reason to do anything. If fall webworms are on a small tree and you choose to remove the nest, please don't use a flamethrower or shotgun (both have been used). The easiest way to control the pest is to push a stick into the webbing and pull everything out of the tree and into a bucket of soapy water.

## A Dog and Its Persistent Kangaroo “Friend”

*Permit me to introduce myself. I am Pepe Le Roo, your kangaroo lover.”*

*“The game of love is never called on account of darkness, my little midnight snack.”*

*You may call me Streetcar, because of my desire for you.”*

*I tell you what. You stop resisting me, and I, I will stop resisting you. When have you had a better offer than that?”*

*A pitiful case, am I not?”      You are ze corned beef to me, and I am ze cabbage to you.*



Branches have been set on fire or cut off, and pesticides have been sprayed to stop this perceived pest threat. This is a case of the human doing much more damage to the tree than the fall webworms ever could. This native insect has more than 50 natural predators and 36 parasites that help control it. Best of all, fall webworms do not eat the buds of next year's leaves. They are feeding on leaves that are nearing the end of their photosynthesis careers and only have a bit more to give. Next year, the leaves will appear on the currently affected branches with no sign of last year's damage.

Eggs are laid by the female moth on the bottoms of leaves about a month or so before the caterpillars hatch.







## Retention Ponds Reprinted from a long-ago news article written by yours truly...

**Question:** Our neighborhood association is spending a great deal of money each year to keep our retention pond weed free. Are there any alternatives to these expensive treatments?

**Answer:** Yes and no. It is important to utilize licensed professionals that are bonded and insured for pond management issues in an association setting. I know that sometimes organizations have their own people treat the pond. This raises all sorts of liability issues.

Also remember that if someone is paid to apply pesticides; they need to be licensed.

Part of the issue with neighborhood association retention ponds is that many are just not deep enough (18 feet in depth). Shallow ponds just invite weeds and algae because sunlight can penetrate the water all the way to the bottom - encouraging algae and aquatic weed growth. In addition, many ponds were constructed with steep slopes leading to the ponds - encouraging erosion and silt buildup which decreases water quality.

Another issue is unrealistic expectations. A natural pond has vegetation in and around the pond that will help keep the water clean. Many urban dwellers want a pond devoid of vegetation because it is somehow perceived to be "cleaner". Any vegetation is perceived to be a weed. Many associations want a pond devoid of vegetation and want fish. Healthy fish need cover to flourish.

Finally, many homeowners in associations want a lush, beautiful lawn that extends right to the pond edge. They often can be unwilling to change fertilization habits to maintain the lawn. This can lead to algae problems due to nutrient leaching into the pond and encourage Canada geese to visit because the geese love the tender new shoots of young grass. In this new age of sustainability, neighborhood associations may need to re-evaluate their expectations and behaviors regarding pond appearance and management.

At the very least, low or no phosphorus slow-release lawn fertilizers need to be used by all homeowners in a neighborhood in the spring. This practice alone will reduce nutrient run-off and save your association money. Do not apply any fertilizer within 20 feet of the water's edge.

Think about establishing some desired aquatic vegetation in and around the pond. This vegetation will also filter, capture, and clean the water entering the pond. I see large drains and culverts emptying nutrients and other toxic materials from all the lawns and driveways directly into the pond. Establish buffer vegetation around the drains to slow and clean the water. Establish an Eco-Grass around the pond edge. These fescue blends need less mowing, and less fertilizer and their deeper root systems will also help clean the pond. They are also less favored by Canada geese.



A bubbler system can also help. Most bubblers work by circulating water over barrels of lava rock. This keeps the water moving (preventing weed growth) and will help to clean the water naturally. To save money and maintain cleaner water in a more environmentally friendly fashion; associations need to re-evaluate management practices and consider a more sustainable approach for pond management.



## Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

*I am saddened by the sudden hospitalization of my taster cat Larry. Of course, I thought the worst – my caregiver had poisoned my food with poison hemlock. Alas - I am sad to say that Larry was sickened by sipping water from a nearby retention pond tainted by prescription painkiller drugs, meth, antacid tablets, Midol, and Pepto-bismol. Larry has had a feline mid-*



*life crisis and has left his job as my personal taster and intends to travel around the country in an RV. I have setup a foundation to prevent cat poisonig from water poisoned by flushing anything not meant for a toliet - on my famous (10,000 friends and counting) Facebook page.*

Larry – now an “RV” vagabond cat.



## The Linden Mystery

Here is a Linden tree that is one of three linden trees planted in a row near a little-used sidewalk. The other two Lindens are reasonably healthy, but this one is suffering badly.

Most of the time considerable loss of canopy and death of branches from the top down signifies deep trouble. In addition, (see photo) the leaves of the tree are abnormally small compared to a “normal” Linden. So, what’s going on? Pick from one or more of the options below.



1. The tree has a disease.
2. Salt from the sidewalk.
3. Storm damage.
4. None of the above.

In this case answer 4 is correct. Looking at the base of the tree, one notices that the trunk /root flare of the tree is buried. The tree has circling roots near the base that are probably cutting off water and nutrients from the roots to the top of the tree, hence death of branches from the top down. The soil around the tree is unusually wet, even after the rains we have had. The tree is planted on a bank, and water should drain more quickly. This could mean the tree was planted with a soil auger, which only bored a hole with straight sides so the tree could be planted easily and quickly. Unfortunately, trees planted with an auger tend to hold water in the planting hole rather than a sloped hole which allows for better drainage. The tree will die unless the tree flare is excavated by a professional tree service and the circling roots are cut. That is my final answer for the Linden Tree Mystery. **Note:** I have been reading a lot of mystery novels lately.





# When It Rains – It Pours

Compared to recent years – we have received more than an abundance of rain this month. Good news if t you don't like to water much. Bad news for potential disease issues.

If you haven't fertilized your veggies or flowers recently, then now is a good time. Copious rain can leach minerals from soil at a time when they are very much needed by plants. One can use a well-balanced fertilizer following label directions to the plants just before a rain. No- don't go out when lightning is around unless you want a "glowing" personality...Hahahaha.

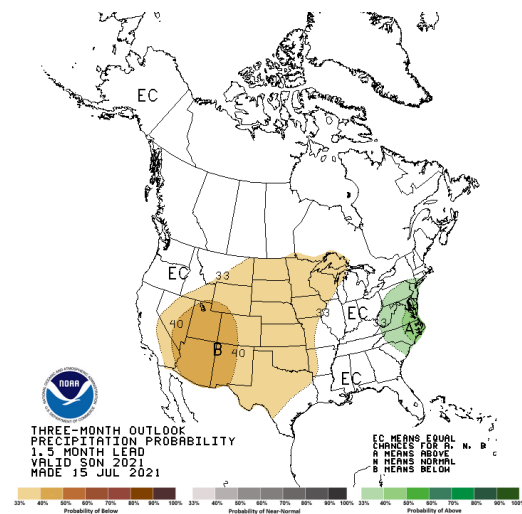
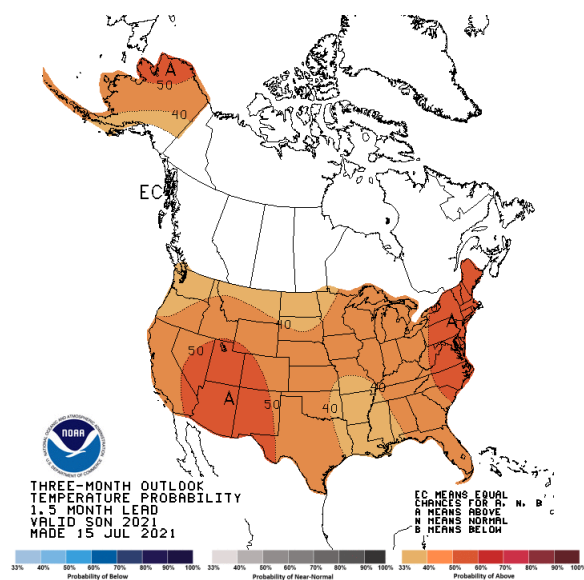


Also add about one half cup of Epsom salts at the base of each of your tomato and pepper plants. These plants respond well to Epsom salts at his time. Plus, they are feeling a bit achy from all the stress of growing and having folks pick off their fruit. They are feeling a bit hen picked...hahahah.

Tomato leaf disease such as Early Blight (and others) will be an issue. Remove any diseased lower leaves. I would remove lower foliage and thin out overgrown tomatoes to help reduce disease. In general, on needs about one healthy leaf per fruit. Here is a nice video on pruning tomatoes by a man who looks suspiciously like one of the Property Brothers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4IUhZMA9O0>

I believe many lawn diseases and diseases of garden and landscape plants will appear in the next two months. If you believe you might have a disease on any plant, just send some pics to me by email or text. Then I will give you the answer - only after we negotiate for pie (cherry is best), orange slices, or premium cat food for Hoggles. (Just kidding).

**Here are the weather outlooks** for September through November from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center. It appears like extreme northern Alaska is the place to be for late fall suntan. ENSO-neutral conditions are favored for the remainder of summer, with **La Niña** possibly emerging during the August-October season and lasting through the 2021-22 winter.



# Swallowtails

Instead of sterile landscapes featuring nothing but turfgrass, how wonderful it is to have plants attractive to birds, bees, and butterflies such as swallowtails. Swallowtails are large, brightly colored butterflies that's feature tails on their hind wings. These tail-like appendages resemble the tails of swallow family of birds, hence their name.

Swallowtails feed on flowers and can often be found in mud or damp sand where they sip dissolved minerals and salts. They beat their wings rapidly when feeding on nectar, as a balancing technique.



I have seen more **Black Swallowtails** in my garden this year. Black swallowtail larvae are often known as “parsley caterpillars” since that’s one of their most common host plants. They also host on dill, fennel, Queen Anne’s lace, and common rue. Females have a band of iridescent blue on their hind wings, while males have a band of yellow instead. I have both dill and Queen Anne’s lace in my garden.



**Spicebush Swallowtails** are found in the eastern half of the country, where their range overlaps with the extremely similar-looking black swallowtail. You can easily tell a spicebush swallowtail from a black swallowtail if you can get a close look. Black swallowtails have a tiny black dot in the orange circle at the base of their lower wing, while spicebush swallowtails do not. As the name might suggest, this swallowtail butterfly hosts on Spicebush, as well a sweet bay, and tulip tree. The larvae is designed to intimidate any predator.



The **Eastern Tiger Swallowtail** butterfly is one of the most common and beautiful eastern butterflies. Females lay their large green eggs singly on plants in the Magnolia and rose families. Common host plants include tulip tree and wild black cherry.

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