

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.

New Plants for 2022

It appears as if there will be more new introductions of new plants in 2022 compared with recent years. That's good news for folks who love to plant new stuff in their gardens. I would also expect prices for plants and supplies to increase with potential shortages once again because of continuing supply chain issues. I selected plants from various sources, mainly wholesale suppliers, so look for them at greenhouses and garden centers.



Ornamental strawberries grown for their fruit and pretty flowers are a sustainable choice for hanging baskets or containers. After the very successful introduction of Summer Breeze Rose and Snow, a new Summer Breeze Cherry Blossom is offered by ABZ Seeds. These unique, semi-double flowers hold on to their colorful petals for a long time.

Nasturtiums are very easy to grow, and their flowers last throughout the growing season. Dark leaves, and a compact habit, and eye-catching electric orange color, will make this a top seller at retail sources. 'Baby Rose' will make a wonderful combo or bedding plant.



With compact habit and fantastic heat tolerance, 'Little Hottie' is a versatile **panicle hydrangea** that has full flower heads that open green and turn sparkling white. 'Little Hottie' is covered in large blooms held up on strong stems. As evening temperatures drop in the fall, blooms turn antique shades of white and pink.

Yet Another Prediction for Winter 2021/ 2022 Compiled from Associated Press

Meteorologist Bill Marino from the National Weather Service in Grand Rapids is seeing a different type of winter in Michigan compared to the Climate Prediction Center's forecast - which forecasts a warmer and a wetter than normal winter. The main reasoning for the CPC winter forecast is a La Niña weather pattern expected to continue through the winter.

Marino has collected and analyzed weather data for over 30 years. His research looking at all La Niña winters shows moderate or strong La Niña winters are dominated by colder than normal temperatures.

Winters were colder than average 70 percent of the time when La Niña was moderate or strong. La Niña is expected to be moderate this winter. Marino points out that while his research is for Grand Rapids, he expects temperatures around the state to react the same as Grand Rapids.

He also found an interesting relationship between fall and early winter. Almost every time September and October were both warmer than normal, December was colder than normal. Our past September and October were warmer than normal, with October being much warmer than normal. Marino thinks a cold December will happen this year. A cold December and warm Great Lakes waters could make for a very heavy lake-effect snow season. Marino expects the snowbelts to have meaningful bouts of lake-effect snow in the rest of November and December.

Marino also found this pattern tends to lead to a warmer than normal January, and a colder than normal February. He says past Februarys in this pattern have been considerably colder than normal.

More New Plants for 2022



The new '**Waterfall Bicolor**' begonia produces a fully covered plant with countless blooms cascading in every direction. The Waterfall series is known for its elegant color with a continuous show all season long, and this new bicolor is no exception with its trendsetting coral and white bicolor blooms.

I keep waiting for a clear yellow petunia whose colors do not fade. **Capella Hello Yellow**' Petunia features a bright, solid-yellow bloom that is unique to the market. Supposedly, it keeps its bold yellow throughout the entire flower season.



The compact **Chrysalis series Butterfly bush** was bred and selected for its profusion of flowers that attract butterflies, and its very compact size. Gardeners will enjoy continuous blooming from spring through late summer. Plants are root hardy in USDA zones 5a to 9a and stem hardy in warmer locations. Available in five colors for its 2022 debut: Blue, Cranberry, Pink, Purple, and White.



Salvia 'Hummingbird Falls' is the first *Salvia guaranitica* bred for hanging baskets or the very front of the flower border. Unique, compact mushroom habit. Large saturated dark blue blooms with striking black calyx. I have grown this type of salvia the last two years in my garden, and the deep blue flowers are impressive.



All new breeding in drought-tolerant **Portulaca** brings this revolutionary new series to the market. A large percentage of the Portulaca '24/7' flowers never close. The 24/7 series not only boasts large, 2- to 3-inch fully double flowers but is also day length neutral. This comes in five colors of fuchsia, orange, red, white, and yellow.

Witches' Brooms

Witches' broom has a long and interesting history. Once they were thought to be the product of witchcraft, with the masses in trees being thought of as both places that witches retreated to for rest and the vehicle for their flying. A witch's broom cut from a tree might become a protective talisman, hung to keep animals safe.

Witches' brooms can be a bunch of twigs or small branches growing from a central point (often growing around a larger branch), a ball-shaped dwarf plant growing in a tree, or an unusually dense cluster of foliage or needle growth. I learned when I was a student at Purdue that witches' brooms were mostly a cluster of twigs - usually on Hackberry trees - but it seems as if witches brooms are now categorized as being any unusual growth of twigs on any plant. This is what happens when people – including scientists – have too much time on their hands.



The term witches' broom comes from the German word *Hexenbesen*, which means to bewitch (hex) a bundle of twigs, sometimes called a (besom). In medieval times, brooms were made of bundles of twigs, and mysterious occurrences of witches' brooms on trees were often blamed on witchcraft in medieval times. Mysterious and unexplainable occurrences were often blamed on witchcraft.

Witches' brooms occur on many different trees such as hackberry, maple, and willow, and conifers such as pine and spruce. There may be only one broom in a tree, or they may be many scattered throughout a tree.

Witches' brooms can be formed on a tree by fungi, phytoplasmas (bacterial-like organisms), mites, or aphids. Some brooms appear to be caused by genetic mutations in the buds of the branches. Unlike brooms caused by living organisms, there is usually just one broom per tree when the cause is a genetic mutation.



Small witches' broom on loblolly pine thought to have been caused by the pine witches' broom mite.

Photo by J. R. Baker, NC State University

Aphids and mites can carry a pathogen that causes a witches' brooms' to grow, and those pests can pass it along to the plant they're infesting. It could be that fairies and witches have hexed the plant grins....

Powdery mildew, a common fungus, has been known to cause oak trees to develop witches' brooms.

Genetics can cause normal twig and needle growth to produce witches' brooms, or "sports," on conifers. The altered plant tissue often grows to form a ball of dwarfed needled twigs and branches in the tree's crown. Conifers

with genetic witches' broom are healthy, and the sport itself looks like a tiny version of the species. Again, I blame the tiny fairies.

These naturally occurring miniatures are the source of some of the dwarf cultivars of conifers found in nurseries, such as 'Blue Star' juniper, and Dwarf Alberta Spruce. Other cultivars were developed by plant hunters and scientists who climbed trees to collect witches' brooms, and then used cuttings from them to grow new plants that were healthy and carried the genetics for dwarfism. Plant hunters afraid of heights reportably hired black cats with tiny chainsaws to collect the brooms.

Most witches' brooms are not fatal, just disfiguring.

Depending on the cause of a witches' broom, removing affected branches, twigs, buds, or leaves may be all you need to do. Be sure to make your pruning cut at a proper location along a branch or twig before the affected portion. Discard the cuttings right after pruning, rather than leaving them to decay into compost or leaf mold. This will reduce the availability of potential sources of reoccurrence, such as fungal spores or insects. Clean your tools after using them to cut away a witches' broom.

More New Plants

A new Bidens perfect for early season baskets and combinations is 'Spicy Electric White'. This plant has bicolor flowers and a compact habit. The plant is daylength neutral, tolerant of cool early season temperatures, self-branching and remains an upright mounded plant



'Little Lime Punch' panicle hydrangea

will knock your socks off with extremely bright and vivid color on a very sturdy dwarf habit that is similar to Little Lime hydrangea. Plants will benefit from a dormant prune of a few inches off the top in early spring. USDA Zones 3-8; 3 to 5 feet tall and wide. Perfect for small spaces,



Pinktini Lilac matures at only 4 to 5 feet tall and 3 to 4 feet wide. Fragrant, rich pink flowers bloom in late spring and are accented by classic Preston lilac foliage. Bred in Canada, this cold-hardy lilac is a cross between Charisma and Miss Canada, resulting in a more compact, tidier form of the latter.



An incredible display of color allows just one plant to have a combination affect. With blossoms that open in silver, purple, lavender, and half and half, **Petunia Silver Surprise** can easily fill a hanging basket or the landscape with a mature size of 8 feet by 8 feet.



Confusing Moon Phases

Condensed from article by Johnny Rodgers

Remember when I remarked that experts who want to classify, categorize, and ultimately confuse everything have too much time in their hands? Moon phases are such an example. As it turns out - what I thought was a half moon is not a half moon at all, and a crescent moon –well... sighs...

The moon takes approximately one month to orbit the earth, or exactly 29.53 days. The moon rises in the East and sets in the West each day. During this orbital cycle, based on the position of the moon between the earth and sun, portions of the moon become illuminated. Each of these appearances are called phases and have specific names. The names of the 8 moon phases are: Waxing Crescent, First Quarter, Waxing Gibbous, Full Moon, Waning Gibbous, Last Quarter, Waning Crescent, New Moon.

To simplify the process of understanding moon cycles, we'll start with the four intermediate phases which occur approximately each 7.4 days, where the moon is positioned along the ecliptic at 0°, 90°, 180°, and 270° respectively. This is as clear as defining types of mud.

These four intermediate phases are: new moon, full moon, first quarter and last quarter. The other phases of the moon occur in between these four intermediate phases.

When the sun and moon are aligned on the same side of the earth, the moon is called “new.” Of course, a new moon means nothing really, as the moon is not at all visible in the sky. It should be called “invisible moon” or “totally tuned out” moon

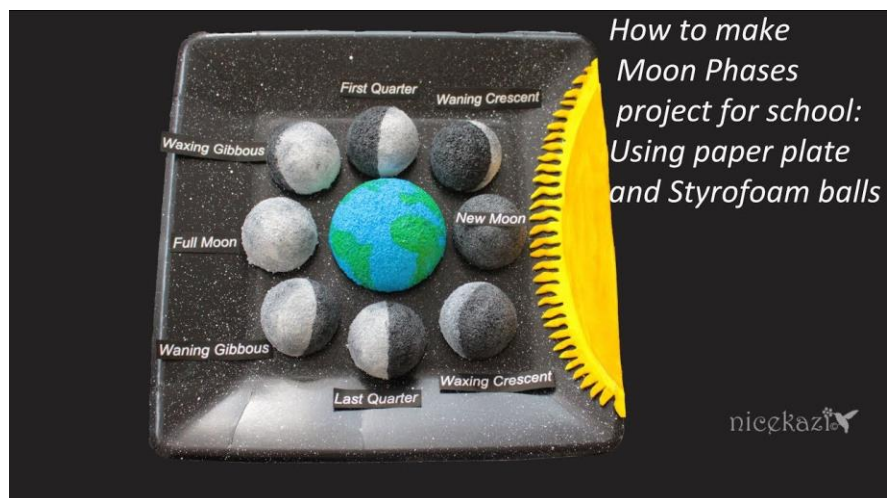
The term “waxing” moon refers to the amount of illumination on the surface of the moon that is increasing.

Just before the moon becomes full and just as is illumination starts to decrease again it is referred to as “gibbous.” A totally reasonable term that could refer to famous monkeys in Madagascar.

The term “waning” refers to the period of time after the moon becomes full and illumination begins to decrease again moving toward the new moon - again which is not visible – but somehow “new”

One important thing to keep in mind:

During the quarters, waxing or waning phases of the moon, whether you see the right side, or the left side of the moon illuminated depends on whether you live in the northern or southern hemisphere. For example, at the first



quarter, people living in the northern hemisphere will see the right side of the moon illuminated, while people living in the southern hemisphere will see the left side of the moon illuminated.

Waxing Crescent: This occurs when between 1-49% of one side of the moon is illuminated. I always thought a crescent moon was when a cat - who happens to play a fiddle - jumps over the moon. Cats are amazing.

First quarter: This is when 50 percent of one side of the moon is illuminated. Interestingly, this is what I have always referred to as a “half” moon. I learned that 50% means “half” in my antiquated grade school – evidently new math changed all that.

Waxing Gibbous: This occurs when between 51-99% of one side of the moon is illuminated. Maybe this phase is named after an unincorporated town in Grant County, Oklahoma. It is southeast of Manchester, Oklahoma, and northwest of Wakita. While never formally incorporated, the town was given a post office on March 26, 1896, by early settler William H McGibbon, to which he attached the “Gibbon” name. Wakita was featured in the movie “Twister” starring Helen Hunt.

Full moon: This is when the entirety of the moon is illuminated. Thank goodness- we agree on something – wait - is the “dark side” of the moon also illuminated?

Waxing Gibbous: This occurs when between 99-51 % of one side of the moon is illuminated. This is named after monkeys who wax their legs before the prom.

Last quarter: This is when 50 percent of one side of the moon is illuminated. So, a fifty-cent piece is a half dollar, and a quarter is what I used to use at a car wash.

Waning Crescent: This occurs when between 49-1% of one side of the moon is illuminated, or an explanation of how my patience has “waned” about moon phases.

Finally New Plants – The Continuing and Final Saga

Suncredible® Saturn™ Sunflower is an everblooming sunflower is built on a well branched bush-like habit that is perfect for the back of the bed, as an annual screen or along a fence. The blooms are about 4” across and do not need to be deadheaded to continue blooming. It makes a great cut flower. This plant blooms several weeks longer than similar sunflowers due to its semi-indeterminate to determinate habit. Great for pollinators and will pump blooms all season and well into the fall for a great seasonal pop of color. I am not sure – Is this plant staring at me – are you looking at ME? Huh!...



This new and interesting evergreen breaks up the monotony of the landscape.

Cheer Drops™ arborvitae easily transforms any garden from drab to darling. No shaping is needed as it maintains its fun attractive tear drop shape naturally. Fresh green foliage remains bright year-round. Thrives even in chilly USDA zone 3. What they don’t mention much in the advertising is that this plant can become very large – up to 18 feet in height – and width - or more. If you plant 30 or more of these in a landscape, I would argue that could be monotonous.

Lighthouse Linden is characterized by an ascending crown structure, strong branching, and dark green disease- and insect-resistant foliage. Developed and tested for 20 years, this tree has proven hardiness and adaptability across Zones 3 to 6. The abundant yellow fragrant flowers are followed by limited seed production. The strong branching and insect resistant foliage are what caught my interest.



Blueberry 'Bushel and Berry BerryBux' wins the most intriguing plant introduction award. BerryBux looks like a boxwood but has the bonus of blueberries. Its boxwood-like foliage and compact habit make it ideal for planting as a hedge or in the garden. White flowers ripen into a display of wild and aromatic tasting berries. BerryBux grows to a height of 75 cm and a spread of 60 cm. Hardy to Zone 5. I will assume that it probably still needs acid soil to thrive.

'Ragin Cajun' Indian Pink is a native woodland perennial which has orange red flowers. It attracts pollinators like hummingbirds and grows well in both sun and shade. From Tony Avent from Plant Delights Nursery. Height: 20-24" | Spread: 20-24" | Zones: 5b-9



Space Fruit

Condensed from article by Scott Elliott, ARS Office of Communications

Space travel in the future is expected to last from several months to years, and astronauts will need to maintain healthy diets during those extended voyages. Really? I expected that a brief visit to Mars might take, maybe 20 minutes, and that astronauts would just eat pizza and macaroni and cheese along the way. Scientists with USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) are working with NASA to develop sustainable farming techniques and technologies to grow fresh produce while in spaceflight.



Leave it to scientists to develop genetically engineered plum trees to continually flower and produce fruit. The trees were created by over-expressing a key flowering regulator gene that causes them to flower all of the time and eliminates the need for cold dormancy. Not only does this technology offer the potential to grow fruit on long-duration space missions, but it could also be used on Earth in indoor or urban farms to help feed residents of food deserts – areas where people have limited access to a variety of healthful foods. Everyone needs GMO space fruit.



Drugs and Plants – and Puns

I once considered going to pharmacy school because I was fascinated by how plants were utilized for medicine. Many common medicines have their “roots” in medicinal plants from all over the world. (I majored in “puns” at university. Here are but a few examples.

Arthur Barclay was an American Botanist who would often go on excursions to collect plant samples. In 1962 he went to Washington state and collected bark from the Pacific Yew tree. There was no special reason for him to collect this bark. In 1979, Dr Susan Horowitz found that that an extract made from the bark of Yew (named Paclitaxel) stopped cell division in lung and breast cancer patients.

In the early 1800s, German pharmacist **Friedrich Sertürner** was so curious about the effects of the opium poppy, that he started experimenting on stray dogs and then on himself. Because this extract made him feel so sleepy, he named it Morphism after the god of dreams, Morpheus. Shortly afterwards, Friedrich became addicted to the drug and wrote: “I consider it my duty to attract attention to the terrible effects of this new substance called Morphium in order that calamity may be averted”. There have been attempts to produce opium derivatives that aren’t as addictive as Morphine, but this has only been partially effective. One stray dog quit “cold turkey” at or near Thanksgiving, 1815.

For more than 2000 years, Chinese herbalists were using the herb *Artemisia Annua* in the treatment of Malaria. But was only in 1972 when a Chinese scientist called Tu Youyou discovered the malaria fighting compound and called it **Artemisinin**. This was an incredibly timely finding because Malaria was quickly becoming resistant to an older drug called Chloroquine. Today, Artemisinin based therapies are used as first line treatment where Chloroquine is no longer effective.

Modern day aspirin has its roots in ancient medicines derived from the willow tree. The ancient Egyptians mentioned using willow to treat pain and fever. Hippocrates, often referred to as the Father of Medicine, suggested drinking willow bark tea to relieve pain during childbirth. In the early 1800s, multiple chemists extracted this mysterious pain and fever curing compound from willow bark. In 1828, the German chemist Johann Buchner called this compound Salicin. But extraction from the willow bark was difficult and wasteful. Eventually the combined work of multiple chemists led to the formulation of modern-day Aspirin – acetylsalicylic acid.

Metformin is one of the first line treatments for type 2 diabetes and helps millions of people control their blood sugar levels. Metformin was developed from Galega, (Goats rue- pictured on right), native to central and southern Europe, western Asia, and tropical east Africa. It contains a substance called Guanidine, which was found in 1918 to have blood sugar lowering effects.



In 1775, Dr. William Withering was treating a patient with severe dropsy caused by heart failure. He was unable to bring about any improvement with traditional medicines. The patient’s family administered an herbal brew based on an old family recipe and the patient started to recover. Dr. Withering experimented with the herbs contained in the recipe and identified foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) as the most significant. In 1785, he published his Account of the Foxglove and Some of Its Medical Uses. After further analysis, the cardiac glycosides digoxin and digitoxin were eventually extracted. These are still used in treating heart conditions today.

Prescription Warning Ads

I think it is interesting when I see commercials for prescription drugs on T.V. The commercials usually start out with how wonderful the product is. For example, a particular drug might reduce blood pressure, reduce cholesterol, or eliminate the dull nagging headaches that all of us suffer from. The wonderful qualities of the drug are usually accompanied by “qualifiers”- the side effects of the drugs that the commercial must address to be legal. Here’s a “theoretical” example.

“Laboratory studies reveal that some subjects (compared with a placebo) complained of diarrhea, stomach cramps, increased blood pressure, heart attack, and possible stroke. Other subjects complained of sleepiness and catatonic drowsiness- you should not even think about operating a vehicle while taking (insert name of drug). Some subjects complained of unluckiness- do not attempt a trip to Las Vegas - do not drink alcohol or instant death can occur.” Do not attempt to pound a nail while on this medication! “So what if you are an unlucky, sleepy, near-death person who frequently visits a rest room? A recent trend in prescription ads features background music from the 50’s and on whose lyrics are changed to fit the name of the drug. This is done because copyrights for the songs have expired, and the boomers and Silent Generation folks still alive will feel better about keeping themselves alive when they hear their favorite songs. Some possible candidates for future prescription songs are “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right” by Bob Dylan, and “Staying Alive” by the Bee Gees.



Leeks:

Leeks (*Allium porrum*) have been cultivated for more than 4,000 years. The Egyptians regarded the leek as a sacred plant, and the Roman Emperor Nero demanded leek soup daily, for he believed the leek strengthened his voice for his lengthy orations. The leek, while a member of the onion family, does not form a true bulb like onions or garlic. Rather, the leek has thick white stems which connect directly to the roots.

The Romans reportedly distributed the leek (a native of the Mediterranean region and Near East) across Europe to Britain. The Welsh loved the leek so much that they made it their national plant and emblem. Welshmen adorned their hats with leeks before going into battle in 640 A.D. in order to distinguish themselves from their enemy. To this day, the Welsh wear leeks in their hats on St. David’s Day to celebrate their victory.

Leeks are very easy to grow, but they prefer cool temperatures. They can be difficult to establish when seeded directly into a garden in heavier soils. I start the leeks in a small container filled with a grower’s mix designated for seedlings, and then transplant the leeks seedlings into the garden.

Leeks have a long growing season, so they should be sown in the garden (barely covering the seed) as soon as possible. Often leeks are grown using a shallow trench system similar to growing asparagus. In other words, small amounts of soil are pulled over the stem of the leek as it develops in a shallow trench. This “blanches” the stem, resulting in a tender white stalk perfect for the kitchen. Some gardeners place plastic or cardboard sleeves over the developing leeks for the same effect.



During the winter, leeks can be harvested using a garden fork (don't try to pull on a leek-it will break off) to uplift the leeks for a late-winter snack or soup.

Leeks are biennials, and if left in the garden to over-winter, will produce tall flowers up to 3 feet in height the next season. Once this occurs the leek becomes tough and inedible. However, second-year leeks will not only produce flowers, but also will produce underground corms that can be used for transplanting. This overcomes the hassle of starting leek seed each year. Plant the corms the same depth as they were dug. This overcomes the problem of "blanching" in a trench discussed previously.

The British have inter-planted leeks, between rows of veggies for centuries. Leek plants have been reported to be particularly effective against carrot flies.

Bears, KFC, and a Parakeet *Compiled from CNN*

A California man got a closer wildlife encounter than expected after returning home to find a bear devouring his bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken's legendary secret "11 herbs & spices" recipe.

"They sure made a mess of the place," John Holden told his local ABC outlet of the bizarre break-in, which occurred Oct. 28 at his house in Sierra Madre. The homeowner had reportedly returned to the house to discover that the front door was wide open, and a big burly bear was on his counter, wolfing down a bucket of KFC fried chicken. When Holden first arrived, he saw the mama bear was sitting outside. When she would not move, he ran past her into his house. "I was very concerned about my pets at the time, so I guess I wasn't thinking clearly". I just wanted to get in here and make sure they were OK," Holden said. While one cub devoured his bucket of chicken on the kitchen counter, Holden saw another ransacking the house.



In the meantime, he realized one of his parakeets was missing and so was his dog, Woody. At this time, he was just focused on getting the bears out.

Fortunately, the besieged man was eventually able to shoo the chicken thieves out of the house by making loud noises. "They were very happy. They rested. They definitely enjoyed their visit at my house," Holden said, evidently deciding that it was more important to be a good host for visitors than to worry about ransacking bears.

He then turned his attention to finding his pets. Sadly, his parakeet was gone, but Woody is back home. Woody got out of the house when the bears came, (Woody evidently decided to cut and run rather than protecting the house from interlopers), but a neighbor driving by found him and brought him home.

In a similar incident this past August, a black bear was filmed calmly strolling down the aisles of a California grocery store. That same month, another four-legged scene stealer was caught on cam swiping someone's Amazon delivery.

The bear later remarked that it would have preferred the "extra crispy" chicken and would have liked to have stayed to pick up his order of "Care Bear" toys from Amazon.

My Friend Steve

For me, the holiday season can be bittersweet – especially as one becomes older, and one reflects back on life – and one’s mortality. I have had few really close friends – this is probably a reflection of my personality – and the fact I have always been a loner.

When you spend time playing music with someone, the friendships that develop can last a lifetime. The practices, gigs, setup and teardowns, the sharing of creative skills, and positive feedback from the audiences can bring people very close together. My friend Dan, whom with I played music with for many years, is a classic example.

The friendship I had with Steve Wilson went way beyond even the traditional music friendship. I believe that true friends are rare - true friends stick around no matter what and +are positive forces in your life. True friends set good examples and teach valuable lessons that one will never forget. I learned many lessons from Steve.

When he was in his twenties, Steve had suffered from stage 4 Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma – a disease that often resulted in death. Steve was getting chemotherapy that resulted in symptoms often worse than the cancer. Despite these obstacles, he was always trying to be upbeat. He even played guitar and tried to sing,

Amazingly, Steve’s cancer went to remission. He had beaten the odds.

In 1982, my wife began bleeding profusely from complications of pregnancy and she needed to go to the hospital in Albuquerque, 10 miles away. I called my family doctor who called an ambulance and then I called Steve. “I need you NOW!”, I said. He was at my house in 3 minutes to watch my daughter Jessica. After a harrowing ride in the ambulance, my son Richard was born.

Months later, I was in a bad car accident as I was traveling to my day job as a warehouse supervisor in Albuquerque. The car was totaled. Steve let me drive his almost brand-new pickup to go to work – or gave me rides to work so I didn’t lose my job.

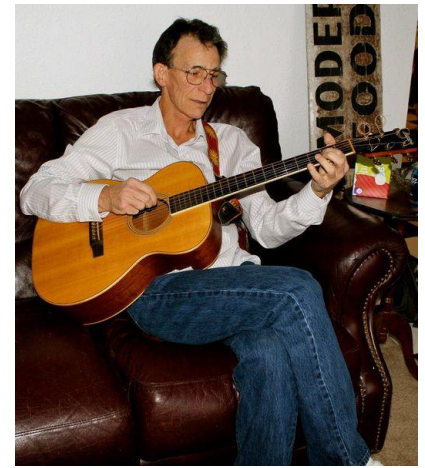
We always played music together, whenever he would visit – and also in a rock band we formed in New Mexico.

Steve loved to have fun. He drove his little truck like a madman on remote desert roads, laughing as the rest of us clung on for dear life. Once Steve came over near the Fourth of July with bottle rockets. My kids were thrilled when he would toss the lit bottle rocket in the air, and then scramble out of the way when the rocket would accelerate and blow up before it hit the ground.

When I moved back to Indiana circa 1986, we lost touch for a while. Steve was working as a traffic safety engineer for a large construction company. He had to travel to sites all over the west and was away from his family a lot.

His family adored his visits when he had time to return home in Tucumcari, New Mexico.

It was during a visit back to Indiana circa 2010 with his wife Toni that I noticed he had lost weight, was having trouble playing his guitar, and he declined to do much singing. As I prepared to leave, Toni took me aside and explained that Steve had serious health issues and coming back was Steve’s way of saying goodbye.



On Jan 5, 2016, right after the holidays, Steve passed away at home from pancreatic cancer. He worked to provide for his family almost to the very end. We had talked on the phone a few days earlier and he told me he had played his guitar for family and friends.

I wished him well, though I had trouble speaking, and I didn't want to cry. Even today, I still remember Steve – his kindness and humor and his love and kindness for everyone.



Two 'Forever Chemicals' More Toxic than Previously Thought:

Condensed article by Rachel Frazin – The Hill

New draft reports from the Environmental Protection Agency have found that two "forever chemicals" are more toxic than previously thought and found the safe levels of ingestion for

chemicals perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) are much lower than the agency had found in prior assessments.

The agency also found that PFOA is "likely" carcinogenic to humans. This is a step up from before, as it has previously said that there is "suggestive" evidence that the substance can cause cancer.

Both PFOA and PFOS can be found in drinking water, as well as other substances. PFOA has been used in nonstick cookware, flame repellants and cosmetics. PFOS has been used in water repellant and stain-resistant products. This is but one reason no one trusts government agencies. I used Teflon pans when they first came out. Their non-stick surfaces were too good to be true, and in fact it turns out they were. I first became suspicious when experts cautioned against using Teflon pans in homes where pet birds were kept. Turns out the fumes from a Teflon pan killed the birds.

Scott Faber, senior vice president for government affairs at the Environmental Working Group, said that the stronger toxicity finding is a sign that the agency will issue strong regulations.

"There's no turning back. The evidence is now overwhelming that these chemicals are toxic at very low levels and that tens of millions - if not hundreds of millions of Americans - have unsafe levels of PFOA in particular in their drinking water," Faber said. Both substances belong to a class of chemicals called "forever chemicals" because they build up in peoples' bodies over time instead of breaking down.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found PFAS in blood of nearly all the people that it tested, indicating "widespread" exposure in the American public.

More information about health issues related to PFOA can be found here:

[Potential health effects of PFAS chemicals | ATSDR \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/ATSDR/pfas/health-effects/)

My Kroger Store / and Reflections on the Pandemic

It had been a while since I had been physically inside a grocery store because of the stupid pandemic. Since I am immune - compromised and an old codger, I thought it best just to isolate – just for a few months - I thought at first. A year and a half later, here are a few reflections from my experience.

Thank goodness for store pickup. The convenience, safety, and timesaving of picking up items after selecting them online in my mind was long overdue. I also believe it was cheaper in the long run as one is always adding items one sees in a store, especially if one is hungry when shopping. Somehow Spaghetti O's or Spam seem tasty when shopping until you open the can at home – or read the list of ingredients.

Kroger's web site has always been slow and clunky. A friend of mine talks to the web app as if it is a real person. "Kroger!" "What are you doing?" "Why, Kroger, Why?" ,,,when the site crashes and one must start over.

Kroger also has an annoying habit of texting you 15 minutes before pick-up with apologies that some items are unavailable. It is difficult to believe that some items are truly out-of stock. Taco sauce? Peanut butter? Spaghetti sauce? Really? I was actually tempted to go in the store just to check if any items were actually on the shelves.

Having whined, I must say I believe the workers at Kroger and other stores are heroes. They loaded my car with cheerful attitudes – even in lousy weather. Often, I think we take those workers and other workers in the service industry - who put their own lives at risk - for granted.

So, once I made it back into the store to shop, I found I didn't miss it at all. Really, do I prefer waiting in long lines to check out groceries? How about the crowded aisles packed with shoppers who leave their carts in the middle of the aisle so they can either talk with a friend they met at the store, or just have two sides of the store to shop at the same time. No thanks....



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: *I would prefer to do my own online shopping for cat food pick-up at the grocery store. As it turns out, I require much more food to sustain myself during this pandemic than previously thought...*

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