Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture March 2022 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 kemeryr?@frontier.com.

Bluebird Drama

A few subscribers noticed my article about bluebirds also appeared in a recent edition of *Senior Life* magazine.

Bottom line: I don't write for *Senior Life....*

According to their website, *Senior Life* publishes four territorial newspapers monthly spanning across northern Indiana. You will find features covering entertainment, health and wellness, housing (independent, assisted and/or nursing homes) as well as health services. You will also read about travel destinations, finance, spotlights on local residents, sports, calendar of events, retirement, and happenings. The main offices of Senior Life are located at S Main St, Milford, Indiana . All issues of Senior Life are free when you pick them up from the newsstands. Mailed subscriptions are available, prepaid with \$34 for one year and \$58 for two years. The issues are mostly filled with advertisements, which they do charge for.

I was surprised when Senior Life picked up my bluebird article from Home Horticulture and listed me as a feature writer. I don't write for Senior Life. It would have been nice for Senior Life to let me know they wanted to use my article.

The real drama began when someone at Senior Life replaced my picture of bluebirds at my feeder with a picture of a blue jay – oops! Bird enthusiasts are not happy when information about their favorite birds is not correct – especially folks fond of bluebirds. Also unfortunate is the fact that issues of Senior Life are everywhere, in doctors' offices, restaurants, nursing homes etc., so everyone will know I evidently don't know the difference between a bluebird and a blue jay.

I did contact Senior Life Magazine and was told by the editor / manager "they would take care of it"

In fact, I can envision a day, somewhere in a distant daydreaming egotistical future... like this:

News reporter: Today, we have with us Ricky Kemery, at the top of the polls for governor of the state of Indiana, and also up for a Grammy, He has won an Oscar award, a Purdue President's Award for outstanding work as a Horticulture Extension Educator, and recently was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Thanks, for being with us today....

Me: It is an honor.....(trying to appear humble),,,

Reporter: Before we begin Mr. Kemery, what do you have to say - pauses for dramatic effect - about THIS! Slaps down a dirty bedraggled issue of Senior Life on the table.... Have you no shame? It is an insult to bird lovers who are also seniors everywhere!!!

Me: Well, uh... It was all a mistake....

Reporter: A mistake you say? Don't you know the difference between a bluebird and a blue jay?

Me: Well yes I do.....

Reporter: Perhaps you need to find a shallow hole to crawl into and think about the travesty to Bluebirds and seniors everywhere... I mean did you even think about the consequences? I mean it is obvious that you do NOT know the difference between an innocent bluebird and a blue Jay - do You?

Outside the station an angry crowd of seniors has gathered, holding signs that say SAVE THE BLUEBIRDS!! DON'T DITZ MY BLUEBIDS! BLUE JAYS AREN'T REAL!

Final Note: I want to emphasize that it is important to keep feeders clean and to change food regularly. Some folks use live mealworms to feed their bluebirds. My mealworms – delicious and appetizing – are dried and have a much longer shelf life – though the bluebirds usually eat them all in one day. They are little piggy's – and are a joy every day to watch. \

Pine Nuts Some material from Michigan State University

In my copious spare time, I watch cooking shows, British Crime dramas, and home renovation shows of all sorts. I especially enjoy competition cooking shows like Chopped, for instance — where a list of ingredients for the cooks to use might be a disgusting fish no one has ever heard of — some sort of green — candied canned meat loaf — and pine nuts.

The funny thing about pine nuts is that they're actually not nuts at all. Pine nuts are the seeds of pine trees and can be commonly found in pinecones that usually come from stone pine, Chinese white pine, and pinyon pine trees. These pines



produce a larger seed that's better for eating and easier to harvest. The seed of Chinese White Pine is most commonly found in U.S. markets.

Stone pine trees are native to central Europe, and pinyon pine trees are found in the mountains of the desert southwest. When I lived in New Mexico during the early 1980's, we (meaning family and friends) would travel up in the mountains to collect pinyon pine nuts. The trees only produced nuts about every three to five years, so it was a big deal to score on these rare nut harvests. We would travel high up in the mountains on little used logging roads to reach the trees. We spread sheets under the trees and then shook the limbs so the nuts would fall out of the cones onto the sheets.

We had to watch out for timber rattlesnakes sunning themselves on rocks or hiding in the shade of the rocks at mid-day. After a full day of harvest, someone would make twice - baked potatoes – where crushed roasted pinyon nuts were mixed into the potatoes and then baked again – usually over an open mesquite fire. Mesquite wood was everywhere and gave the potatoes enhanced flavor. The potatoes were delicious.

It is one of my favorite memories of New Mexico – the clean open sky, the rugged mountains, the quiet and stillness of being in the middle of nowhere, and then sharing the bounty with family and friends. Later, as the

sun fell blazing in the desert, we brought out guitars, drums, and other instruments and sang around the fire. According to experts, people who are allergic to tree nuts aren't usually allergic to pine nuts and vice versa, However, this isn't a hard-and-fast rule, as food allergies can vary from person to person. If you're allergic to tree nuts, proceed with caution with pine nuts, just in case.

If you've ever shopped for pine nuts, you probably know that they come with a hefty price tag. While all nuts tend to be expensive, pine nuts are in the upper echelon of the pricing scale. This is because they're not easy to harvest and process. Getting the pine nuts from the trees and pinecones is a labor-intensive process. Add to all of this the fact that it takes a pine tree more than a decade to start to produce pinecones and pine nuts, and you've got yourself a long and arduous process that comes with a price tag to match. Many pine nuts are still harvested by hand collection.



Flowering Dogwood

Flowering dogwood is a beautiful native tree with four-season appeal. It has lovely flowers in spring, attractive foliage in summer, colorful foliage and fruit in fall and an interesting growth habit that provides winter interest.

The bark and the roots were used medicinally, and a red dye was extracted from the roots. A tonic was made from the roots and root infusions were consumed as an antidiarrheal, a blood purifier, and a tonic. Also, the flowering dogwood was used as a decoration and for

making tools. Shredded bark from the twigs was used to whiten the teeth. In addition, dogwood branches were used to dry fish by colonists and Native Americans because of the branching pattern of its limbs. The Creoles of Virginia, the Cherokee, Delaware, and Rappahannock Indians are among the Native American tribes known to have utilized this species.

Colonial settlers drank a tea brewed from the bark to reduce fevers. Some colonial folklore lists dogwood as the "tree that helped win the American Revolution" because many English soldiers pursuing the colonists fell victim to "swamp fever" because they did not know about the anti-malarial properties of the tea.

The wood of dogwood has a high resistance to sudden shock. It was used to make chisel and mallet heads and wedges, as it can be hammered on the ends without splitting and mushrooming out. It was once used to make hay forks, hubs of small wheels, rake teeth and machinery bearings because of its durability. Ninety percent of dogwood cut since the late 19th century has been used to make shuttles for the textile industry. With a mechanical loom, the shuttle is hurled at top speed, and a wood has to be used that wears smoother and will not crack under the strain.

The showy part of the dogwood flower is not the flower at all but the bracts. The true flower is greenish yellow and insignificant. The bracts appear for 10 days to two weeks in April or early May.

Dogwood trees are extremely popular trees with consumers - who then purchase and plant the trees in the front yard – hoping for an impressive show of flowers over time. The open front yard often is the worst location for a dogwood tree. This is because the dogwood in its native habitat is an understory forest tree-usually found on the forest edge.

What this means is that flowering dogwood prefers an acidic, well-drained soil that contains a significant amount of organic matter. It performs best in partial shade. The tree should be mulched to keep the soil moist and cool. It does not tolerate poorly drained soils, drought, or pollution. Anything other than these conditions - let's say a front yard in full sun with a poorly drained heavy clay alkaline subsoil – creates an "unhappy" dogwood. If an unhappy dogwood could move and talk it would chew up the cushions of the patio furniture – trample or eat all ornamental shrubs and flowers in the landscape, and bark incessantly at absolutely nothing at all for hours at a time. Unhappy dogwoods are more susceptible to a number of insect and disease problems such as borers, petal and leaf spots, pale chlorotic leaves, powdery mildew, and anthracnose. Anthracnose is caused by a fungus, and has weakened, or killed large numbers of dogwoods in the eastern U.S. There is dogwood anthracnose in Indiana, but it does not appear - based on my research – as widespread and destructive as areas to the east and south. Symptoms of anthracnose include large tan blotches or purple-rimmed leaf spots on the leaves, though some severely infected dogwoods can develop infected areas on the limbs and trunk. Trees may die within two or three years after onset of the disease with no treatment.

Through the breeding efforts of Dr. Elwin Orton, Rutgers University has introduced hybrids of native dogwood with Korean dogwood known as the Rutgers Stellar series. The hybrids start blooming later than native flowering dogwood. They are highly resistant to dogwood borer and moderately to highly resistant to dogwood anthracnose.

'Appalachian Spring' is a native flowering dogwood with resistance to dogwood anthracnose. This would be my first choice if I wanted to purchase a native dogwood for the landscape.

Many folks confuse Korean dogwoods (*Cornus kousa*) with the hybrids or native flowering dogwoods. Korean dogwoods are not as cold hardy, have smaller greenish bracted flowers, and are even more sensitive to environmental conditions than their cousins.



There are tons of cultivars of all type of dogwoods. The pink-or red flowered cultivars are very popular, and yet these cultivars generally are shorter-lived in an average landscape. This had to do with genetics or what I call "Ricky's fancy factor". My arbitrary rule states that the fancier the plant, the more genetics the plant had to give up to be so fancy. So, plant hardiness, insect and disease resistance are often given up for fancy flowers or foliage.

There is remarkably little useful information about dogwood anthracnose on the Internet. Most Extension resources list the disease with other types of leaf blotches



Alternatives to Annoying Music on Hold...

As one becomes older, it seems as if we spend a lot more time on hold. I guess most folks think we have time to burn, as we wade though the vagaries of Medicare, retirement, doctors, Internet providers, utilities, and shopping on the Internet (where the items you purchased never arrives, is broken, or incomplete).

Regardless, anytime anything goes wrong, or you just need information – requires one to have to call a company to talk to a real person. Before you can actually talk to a real person, one must endure being on hold.

Wait times on hold seem to be increasing as companies deal with pandemic issues and labor shortages. One company I had to call several times always began with the message that wait times were long based on weather issues – Really - the weather is always bad in Florida?

Being placed on hold usually involves some type of music with overdubbed messages that tell you how important you are as a customer, how sorry they are for the inconvenience of you being on hold, and how their customer service people are too busy to answer any call. Some places give you time estimates on how long you will be on hold or tell you the number of people that are ahead of you. I have found the time estimates are worthless. The hold music varies widely. Some music is calming, some more frenetic – either way - spend up to 3 hours on hold and any music becomes unbearable.

So, I believe that hold messages should contain alternatives to any companies' traditional hold message.

Something like this.....

Press one to continue to hold and listen to the mind-numbing piano music you have listened to for the past two hours – or –

Press two to hear the sound of fingernails scratching a chalkboard.....

Press three to hear a continuous loop of a monster truck approaching an intersection revving its engine with glass shattering booming bass

Press four to hear the sound of slowly dripping water on an aluminum pie pan

Press five to hear the sound of more cowbell – over and over again....

Press six for.....Bark...Bark...Bark bark bark barkbark ... bark....

Gambling on Weather

Already we have seen very warm weather this early spring. It will be very tempting to plant early this season. One can usually get away with planting perennials in March and early April – as long as the plants are hardened off – or exposed to Indiana weather for 2-3 days before planting. What a shock it must be for perennials shipped into our area from the west, south, and southeast – where many nurseries are located.

"Why did they send us here?", the plants discuss amongst themselves. "Did we do something wrong to deserve these poor soils and weird unpredictable weather? The answer is yes – welcome to the Hoosier state.

Frost heaving can be an issue if one plants a perennial when the temperatures are in the sixties and two days later a hard freeze might hit the area. Sometimes the foliage can be nipped back a bit, but sometimes the plant will pop right out of the ground - like a pop tart ejected from a toaster. The roots of the plant can dry out quickly – which is not good.



Speaking of toasters, I have another Ricky observation based on physics, consumer buying behavior, and personal experience. My observation is that a 20-year-old toaster purchased at an out-of-the way garage sale will last years past a fancy deluxe toaster with all the bells and whistles purchased from Amazon. Just an observation – sorry Amazon.

Planter beware when it comes to annuals or tender vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers. Our frost date to plant such tender plants can be as late as May 15th to as early as April 23 – depending on what source you use to make such decisions. Remember the frost date is the date when there is a greater than 50%

chance of a frost or freeze occurring before that date. It doesn't mean a frost or freeze can't happen after that date – but the chances of that occurring go down quickly after that date.

So, let's look at the last several years. We have had major frosts and freezes occur as late as May 15th in previous years with snow- yes snow- occurring in late April or May. If you like to gamble, then go ahead and plant early. Keep plenty of blankets and tarps ready to protect your plants. Try sports betting for a thrill...

Music That People Dread

Recently a government minister in New Zeeland decided to play loops of music that included very loud repeating clips of Barry Manilow songs to protestors gathered outside of government buildings at the nation's capital. Police blasted a 15-minute loop of Manilow's upbeat pop songs, as well as the Macarena and other music, to try and disperse the protesters, according to BBC News.



Oh No! Not the Macarena!

This is not the first time that music has been used to disperse citizens. In 2019, officials in Florida's West Palm Beach blasted "Baby Shark" to keep homeless people from laying around the city's Lake Pavilion. Nearby Lake Worth once tried using classical music to drive homeless people away from the city's Cultural Plaza — but they ended up liking the songs.

After considerable Internet research, I provide a list of a few songs considered "The most annoying songs of all time". I am sure some will disagree or add their own annoying songs to the list. Just keep in mind it is not just playing a song once — it is the repeated playing of a potentially annoying song that drives people crazy-like being on hold- for instance — shopping in a grocery store — or being stuck on an elevator. Here are some notables:

Copacabana (1978) Barry Manilow - Barry Manilow was the music director for the Ed Sullivan show before he launched his solo career writing sappy songs on his piano.

What's New Pussycat (1965) Tom Jones – A remarkably campy song sung by a Welshman with a very powerful voice. He performed the song for the James Bond film "Thunderball". He also performed the song for the Peter

Sellers/Woody Allen comedy "What's New Pussycat? Burt Bacharach wrote the song and convinced a hesitant Jones to sing it.

Believe (1998) Cher – Repeats the chorus over and over again with a warbled voice effect that grates over time.

Who Let the Dogs Out (2000) Baha Men – Cute lyrics that become less cute when the song is played over and over again.

It's a Small World (1963) Sherman Brothers – *Having to listen to countless loops of this song at Disney World is a torture many have had to endure.*

Disco Duck (1978) Rick Dees – Gimmicks – I call them smoke and mirrors – help a duck take advantage of the disco "revolution.

We Built This City (1985) Starship – This song is a chorus repeated over and over...

Karma Chameleon (1983) Culture Club – I have mixed feelings about this one – but many listeners hate it, and it was played over and over again on the radio and MTV.

Friday (2011) Rebecca Black – Rebecca was a "average" teenager whose helicopter parents funded her music production and video ...that went nowhere...

Macarena (1995) Los Del Rio - Every wedding in the late nineties featured a dance along to this song....

I Love You (1992) Barney – I suffered though Barney's cheerful dopey voice and sappy songs when my daughter was growing up. Mr. Rogers was a rock star compared to the purple dinosaur.

My own personal most annoying song - Seasons in the Sun Terry Jacks - 1974



Singer, songwriter, guitarist, and record producer Terry Jacks was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. A member of the hippie generation, Jacks resisted his family's wishes to become an architect and decided to pursue a career in music instead. In the mid-60s Terry joined the Vancouver, British Columbia-based band The Chessmen as both a singer and guitarist. Jacks subsequently met singer Susan Jacks and formed a duo with her called The Poppy Family. Terry and Susan eventually married. The Poppy Family scored a big smash with the touching ballad "Which Way You Goin' Billy?"; the song was a #1 hit in Canada and peaked at #2 on the Billboard pop charts in America. Alas, Jacks and Susan broke up in 1973. In 1974 Terry scored himself a massive international success with the sad, sappy

song "Seasons in the Sun;" Terry was never able to either match or surpass the monumental success of "Seasons in the Sun," but did manage to eke out a nice career as a record producer (among the artists he's worked as a producer for are the Beach Boys, Nana Mouskouri, D.O.A., and Chilliwack). In 1986 Jacks produced, acted in, and composed the score for a flop made-for-TV adaptation of his signature hit song "Seasons in the Sun." A dedicated environmentalist, Terry Jacks is the founder of the organization Environmental Watch, which makes sure that major pulp and logging companies are properly adhering to Canadian pollution laws. Sad and sappy is an understatement – even key changes in the latter part of the song cannot make it any less bearable.

Gardening Tasks for Late March to Mid-April

Yes, I know you task-orientated Type A gardeners can't stand the thought of not getting started in the garden this year, eh? Here is some gardening fodder to fill up your to-do lists,

Till or loosen soil in the garden areas if the soil is not frozen or too wet. Too wet means you can squeeze water out of a fistful of soil. Not having a foot of snow on the ground also helps — There - there- I know you want to take a hair dryer to melt the snow. Add amendments — I prefer topping off existing beds with at least a one-to-two-inch layer of compost, composted manure, and or Canadian sphagnum peat moss. Worm castings will also work well. Mix the soil amendments with a tiller or shovel into the soil — making sure to break up any clumps.

One can direct seed spinach, lettuce, kale, or chard after soil prep. These cool-season vegetables prefer cool to cold weather. I prefer to "block seed" lettuce and spinach. This means I select an area, and then scatter the seed over the area instead of making rows. If I have lettuce or spinach in rows, I can do more damage thinning the rows to plants 6-8 inches apart than simply thinning out an area. Try it, you'll see.

It is fun to plant Swiss chard in rows along paths or on the outside of planting beds. It looks designer - baby. Late March/April is a great time in general to plant trees and shrubs and perennial flowers.



The Pentagon Bunny and the Chicken Complied from ARL

In what might be the world's fluffiest and most adorable infiltration of a secure military installation, a bunny was recently spotted hopping around in the 5.1-acre outdoor courtyard at the center of the headquarters of the U.S. Dept. of Defense. Given that it is outdoors and has plenty of trees and people eating meals, the

courtyard is naturally a hangout spot for birds, which can simply fly in. It's unclear how a bunny would have hopped into a place surrounded by five rings of some of the most secure office space on earth. The current hypothesis is that the bunny was carried into the courtyard by the hawks that were nesting in one of the trees and dropped before it was fed to the offspring." It sounds as if the bunny could still be in danger from the hawks, so perhaps it should install a missile defense system to protect itself. "From time to time there may be various species of animals on the reservation that make it to the Center Courtyard," said Sue Gough, Department of Defense spokesperson. "We normally do not intervene unless the animals create a hazard to building occupants, or the animal is at risk from our activities. This excludes the ferocious ankle biting Chihuahua who is a constant danger to others.

In a related incident, the Animal Welfare League of Arlington revealed that it had taken custody of a rogue chicken at the request of the Department of Defense, after it was found wandering around a secure area outside of the building. On Jan. 31 at approximately 6:40 a.m. EST, a chicken suddenly appeared on the southwest side of the Pentagon. "For security reasons, Department of Defense officials could not provide specific details of the location. Pentagon Police Officers notified the Animal Welfare League of Arlington, and they came and took custody of the chicken at approximately 7:20 a.m. **Ricky's thoughts:** Maybe the chicken was just trying to cross a road and became lost. The chicken went viral on social media, now has its own t-shirt line, and even earned a Jimmy Fallon-sung ballad on the Tonight Show.

Neglected Fruit Trees

For whatever reason, trees that bear fruit can become neglected over time. It might have seemed like a good idea ten years ago to plant an apple tree in the backyard, but your busy life got in the way of actually taking care of the tree. Or, you might be a young couple purchasing a first home, and the landscape contains several fruit trees that have never been maintained by the previous owners.

In some cases, the trees are too large and overgrown to "fix". The choice is to simply cut down the trees or try to prune the neglected trees so they are healthier and may bear some fruit.

One can surf the Internet for all sorts of info on how to prune fruit trees, but most will discuss how to prune such trees from the beginning – discussing modified central leader pruning, open candelabra concept for sweet cherries and peaches, but we are really beyond that now.

So, my method for realistic pruning of neglected fruit trees is not the most perfect method of pruning. If all you want is to harvest or can some fruit from backyard trees, then this will work. Here's the scoop: Realize it will take 2-3 years to get the trees into shape.

- 1. Never prune more than ½ of the existing wood on the tree in any one year. If you hack too much wood, then the tree will respond by producing even more new wood in response.
- 2. When you prune, take away growth that grows straight up, towards the interior of the tree, or crosses and shades another branch. It is better to make larger cuts of branches rather than a bunch of twiddly tiny cuts.
- 3. Pruning when the tree is dormant makes it easier to see the structure of the trees (sans leaves).
- 4. In general, try to prune so the tree has a triangle shape it's as good as we can do at this stage of the game- regardless of the species of the tree.

Over time, the tree will be healthier because more light and air will reach the interior of the tree, reducing disease issues and enhancing fruit number and quality. If this is good enough for you, then let's not worry of the tree has an open center, scaffold branches, and a perfect shape for perfect unblemished fruit. After one gets the tree in some semblance of shape, then it will only require minimal pruning yearly or every other year to keep them in line.

Final note: You may have visits over time from an "experienced" fruit aficionado – who will take you aside and attempt to explain how fruit trees are supposed to be pruned in a perfect world. Explain to them you have better things to do with your life than to worry about and maintain perfect fruit trees – and to simply go somewhere else.

The Vagaries of Spring Lawn Care

Discussing lawn care is not one of my favorite topics. First of all, there is intense judgment associated with the appearance of your lawn in a particular neighborhood. This judgement comes because we have been brainwashed by the idea that lawns have to be "perfect manicured emerald green carpets" like our British ancestors. The British elite who maintained



these lawns had a lot of money, gardeners, and sheep – who mowed for free. The United States Golf

Association, - along with the Scotts fertilizer company - also promoted the idea of easy - care perfect lawns beginning in the 1950's.

This is why most Americans spend considerable time and money to avoid the judgement of others if "your" lawn does not meet up to their standards. So, we over - fertilize – and apply copious herbicides and insecticides each year to maintain the lawn.

It doesn't have to be that way – especially if you have a smaller lawn.

I would challenge anyone with a smaller front/back lawn to try to have as little environmental impact as possible by using a top-dress of Canadian sphagnum peat moss or compost on the area. Rake the material lightly so you can still see the grass above the top dress. Spot treat weeds or just hand pull (dandelions and plantain are a good example). Mow with a reel-type or electric mower. Stop obsessing over trying to maintain a perfect lawn. An OK lawn is – well just fine.

I do want to stress that lawns do need some care and feeding, so a homeowners in the city or suburbs do need to provide some maintenance. If your lawn is unhealthy or untidy because you don't believe in providing any care – then you will be put on someone's short list for judgement and punishment - usually involving fines or letters from neighborhood association or code enforcement officials.

It is possible nowadays to be more realistic – even with larger lawns. Using slow-release fertilizers to avoid runoff is always a good idea, regardless of whether conventional or alternative fertilizer sources are used. Many lawn care companies will top dress and core aerate lawns – for a price. I would encourage lawn care companies to spot treat weeds rather than to blast the entire lawn with herbicides year after year. Maybe this is the year, with inflation, higher gas prices, and more limited resource, to rethink how we take care of our lawns.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: I am deeply distressed that you list Tom Jones's mega hit "What's New Pussycat" in your list of the "most annoying songs of all time".

If Tom Jones was a cat, he would rate far above "Garfield" according to members of my worldwide cat kingdom. I mean... just look at these lyrics:

What's new, pussycat? Woah, woah --What's new, pussycat? Woah, woah

Pussycat, pussycat, I've got flowers and lots of hours to spend with you So go and powder your cute little pussycat nose Pussycat, pussycat, I love you, yes, I do... You and your pussycat nose... Mozart himself could not top the incredible meaningful arrangement and lyrics......

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