

# Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

## and Home Horticulture

### February 2023 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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## All America Selections

Since 1932, expert judges have selected All-America Selections winners which have been tested for garden performance in trial gardens all across North America. Overall, these plants should perform well in a wide variety of soil and weather conditions. AAS winners that are still around in the trades are 'Wave' petunias, 'Ring of Fire' sunflowers, 'Magellan' zinnias, and 'Giant Marconi' sweet pepper – just to name a few. Some Garden Centers that specialize in flowers and vegetables will offer AAS varieties that are marked with a shield emblem with an AAS logo.

I always look forward to looking at what varieties have been selected and I will make a point to either order seed or look for them at area garden centers. Here's a look at some of this year's selections.



'Wildcat' Cayenne pepper is a moderately hot and sweet/spicy compact pepper for the garden. Judges report that it is a high-yielding plant with good flavor.

'San Joaquin' jalapeno is what is called a determinate pepper -meaning it puts out a bunch of fruit at the same time. The judges loved the flavor of this

moderately hot pepper. The pepper is perfect for canning, pickling, and making roasted stuffed jalapenos for a crowd.



'Zenzel' Tomato is a roma type plum tomato that does especially well in the mid-west. It is disease resistant, and resistant to blossom end rot. It is reported to be a good tomato for canning.



'Rubyfirm' watermelon produces about 3-5 melon-sized watermelons per vine. The cute little melons produce little-if-any seed and are very sweet.

Squash 'Sweet Jade' produces 1-2 pound single serving size squash in prolific quantity per plant. The fruit can be used as an edible small soup bowl. The sweet, dry fruit can also be baked, roasted, or pureed.



Coleus 'Premium Sun Coral Candy' is the first seed-propagated coleus AAS winner. 'Coral Candy' has unique multi-colored serrated leaves on a compact plant. Coleus are easy to grow in our area and can be used as bedding plants or in containers in sun or part-sun environments.

Coneflower 'Artesian Yellow Hombre' is the first F1 coneflower hybrid to come in a solid color. The plants were uniform and produced lots of flowers in the perennial plant.



Salvia 'Blue by You' is a perennial salvia that blooms earlier than other perennial salvias. Perennial salvias in general are well-adapted for our area and produce blooms for most of the summer in a variety of conditions. Pollinators love this plant.

Snapdragon 'DoubleShot Orange Bicolor' is a mid-sized snapdragon with stunning orange-red double flowers. Orange has become an increasingly popular color choice in gardens. This makes a great cutting flower for table decorations.



Search the Internet using the word All America Selections for more info.



## Hiring a Lawn Care Company

With labor shortages everywhere, finding and hiring a company to do lawn mowing and maintenance can be difficult. Many companies nowadays are very selective about taking on new customers because of these issues.

Many are quite expensive. Here are a few tips and

observations about this issue.

1. Make sure the company is licensed and bonded. If they are not, then there could be issues.

2. Decide what you need. Do you just need someone to mow the lawn? Or do you want the whole nine yards of fertilizer and weed control?
3. If you want the whole nine yards, then ask exactly what is offered and when. For instance, does the company call and notify you when a weed control or fertilizer application is scheduled?
4. Does the company have good customer service or is it difficult to talk with a real person?
5. Does the company avoid spraying toys and other items left in the yard? If spraying – does the employee have the proper clothing and protective equipment? If you see an employee spraying weed control in a tank top, shorts, and sandals – you need another company.

If it is just mowing you want, does the company have an absolute set schedule for showing up? It is better if the company agrees not to mow if it is too wet or in the middle of the summer if the lawn just hasn't grown much.

Ty to work with companies so they do not fertilize the lawn in mid-summer when it is very hot and the lawn is drought stressed.

There are a few companies that now offer organic or partially organic lawn care.

Some companies try to upsell other services and may point out potential issues with disease of trees or shrubs. I would always get second opinions when this occurs. Remember you are the customer and lawn care companies should work with you to provide a plan that meets your needs and budget – not the other way around.



## Arborvitae

Arborvitae is a popular choice for an evergreen shrub that is often used for screening or defining a border between neighboring properties. There are different types of arborvitae based on the region where they come from. In general arborvitae prefer moist soils, partial shade, and protection from winter winds in our area.

Native Americans used arborvitae in many ways. Ojibwa Indians are said to have made soup from the inner bark of the young twigs. The Potawatomi rolled up the bark into wads which served as torches.. The timbers were also used to make the ribs in the Indians' birch bark canoes .

The essential oil extracted from arborvitae is used in cleansers, disinfectants, hair preparations, insecticides, liniment, room sprays, and soft soaps. Powdered leaves are reported to kill flies in 2 hours, the vaporized leaf powder to kill ticks. Arborvitae wood contains a heat stable antibiotic useful as a food preservative. Arborvitae is also used for poles shakes, shingles, and siding.

Eastern White cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) is a evergreen shrub native to the eastern and southern portions of the United States. it is listed as endangered because it is now so rare to find it growing in the wild. Perhaps the most popular cultivar is 'Techny'. 'Techny' is fast growing, columnar with a broad base. It is also one of the hardest and toughest of the arborvitae, 'Rheingold' has gold leaves that turn copper in winter. 'Emerald Green' arborvitae is also popular. It has a finer texture and is narrower in form than 'Techny'.



Globe arborvitae is used as a foundation shrub that needs regular pruning or it can overgrow a landscape.. There are tons of other cultivars - some with gold foliage or distinct forms.

Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*) is native to the Pacific Northwest. It is not as cold hardy as *Thuja occidentalis*, and is a bit coarser in texture. 'Green Giant' is a newcomer on the scene. It has dark foliage and is reported to be more vigorous than other *plicata* cultivars. Western Red Cedar in general prefers cool, moist sunny to part sun conditions. 'Whipcord' is an unusual newcomer to the trades also. The dwarf form has stringy, pendulous branches which look like thin cords.

Oriental Red Cedar (*Thuja orientalis*) is the least hardy of all the *Thujas*. One could expect to see more cultivars appear on the scene with the recent plant hardiness zone changes.

Bagworms find arborvitae very tasty, so it is important to scout each year for their presence. Deer also find the foliage of arbor-vitae tasty. *Plicata* cultivars are more likely to winter burn, though both species can brown up in the spring because desiccating winds can suck the moisture from the needles. Arborvitae limbs can also break under heavy snow loads or ice. Keep them pruned so this is less likely to occur.

Arborvitae can struggle in wet soils, or when drought conditions occur in summer. They do not respond well to change. I have seen whole plantings go down when drainage patterns change – such as suddenly diverting water from the house to an arbor-vitae planting.

All-in all- arbor vitae can be useful shrubs to use in our area. Read the tag to make sure you are using the species that best fits your local conditions.

## Weird Plant Names

Sometimes plants have unusual names that were given based on their history, use, or folklore. Here are a few examples:



### Bouncing Betty (Soapwort)

The genus name, *Saponaria*, is from the Latin *saponis* meaning 'soap' and *aria*, meaning 'pertaining to', together referring to the juice of the leaves and root that can make a soap. The species name *officinalis* is also Latin and means 'of the shops', all referring to the historic use of the plant as a cleanser, particularly in fine fabric shops. The common name of “Bouncing Bet,” thought to come from the visual effect of the reflexed petals looking like the rear of a washerwoman, name of Betty, bent over.



## Syllabub

*Silybum marianum*, commonly called blessed thistle or milk thistle, is a rosette-forming biennial that is native to the Mediterranean region (southern Europe, western Asia and northern Africa). It has naturalized in parts of Europe, North America, South America, Australia and New Zealand. It is an invasive self-seeder in some

locations. In the first year, a showy rosette of deeply lobed, obovate, spiny green leaves (to 20" long) with distinctive white marbling appears. Leaves and stems exude a milky sap when cut, hence the common name of milk thistle. In the second year, a strong flower stalk rises from the foliage rosette to 3-5' tall bearing thistle-like, mildly scented, purple-pink flower heads (2" across) subtended by spiny bracts. Flowers are followed by seed as the plant completes its biennial (sometimes annual) life. An extract (silymarin) from the seeds of this plant has been used for many years in the treatment of a variety of medical problems including liver disorders, gall bladder disorders, high cholesterol and mushroom poisoning (especially from *Amanita phalloides* - death cap mushrooms).

Genus name comes from the Greek name *silybon* for some thistle-like plant.



Syllabub is also an English dessert traditionally made from a mix of white wine, cream and sugar, along with some sort of acidic juice. Syllabub is normally served cold, and it comes in varying consistencies depending on how much wine is used, what kind of cream is mixed in and the method of preparation. In some cases, syllabub has a consistency that requires people to eat it with a spoon like ice cream, but it can also be more of a drink. The flavor varies a great deal depending on the exact recipe and what kinds of additional spices or flavorings are used. Some syllabub is very sweet and sugary, while other recipes can have a milder level of sweetness. One can only assume the plant is named because the milky sap resembles the English dessert.



## Lionsbane/Lions tail

Lion's tail, is an evergreen shrub from the mint family (*Lamiaceae*). It is grown as an annual in our area. These plants are also commonly known as lion's ear or tail and wild dagga. Amusingly, the scientific name for this plant means lion-colored lion ear. Lion's tail plant is native to South Africa - where it grows in a variety of habitats.

Lion's Tail has a prolonged flowering period from as early as spring until fall in warmer areas but if grown as an annual in colder areas, expect this plant to flower in the fall after being started indoors in the spring. The seeds of this plant are held in unusual-looking seed heads which resemble paper wasp nests. This plant attracts hummingbirds and sunbirds, bees, butterflies, and other pollinators because of its sweet nectar. It is also deer resistant. In our area, one must direct plant with seed – and the plant will flower in mid-to late summer.



## Sneezeweed

Common sneezeweed is a perennial plant in the daisy or aster family (Asteraceae). Its abundant yellow blooms can be found in late summer to fall, often attracting bees and butterflies. Common sneezeweed can be found in much of the United States, in moist to wet openings, edges, shores, and thickets.

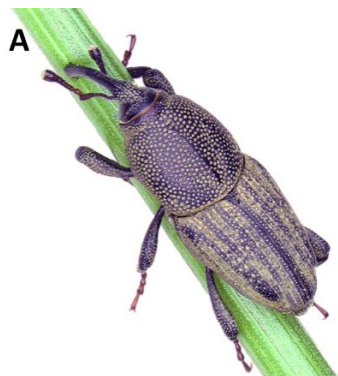
Common sneezeweed is also known as Helen's flower, bitterweed, autumn sneezeweed, and false sunflower. The genus name, *Helenium*, refers to the famous Helen of Troy. There is a legend that these flowers sprang from the ground where Helen's

tears fell. The species name, *autumnale*, refers to the season of the flower's blooming—autumn.

According to a 1923 publication by H. Smith of the Milwaukee Public Museum, the name given to the plant by the Menominee Indians of the Wisconsin area is "aiatci'a ni'tcîkûn," which means "sneezing spasmodically". With its large showy flowers, insects pollinate common sneezeweed, not wind. Therefore, it does not have small pollen grains, like ragweed does, which cause sneezing and other hay fever symptoms. This is not the reason for the Menominee and English names for the plant. The common name is based on historic use of the crushed dried leaves and heads to make a form of snuff that caused sneezing. In certain cultures and times, sneezing was regarded as a desirable way to rid the body of evil spirits or a way to loosen up a head cold, so that a sneeze-producing remedy was desirable. Having crushed dried sneezeweed heads to collect the seeds, the author can attest to the plant's sneeze-producing power! Common sneezeweed leaves, flowers, and seeds are poisonous to humans, if eaten in large quantities, causing gastric and intestinal irritation, which can become fatal. The plants also contain sesquiterpene lactones, which may cause a skin rash in some people. The chemicals in sneezeweed can poison livestock, particularly sheep.

## Mystery Lawn Damage

I have received several texts and emails from folks reporting sudden damage to lawns in mid-summer last year. Some folks even had a lawn service who could not figure out what the mystery problem is. My suggestion is to scout for billbug damage.



Billbugs are particularly troublesome lawn pests because both the adult insect and its immature larvae damage grass. Adult billbugs chew holes into grass blades and deposit eggs inside. When larvae hatch, they eat grass from the inside out and continue eating from the roots to the tips. By the time homeowners see the results, large areas of lawn may already be lost.

**Identification:** Billbugs get their name from the adult insect's long, curved, bill-like snout. A type of weevil, mature billbugs may grow up to 1/2 inch in length. Depending on the species, their hard shells range in color from clay-brown to near black; all have an unusual, pitted texture. Billbug larvae are white with

reddish-brown heads and look very similar to white grubs, another common lawn pest. However, billbug larvae do not have legs; white grubs do.





**Signs/Damage:** Billbug damage can be hard to diagnose. Grass begins to turn brown in early summer, but it's easily mistaken for drought damage, fungal disease or grass dormancy. Test your lawn by pulling on an affected area. Billbug-damaged grass breaks off at the soil line and is usually accompanied by lots of powdery sawdust-like excrement. Dig or pull apart grass to inspect the roots and crown, and the legless larvae are easily seen.

**Control:** Effective billbug treatment calls for a multi-pronged approach. Target adults in early spring before they lay their eggs and treat newly hatched larvae before they can damage lawns extensively. Late-season treatments target larvae and adults, which may overwinter in thatch and leaf debris. My suggestion is to hire a professional service who knows about billbugs to apply preventative treatments.



Larvae



*A tug-test can be used to examine the bottom-ends of Kentucky bluegrass tillers that pull easily from the sod and are filled with fine sawdust-like frass indicating billbug damage.*



## Instant Potato Shortage

Some material compiled **Boise State Public Radio**

News | By George Prentice

I use instant potatoes quite a bit as I really don't have time to peel and mash "real" potatoes. I dress up my pretend potatoes with sour cream, cheese, and sometimes pineapple to improve the flavor. Recently the stores have been out of my pretend

potatoes, and that makes me very sad. Maybe I can attend a support group – named Friends of Pretend – to find others to share my anguish.

Instant potatoes developed in their modern form in the 1950s and 1960s. First potatoes are peeled and then grated into small pieces. Next, they are boiled in water until they are soft enough to mash. After that, all the excess water is removed and the potatoes are put into a large mixer. Finally, additional ingredients like butter, cream, and salt are added to taste. Look for ones that are made with real butter and cream and avoid any that have extensive artificial flavors or preservatives.

Research began in Philadelphia in 1953 on dehydrating all types of potatoes, not just those grown in Idaho. This research was part of a long history of dehydrating potatoes that stretched back to the Incas, who squeezed the moisture out of potatoes.

It took until 1957 to bring the potato flakes to market, and by 1960, more than 4 million bushels of potatoes were converted into flakes. Instant mashed potatoes had found their market. Today, dehydrated potatoes constitute 17 percent of the potato market.



Idaho has a potato shortage. If you haven't heard about it already or noticed fewer and fewer potatoes in your grocery store's produce section. It's the weather from over a year ago that's to blame.

In June 2022, we had some just unbelievably hot temperatures here in Idaho. It did a number on our potato crop," said Jamey Higham, president and CEO of the Idaho Potato Commission. "And so, our yields were significantly down last year." Consumers are facing the shortage from last year's crop.

"There is not a gap. There are just less potatoes being shipped right now than there normally are this time of year because of the shorter supply that we started the season with," said Higham.

"As the fresh market goes, the grocery stores – your Albertsons, Walmart, WinCo, that stuff – it is not just Idaho that's having high prices right now. It's the other states as well." And as for the higher prices, Higham says they could remain higher for a while longer.

"As we get down to the end, there are very strong prices out there right now and potatoes are still supply-and-demand. And when the supply is lower, the prices go up and it will probably stay that way," said Higham. "I don't anticipate these prices staying high long term. And once 2023 harvest gets under way, it'll get back down into a better spot. "It's been a while since we've been this short and the prices of business strong. But it's one of those things. Mother Nature can be kind of nasty when she when she wants to be to farmers."



# An Emerging Trend – Organic Lawn Care Using Biologicals



A few lawn care companies are responding to consumer demands for organic lawn care by venturing into providing an alternative to conventional lawn care by concentrating on using biologicals to promote a healthy lawn that needs little if any conventional fertilizer or weed control. It's an interesting concept that is gaining popularity and interest from companies and consumers alike.

Biologicals are products that contain components from living or once living organisms. Biologicals offer many significant benefits to turf and soil health and can be applied to plants, flowers, vegetables, and trees. Some of these positive benefits include improved root growth, stress tolerance, increased microbial activity, improved nutrient availability and soil water holding capacity.

Listed below are the major categories of biologicals and their key benefits to turf and soil health.

## Beneficial Microbes

Organisms found in soil where food sources are plentiful. Beneficial microbes used in biologicals are:

**Bacteria, and Fungi (mycorrhizae).** Mycorrhizae are fungi that either grow on or into roots that help with phosphorous uptake.

Bacteria can fix nitrogen gas from the air into usable forms for plants, and convert urea into inorganic nitrogen for plant use, and share metabolites with plants.

Fungi (Mycorrhizae) can act as an extension of plant root systems, and defend plants against harmful bacteria.

## Plant Growth Regulators (PGRs)

Chemical substances that are used to regulate the growth of plants. PGR's regulate the rate of various plant processes including growth, homeostasis, reproduction, pathogen defense, and abiotic stress tolerance.

**Humic Substances** occur naturally in soils as a result of the breakdown of organic matter. Humic substances in biologicals are: Fulvic Acid, and Humic Acid.

Humic acids stimulate root growth, chelate and complex macro and micronutrients, increase the soil's Cation Exchange Capacity (C.E.C.), reduce soil compaction, retain moisture in soils, and enhance the soil quality for beneficial microbes.

**Kelp (Seaweed) Extracts** are marine-based species of plants and algae. Kelp helps plants adapt their physiology to abiotic stressors such as heat, cold, drought, and salt.

**Metabolites** - Microbial metabolites are a byproduct of beneficial soil bacteria (microbes), which are a natural, rich source of protein hydrolysates, organic acids, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and fulvic acids. There are two types of metabolites, primary and secondary. Both are highly beneficial to plant and soil health.

Metabolites assist the plants biochemistry including respiration, cell division, energy production and reproduction. They also help plants cope with many biotic and abiotic stresses, and Improve plants survivability by boosting disease resistance and discouraging herbivory (insect damage).

**Enzymes** accelerate metabolic and catabolic reactions associated with the plant's metabolism.

Humic acids and beneficial micro-organisms are used the most in combination with core aeration and top dressing with compost and peat moss in organic lawn care.

## Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic



**To my caregiver:** *If you love the fabric on your new couch and want your fabric to remain pristine, Don't EVER again try to feed me instant potatoes as a substitute for my premium cat food.*

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