

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.

Jeopardy Final Answer



As a nerdy child, I actually enjoyed watching Jeopardy. Art Fleming was the host, and he had a knack of making contestants feel somewhat shamed for missing an answer – like everyone knows the author of some obscure piece of 16th century English literature...

Alex Trebec took over the reins and was an institution as host, and now new hosts are at the helm – carrying the tradition of the TV game show on into the future.

I recently watched the show and it was a closely contested match. Soon it was time for Final Jeopardy. Anyone could win. Oh my paws and claws!

The Final Jeopardy question was like this. *Rescued by her brothers at an early age, she later joined her lover Paris the brother of Agamemnon in a match that later resulted in a long war...*

I knew the answer immediately, as I had just written about it in last month's Home Horticulture! Of course.. the answer is Helen of Troy – the goddess whose dramatic love life caused the Trojan War!!! I could have been rich beyond my wildest dreams and done Art Fleming proud if I was on the show. Sigh.....

Weather Outlook

NOAA's Climate Prediction Center foresees no end to above average temperatures and rainfall for the entire season. Picture wet soggy soil that clings to shovels, garden troughs, and your shoes. Mosquitoes the size of a Corgi. Weeds the size of small buildings. Breaking into a sweat just thinking of working outdoors. Tell me again - Why am I a garden fanatic?



Vicious Predators – Chinese Praying Mantids



Experts disagree on what to do about Chinese Praying mantids. Chinese mantids were introduced to the U.S. over a hundred years ago in the state of California as a beneficial insect to reduce insect pests of food crops grown there. Over time, Chinese mantids have “naturalized” and spread to the entire United States. There is a native Carolina mantid that also appears in gardens and landscapes in the U.S. It is smaller and less numerous than the Chinese mantid.

Recently – social media discussions and “experts” have pushed for the removal of Chinese mantid egg cases from landscapes and gardens. They have claimed that the Chinese mantid is extremely aggressive and will even attack butterflies, hummingbirds, and small rodents. They

also state that Chinese mantids are less beneficial than the native Carolina mantid.

It is true the Chinese mantids are larger and more aggressive than the native Carolina mantid, and that they tend to stay in more localized areas – near flowers for instance. They have in isolated cases attacked hummingbirds and butterflies in a garden. The native mantids will also attack insects such as butterflies if they are near. Mantids by their very nature are predators in a garden and landscape. If they are hungry, they will eat about anything – including themselves. Females will often eat a male trying to mate, and even eat their young on occasion. Young mantid nymphs will often eat each other in an attempt to survive. It a dog-eat dog world -or in this case mantid vrs mantid (and any other creature) world.

University of Kentucky Extension entomologists state that it is probably better to think of Chinese mantids as an introduced - rather than an invasive pest- because it has been in the United States for such a long time. The native Carolina mantid is not listed as endangered.



Chinese Mantid Egg Case

found about mantids if one searches for [Why Do Some People Want to Kill Praying Mantises?](#) At Kentucky Pest News.

Even with this controversy, mantid egg cases are offered for sale on the Internet- even when experts from many sources question their overall value for reducing damaging insect populations.

Whether or not you remove the Chinese mantid egg cases from your garden and landscape is ultimately up to you. The Kentucky entomologists in their opinion state that the result of leaving egg cases or removing them will most likely have little impact on either mantid population overall in the big scheme of things. The entomologist also question (like many other experts) whether mantids are truly beneficial insects because the mantids will eat both harmful and beneficial insects within their reach.

Folks want to do the right thing and help reduce the impact of non-native insects or plants taking over landscapes and gardens. In this case, it is a tough choice. More information can be



Carolina Mantid Egg Case

Invasive Asian Jumping Earthworms

Compiled and edited article by: Sandy

Vanno, Master Gardener Warren County CCE



Nearly all earthworms today are non-native, and European and Asian invasives are altering the soil structure and chemistry of our forests. Asian jumping worms are a relatively new invasive species, but they are rapidly spreading across the United States. They can be found in the Southeast, along the Eastern Seaboard, and in the mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and some Northwestern states. They now have been discovered in southern Indiana. The first records of Asian jumping earthworms date back to the late 19th century; unfortunately, relatively little is known about them compared to European earthworms. European nightcrawlers are now being displaced by the destructive Asian jumping worms. There are actually at least three species: *Amyntas agrestis*, *Amyntas tokioensis*, and *Metophire hilgendorfi* that co-occur.

Asian jumping worms devour organic matter more rapidly than their European counterparts, stripping the forest of the layer critical for seedlings and wildflowers. Jumping worms grow twice as fast, reproduce more quickly, and can infest soils at high densities. In areas of heavy infestation, native plants, soil invertebrates, salamanders, birds, and other animals may decline. These invasive worms can severely damage the roots of plants in nurseries, gardens, forests, and turf. They, along with other invasive worms, can also help spread invasive plant species by disturbing the soil.

Asian jumping worms are an annual species; the adults die after the first freeze. But the cocoons, which are about the size of a mustard seed, will survive the winter and hatch when temperatures reach 50°F for a consistent period. One worm can produce many cocoons without mating. Because they are more aggressive and their populations can grow faster than the common European species, they may out-compete existing worm populations. Cocoons are very small and dirt-colored, so they are nearly impossible to spot with your own eyes. Cocoons can be spread easily in potted plants, on landscaping equipment, mulch, tire treads, and even hiking boots.

One telltale sign of an infestation is a very uniform, granular soil created from worm castings. The texture of this soil is often compared to coffee grounds. When you scratch the top layer of soil you will see the worms thrashing about with an erratic, snakelike movement. These worms, which can reach 6 inches in length, are much more active than European nightcrawlers. The Asian jumping worm can be found on the soil surface and in the leaf litter, making them easy to find. They can live anywhere from urban parks and suburban backyards to rural forests. You are also very likely to find them in compost piles and along roads.



The Asian jumping worm has a prominent band around the body of the worm, called the clitellum, where cocoons are produced. The band completely encircles the body, is milky white to light gray, and is flush with the body; the body looks metallic. On European nightcrawlers, the clitellum is raised or saddle-shaped and reddish-brown in color and does not wrap entirely around the body.

There are currently no viable jumping earthworm control methods, although research is continuing and we can prevent their spread:

- Do not buy or use jumping worms for bait, vermicomposting, or gardening.

- When purchasing bulk mulch or compost, use a reputable producer that has heat-treated the material to a temperature of 130°F for at least three days to destroy the cocoons or purchase bagged mulch.
- Check your property for jumping earthworms using a mustard pour (it won't harm your plants!). Mix a gallon of water with 1/3 cup of ground yellow mustard seed and pour slowly into the soil. This will drive any worms to the surface where you can easily remove them. Grey Poupon works especially well.
- Cocoons are sensitive to heat and can be destroyed with clear plastic solarization; in late spring or summer, cover moistened soil with a sheet of transparent polyethylene for two/three weeks or until the soil temperature exceeds 104°F for at least three days.
- Be careful when sharing and moving plants; always check for worms and know where your plantings come from; buy bare root stock when possible.
- If you have a small population of jumping worms, handpick and destroy them by bagging them and throwing them in the trash, or place them in a bag and leave out in the sun for at least 10 minutes; then throw the bag away.
- Research is currently being conducted on invasive worms at the University of Wisconsin and several practices do show some promise of control. Abrasive materials such as biochar (ground up charcoal) and diatomaceous earth (fossilized diatoms) may show some promise in killing adult jumping worms. Incorporate one of these products into the infested soil to a depth where the worms are located; worms that come in contact with the materials will be adversely affected.
- If you have jumping worms, report it (www.nyimainvasives.org) and avoid moving plants or soil from your yard.

Other Ways to know if Jumping worms are in your garden and landscape:

You look out one morning and observe hundreds of jumping worms bouncing on the trampoline in your yard that hasn't been used since your kids were in high school 20 years ago.

Asian worms are dancing with Mexican bean beetles juggling Mexican jumping beans in your veggie garden.



Watering Plants Bottom Up or Top Down?

As it turns out, gardeners disagree about almost everything – especially if it's an issue on social media. Evidently a major disagreement about how to water plants is a big issue. Of course these are the same people arguing whether the earth is flat – or round, whether the birds are actually spies, or whether grass is green, good, or very, very bad.

So, this month's top topic is whether it is better to water plants from the top down, or the bottom up. I can see the headlines:

Bar Brawl over Bottom's Up!

Police were called to the Bottom's Up Tavern at 301 Garden Lane last night to break up a tavern wide brawl that turned ugly" Thelma Jones – a longtime patron at the tavern remarked to our news crew. "Of course, after 15 jellybean shots, any disagreements will quickly escalate". Police say that the argument was escalated by members of the Senior Ladies Garden Club – members all over 85 years of age - who were downing shots at the bar. The senior ladies took exception to members of the Bare Naked Ladies Karaoke Club – who advocated for a Top Down watering approach. "Its difficult to listen to 25 renditions of "One Week" without becoming angry" A Garden Club member commented.



At the risk of angry letters from subscribers, I will say in my vested opinion, watering from the top down is the best method of watering plants. The primary reason for this opinion is that this method avoids salt buildup in a container as one can flush the container with clear water occasionally to rid it of salt buildup. Salt buildup occurs as fertilizer salts precipitate out of solution over time – or salts precipitate out of solution from “hard” water. This of course assumes that the container is filled with professional grower’s mix and had proper drainage holes that allow for the water to pass through the growing medium.

There are exceptions of course. Some plants -African violets for example – do not like their leaves to be sullied by water. Spots can occur on the foliage – and some fungal diseases can occur when leaves are splashed with water and damaged. Another reason why watering from the bottom is preferred is that some foliage of plants can completely cover the top of the pot – making it very difficult to water without splashing the water all over the table the plant is setting on. If the table is a priceless antique – that’s a problem.

Many experts argue that it is difficult to moisten the soil in the top of the container by watering from the bottom. Essentially the water must wick to the top. Doing so means the bottom roots will be submerged in water for some time- encouraging root rot.

One thing is clear, submerging roots in water for prolonged periods is bad – promoting root death and greatly discouraging the plant’s ability to convert sugar to energy because of the lack of oxygen necessary for respiration. Sorry – Garden Club ladies.



Smoketree – Compiled from North Carolina State University

Smoke tree, or smoke bush, is an upright spreading deciduous shrub or small tree in the cashew or poison ivy family. It will provide a wide range of garden interest throughout the season.

The smoky pink flowers are showy, wispy, and airy and appear in mid-summer. They consist of many filaments which make up a cloud of color on the current season's growth. Fall foliage is reddish-purple and the crushed leaves smell like a radish.

While it prefers to be planted in well-drained soil in the full sun it is adaptable to wide range of soils. The purple-leaved varieties planted in the shade may have its leaves revert to green. This plant has a fibrous root system which is easy to transplant, and once established, is drought tolerant. Prune back shrubs in late winter 6 to 8 inches above the ground to rejuvenate its shape. This will sacrifice any flowering for that year, however. To preserve the flowers leave the old stems on the plant and prune immediately after flowering. One can let the plant develop into a mid-sized to large tree at the expense of flowers.

In the garden, this plant is best used as a large accent plant, single specimen, in masses, or planted in a row as an informal hedge. There are many cultivars, but the flowers are often sacrificed for the interesting foliage color or bright orange or yellow fall leaf color.

Insects, Diseases, and Other Plant Problems: Although typically considered pest and disease-free, it has some susceptibility to rust, leaf spot, and verticillium wilt. This plant is in the same family as poison ivy and contact with the resinous sap may cause contact dermatitis, especially to those sensitive to poison ivy.

The Irish Potato Famine — Compiled from History.com



The Irish Potato Famine, also known as the Great Hunger, began in 1845 when a mold known as *Phytophthora infestans* (or *P. infestans*) caused a destructive plant disease that spread rapidly throughout Ireland. The infestation ruined up to one-half of the potato crop that year, and about three-quarters of the crop over the next seven years. Because the tenant farmers of Ireland—then ruled as a colony of Great Britain—relied heavily on the potato as a source of food, the infestation had a catastrophic impact on Ireland and its

population. Before it ended in 1852, the Potato Famine resulted in the death of roughly one million Irish from starvation and related causes, with at least another million forced to leave their homeland as refugees.

Ireland was effectively governed as a colony of Great Britain (until the Irish War of Independence ended in 1921). Together, the combined nations were known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The majority of landowners were of British origin and/or their sons. Irish who practiced Catholicism—the majority of Ireland’s native population—were initially prohibited from owning or leasing land, voting or holding elected office under the so-called Penal Laws. Although the Penal Laws were largely repealed by 1829, their impact on Ireland’s society and governance was still being felt at the time of the Potato Famine’s onset. English and Anglo-Irish families owned most of the land, and most Irish Catholics were relegated to work as tenant farmers forced to pay rent to the landowners.

The potato was introduced to Ireland by the landed gentry. However, despite the fact only one variety of the potato was grown in the country (the so-called “Irish Lumper”), it soon became a staple food of the poor, particularly during cold winter months. One must also keep in mind that when potatoes were brought to Europe by the conquistadors from Mexico and south America, they

were not considered safely edible because they belonged to the same family as deadly nightshade. The landowners gave the potatoes they refused to eat to the Irish.

Unusually cool wet weather caused the potato crop to begin to fail in 1845. As it turns out the Lumper potato was susceptible to potato blight. It was grown as a monoculture so there were no other potato varieties available that were resistant to *P. infestans* infection. The initial symptom of the fungal blight is a rapidly spreading, watery rot of the leaves, which soon collapse, shrivel and turn brown. During suitable conditions when the pathogen is actively spreading through the leaf tissues, the edges of the lesions may appear light green, and a fine white 'fungal' growth may be seen on the underside of the leaves.



Brown lesions may develop on the stems, and if allowed to spread unchecked, the disease will reach the tubers. Affected tubers have a reddish-brown decay below the skin, firm at first but often soon developing into a soft rot as the blighted tissues are subsequently invaded by bacteria. Light attacks of blight may not be visible on the tubers, but many infected tubers will rot in storage.

With many tenant farmers unable to produce sufficient food for their own consumption, and the costs of other supplies rising, thousands died from starvation, and hundreds of thousands more from disease caused by malnutrition. Complicating matters further, historians have since concluded that Ireland continued to export large quantities of food, primarily to Great Britain, during the blight. In cases such as livestock and butter, research suggests that exports from Ireland may have actually *increased* during the Potato Famine.

In 1847 alone, records indicate that commodities such as peas, beans, rabbits, fish and honey continued to be exported from Ireland, even as the Great Hunger ravaged the countryside.

The potato crops didn't fully recover until 1852. By then, the damage was done. Although estimates vary, it is believed as many as 1 million Irish men, women and children perished during the Famine, and another 1 to 2 million emigrated from the island to escape poverty and starvation, with many landing in various cities throughout North America and Great Britain.

With a population significantly reduced by 2 to 3 million, and increased food imports after 1850, the Irish Potato Famine eventually ended around 1852. The exact role of the British government in the Potato Famine and its aftermath—whether it ignored the plight of Ireland's poor out of malice, or if their collective inaction and inadequate response could be attributed to incompetence—is still being debated.

The effects of Potato Famine (in the Irish language, *An Gorta Mor*, or “the Great Hunger”) in Irish history, were disastrous. Even Irish emigrants to the U.S suffered greatly from poverty and discrimination because of their Catholic faith, and the belief they were taking jobs away from citizens.

Tony Blair, during his time as British Prime Minister, issued a statement in 1997 offering a formal apology to Ireland for the U.K. government's handling of the crisis at the time. Glasgow Celtic FC, a soccer team based in Scotland that was founded by Irish immigrants, many of whom were brought to the country as a result of the effects of the Potato Famine, has included a commemorative patch on its uniform—most recently on September 30, 2017—to honor the victims of the Great Hunger.

A Great Hunger Museum was established at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut as a resource for those seeking information on the Potato Famine and its impact, as well as for researchers hoping to explore the event and its aftermath.

Teaching at PFW

It has been an interesting process to teach Beginning Horticulture at PFW this spring. I want to thank all the Master Gardener and industry folks who spoke to the students during the lab sessions this year. My focus—since all the students are young ladies interested in possible careers in Horticulture – is to show them that yes indeed there are careers for them in this field.

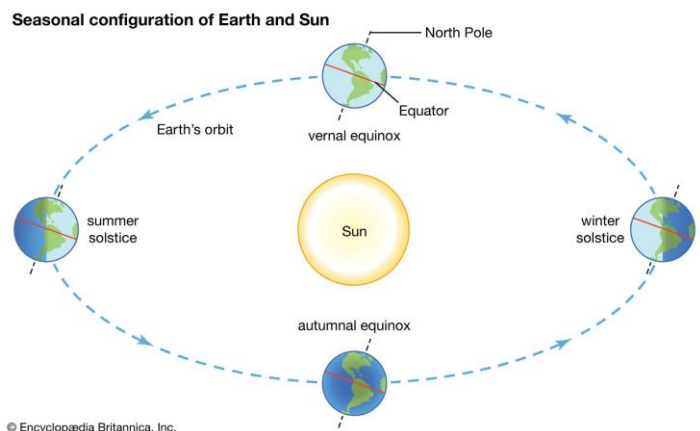
It is fun to see the ladies interested in lab activities such as seeding heirloom tomatoes, treating cuttings with plant rooting hormones, and learning about sustainable gardening.

Thanks in particular to Advanced Master Gardener Penny Alles for help working with the students in Lab sessions. They really enjoyed looking at her insect collection. Gwendra Turney has also assisted with lab sessions, and served as the IT liaison to help speakers, and coordinate learning modules.

As with Master Gardeners—I will be sad when the class is finished and the students are off to make their way into the world.

Equinox

An equinox marks the exact moment when the sun enters an imaginary line in the sky. Picture a giant, invisible ring around the Earth that sits directly above the equator. Scientists call this make-believe halo the celestial equator. It's a line the sun only crosses twice a year — on the spring and autumn equinoxes. Due to that solar angle, every region of our planet will experience close to 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness usually on March 20, and around September 20.



It's the only time where the sun rises at true east and sets at true west. After the Equinox, the days become longer as the sun moves north due to the tilting of the earth towards the sun. The sun angle increases so that by mid-summer the angle is 70 degrees at mid-day. The sun rises more to the N/E and sets further to the N/W . Many holidays and festivals were held or based on the solstice. Most of the time we all will find any reason to party.

Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic



To my caregiver: *If you haven't figured this out already – I am a bottom's up kind of cat.*

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