

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.

What's Blooming

It has been a strange year for flowering trees and shrubs. The cold and wet spring was not an attractive venue to showcase those flowering plants. In addition, the cold weather stretched out the season so that flowering trees and shrubs often had to go it alone so that we did not see a continual display of flowering this past spring. Some flowering is still delayed. Day lilies for instance have yet to flower consistently so we will see these plants flower in late June and July rather than the May/June normal flowering season. The rose-of Sharon in my garden has yet to flower. It's a messed up year.

We are at the point when flowering trees and shrubs are on the decline. There are a few trees flowering despite the drought conditions that we are now experiencing.



Japanese tree lilacs are blooming now throughout the city of Fort Wayne. This unusual tree has been planted more extensively as a street tree. It has a moderate growth rate, an upright growing habit, and a rounded shape. It is a mid-size tree belonging to the olive family and grown for the panicles of white flowers that are 6 to 12 inches long, which it bears for about two weeks in early summer. This tree seems to perform well in tougher situations, though it has in the past been susceptible to borers. It is a choice for folks looking for a smaller tree that flowers in early summer.

Cultivars include:

- **'Summer Snow'**: A smaller tree (20 feet high), this plant is even more tolerant of pollution than the species plant, making it an excellent street tree.
- **'Chantilly Lace'**: This is one of a few choices available with variegated foliage. In this case, the leaves bear creamy yellow margins. It grows to 20 to 30 feet high and 15 to 25 feet wide. Partial sun is better for this type.
- **'Ivory Silk'**: This is the most popular cultivar. At a maximum height of 25 feet, it stays a little shorter than the species plant. It begins blooming at an early age, and it bears many panicles.
- **'Signature'**: Gardeners truly interested in a continual sequence of blooms love 'Signature' because its panicles, although smaller than those on 'Ivory Silk,' come out a week or two later. Grow both to extend the bloom period.
- **'Ivory Pillar'**: This Japanese tree lilac sports a columnar form (25 feet high and 15 feet wide).

Catalpa



Catalpa is an ornamental shade tree that produces dense clusters of white flowers and long seed pods. They can grow upwards of 70 feet in height, although they more typically grow to be around 50 feet.

Northern catalpa is the species that grows in our area. It is native from southern Illinois and Indiana down to western Tennessee and northern Arkansas. Today, this more widely adaptable species has naturalized throughout the eastern United States, as far north as Maine and North Dakota, west to Kansas, and south to Catalpas are impressive trees. They develop a beautiful, symmetrical and rounded habit when they are given plenty of space to grow their best. These large trees make especially attractive shade trees in open areas where there is plenty of room for them to grow. In early summer, large panicles of foxglove-like speckled blooms appear.

Catalpas will be covered up with gorgeous speckled bell-shaped blossoms. These flowers are a magnet to bees, butterflies and even hummingbirds, making native catalpa an excellent addition to pollinator gardens.

Catalpas are easy-going trees that will thrive in full sun to part shade and just about any soil conditions. Although they grow very well when planted from nursery-grown containers, those can be hard to find in many areas. This is because many folks don't like the long seed pods the tree produces after flowering. Catalpa worms can also appear on the tree. These caterpillars become the catalpa sphinx moth. The worms can defoliate catalpa trees, though they're also valued as fish bait. Predators of catalpa worms include braconid wasps, which are known beneficial insects throughout the home garden. Promote braconid wasps by growing an abundance of flowers and herbs nearby catalpas, including herbs in the carrot family like dill, fennel, and cilantro,

Some cultivars include:

- *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea' – bronze new growth matures to bright yellow that eventually fades to light green; all three colors are visible at the same time on actively growing branches
- *Catalpa speciosa* 'Pulverulenta' – green leaves with cream-yellow speckles; slower growing and slightly smaller than the species, usually growing to around 25 feet in height and width
- *Catalpa x erubescens* 'Purpurea' – hybrid between *C. bignonioides* and *C. ovata*; obsidian new growth matures to a deep green; white, speckled blooms held on large 12" x 8" flower stalks; grows up to 50 feet in height and width; this hybrid is hardy in zones 5 to 8, with some reports of success south to zone 10



Birdsfoot Trefoil

Birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) was introduced to the United States for livestock forage and erosion control. It grows well in the Midwest and is most problematic in prairies and disturbed open areas, such as roadsides, where it forms dense mats that shade and chokes out native vegetation.

Birdsfoot trefoil is native to Europe and was introduced to the U.S. and Canada for livestock forage and erosion control along roadsides. It is still sold commercially. It spreads by seeds that are transported by animals, water, and machines (e.g., mowers). Prescribed fires can increase seed germination, making it troublesome in native prairies. Birdsfoot trefoil forms dense mats that shade and chokes out native vegetation. It can degrade the prairie habitat. It is considered an invasive species in many states, especially Wisconsin and Minnesota.

In our area, Birdsfoot trefoil appears in scattered plantings – primarily along right-of ways along highways.

Poison Hemlock



Poison Hemlock is a biennial which means it has a 2 year life cycle. It germinates from seed in the spring of the first year. It grows all that 1st summer as a small plant. Then it goes through that first winter and re-emerges as a rosette in March. It grows all spring and bolts this time of year (June), flowers, sets seed and then dies. In our area, it is flowering profusely along highways.

Poison hemlock plants contain highly toxic piperidine alkaloid compounds, including coniine and gamma-coniceine, which cause respiratory failure and death in mammals. The roots are more toxic than the leaves and stems; however, all parts of the plant including the seeds should be considered dangerous. Gardeners and

professionals may be tempted to spray it with a herbicide or cut it down with a Weed Eater, mower, or brush hog.

The problem with spraying it now, according to Ohio State University experts, is the plant has already flowered and will set seed before the herbicide can kill the plant. And that seed will be viable and germinate over the coming several years.

Mowing or weed eating will potentially release the sap into the air as an aerosol which can be inhaled causing potentially serious health risk. The best thing to do is to note where it is, map it out on paper and plan on spraying it with a herbicide next spring when it germinates as a first-year plant or in its second year as a rosette. For now it is best to leave it alone. If you can't leave it alone, then spray but mark its location to spray again early next year.



A Good Year for Peonies



Peonies were gorgeous in landscapes this year. This old-fashioned perennial can really make a statement when the weather cooperates. The lack of rainfall kept peonies from flopping over, and reduced disease pressure that can reduce flowering. I love peonies planted along sidewalks and pathways. They really fit well with the architecture of old houses that are so prevalent in Fort Wayne.

Herbaceous peonies (*Paeonia lactiflora*) are the most common in gardens, with hundreds of varieties to choose from. These varieties usually have wonderful scented flowers in shades of pink, red, and white. As the name suggests, herbaceous peonies don't form woody stems. Instead, the stems stay green and flexible, so they may need staking to keep them from flopping over, especially when the flowers get wet in the rain. These peonies produce new growth from the plant's crown in spring,

which all dies back to the ground after a frost, similar to most other perennial plants. They grow between 2-3 feet tall.

Tree peonies grow woody stems from a trunk-like base. They are more expensive and grow slower but can eventually reach up to 5 feet tall. Tree peonies also don't need any staking. Only light pruning is recommended.

The Itoh peony is a hybrid of herbaceous and tree peonies. These types of peonies offer more unusual colors, such as orange and yellow. Some popular varieties include 'Bartzella' and 'Cora Louise'. They grow to a middle height between the garden and tree types, usually about 3 feet tall.

Dr. Toichi Itoh, a Japanese botanist, toiling in the aftermath of the horrors of World War II, was the first person to successfully combine the pollen from a tree peony with the ovary of an herbaceous peony.

It would take over a decade of patient oversight before those seedlings grew to full size and produced flowers. Then in 1956, eight years after his successful crosses, sadly Dr. Itoh passed away.

So it fell to his family to nurture those special plants. Eventually an American botanist, Louis Smirnow, got permission from Dr. Itoh's widow to bring some plants to the USA where he patented four hybrid peonies—which he named Itoh hybrids—featuring huge buttery yellow flowers.



Approximately 25 years ago, several Master Gardeners and myself visited a nursery in southern Michigan where Itoh hybrids were being grown and developed. We listened to the story of Dr. Itoh and were amazed at the plants grown in the nursery. It also was the first time I saw a mature specimen of Dawn Redwood, a very unusual tree located on the property.

The best time to plant peonies is in late fall. Peonies are sold mostly as bare-root tubers that must be planted at the right depth

for the peonies to flower properly. If you need to move a peony, this is also the time to do it. If you have to plant in the spring, check that the ground is workable and that there's no risk of frost. Know that spring-planted peonies will usually lag a year behind fall-planted peonies.

A sure way for a plant to lack blooms is to plant it too deeply: Peonies shouldn't be placed more than 2 inches below the soil level. Otherwise, they'll still send out shoots but won't flower. Plant your peony where it receives at least six hours of direct sunlight daily and in well-drained soil. Make sure the spot you choose will allow the plant to have undisturbed roots. Give it shelter from the wind, but don't plant it too close to other trees or shrubs, or the plants will compete for resources.

To feed your peonies, use compost, bone meal, or well-rotted manure in early summer as a soil amendment. You can also use a conventional fertilizer higher in (P) and potassium (K). Avoid nitrogen-heavy (N) fertilizers. These will give you good foliage growth but discourage strong blooms.

You may see lots of ants on peonies. Don't fret; they won't harm your plant! They are not necessary for pollination of peony flowers. Just ignore them, and they'll eventually leave to feed elsewhere. Here are a few diseases to watch out for:

- **Botrytis blight:** This happens in damp seasons when leaves get too wet and develop dark gray mold.
- **Powdery mildew:** It's unattractive more than it is harmful to your plant.
- **Peony blotch:** Also known as red spot or measles for the color of the lesions. It won't kill your plant, but it does disfigure it.
- **Peony wilt:** A fungal infection in the soil that leads to the destruction of the leaves and stems. Unfortunately, it usually results in plant death.

After your peonies have put on their show for the year, a little TLC will ensure that they come back even stronger next year. Deadheading flowers helps the plant save energy for next year's blooms and prevents fungal diseases. Remove the spent blooms, and don't cut away any foliage (the plant will need those leaves to help build up flowers for next year).



For herbaceous peonies, you can cut the whole plant to the ground after the first fall frost. In the spring, new growth will appear from the roots. Prune tree peonies in late spring. Remove any damaged wood. Make your cuts at an angle, right above outward-facing buds.

One rare and unusual peony is fern leaf peony. Flowers are produced on thread leaf foliage. Folks visiting the cottage garden at the Extension office raved about this plant until it was stolen from the gardens many years ago. Folks that steal from a public garden supported by volunteers should be publicly humiliated and then taken to Greenland and dropped off in mid-winter.

The Perils of a Chain-Link Fence



People love to fence in their yards for privacy or just to delineate their territory so no one else can venture on it. Sometimes folks with large loud animals like to keep them penned in with a fence. So folks spend lots of money on fences.

The issue with fences is that they need care. They also provide a wonderful place for birds to perch and do their business – resulting in weeds of all types appearing at the bottom of the fence. Mr. Weedwhacker is then necessary to keep the fence line free of interlopers. I love birds but sometimes one wishes for a laser based system that stuns the birds – causing them to drop to the ground before they defecate seeds upon my landscape. I am sure that would break some sort

of rule protecting our fathered friends. Maybe I can mix a fiber-based product in with the bird seed that will bind them up so they will never poop again - There's the ticket.

In my opinion, a chain link fence is an open invitation for any weed to become established in a landscape. Birds will deposit the seed of all types of weeds, but wild honeysuckle, poison ivy, wild grape, hackberry, and the worst offender – mulberry – will quickly become established in the blink of an eye. Your fence line will be the talk- not in a good way- of the neighborhood. The birds will laugh as they poop more weeds along your fence line. Creatures such as groundhogs, rabbits, squirrels, skunks, and racoons will make your fence line their home.

Overgrown areas will require a tremendous amount of clearing – usually with a chainsaw. Using a chainsaw near a chain-link fence can be a dangerous endeavor if the blades come in contact with the metal fence. Even then, in my opinion, herbicides will absolutely be necessary to complete the job. One will need to apply glyphosate (Round-Up) concentrate to the cut stems of all the weeds using a paintbrush. Several applications may be necessary to kill them completely. Have fun burning all the brush generated by the pruning. Tell your neighbors you are a druid- and the fires are necessary to complete your dark ceremonies. Play Black Sabbath records at full blast. Wear capes and cowls when you burn – and don't be surprised when the neighbors shun you at association meetings. It's all part of the process.

Bagworm Season Is Beginning

Extension Experts from Ohio State are reporting bagworm emerging in southern Ohio as we speak. This means it won't be long before they begin to appear in our area. Bagworms are moth larvae (caterpillars) that develop within silk bags festooned with pieces of their host plants. They never leave their bags throughout the 7 stages (instars) of their larval development. The caterpillars attach their bags to their plant hosts with a small strand of silk and extend their bodies a short distance out of the bag to feed.



Early Instar Bagworm
Caterpillar Feeding



Joe Boggs, OSU Extension©

It is a common misconception that bagworms only eat evergreens. However, the caterpillars may be found feeding on over 125 species of evergreen and deciduous woody plants in 45 plant families.

As the bagworm caterpillars mature, they begin weaving more and more host plant debris into the silk which provides structural stability as well as camouflage. This behavior makes bagworms one of the sneakiest general defoliators found in landscapes. Heavy infestations are commonly overlooked until the caterpillars have

produced substantial feeding injury.

The overwintered eggs hatch within the female bags from last season. A percentage of the 1st instar caterpillars will crawl from the old bags and produce a strand of silk to catch the wind and "balloon" the tiny caterpillars to new locations. This behavior is one of the reasons bagworms often appear on hosts that were not infested last season.

Bagworm "Ballooning" Silk



Joe Boggs, OSU Extension©

Although bagworm caterpillars may waft in on the wind to establish new bagworm beachheads, looking closely at trees and shrubs with last season's bags is a good way to detect this season's crop of bagworms. A single female can produce 500 - 1000 eggs meaning that populations can climb rapidly. Just a few "founding" females from last season can spawn damaging numbers of caterpillars this season. Eggs on the south side of an infested plant usually hatch earlier than those that are shaded on the north side.

Early instar bagworms are highly susceptible to the naturally occurring biological insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk) (e.g., Dipel, Thuricide, etc.). Caterpillars are much less susceptible once bags surpass 2 - 3" in length. It's appealing to use Btk products because they do not kill bio-allies such as predators and parasitoids that help provide natural control of bagworm populations. Two or more applications may be required to cover the extended egg hatch. Of course, once bags exceed 2 - 3" in length, standard insecticides will need to be used to suppress heavy infestations.

It's well documented that a wide range of enemies of insect pests such as bagworms are fueled by nectar. They are pollinators as well as predators or parasitoids. Thus, an effective long-term insecticide-free bagworm pest management strategy is to simply plant flowering plants in your landscape that provide nectar.

Music and Plants

I recently had a discussion with a person who told me that acid rock and / or rap music would have no effect on plants because "they are works of art" – I disagreed.

One of the earliest studies on the effects of music on plant growth was conducted in 1962 by Dr. T. C. Singh, Head of Botany at Annamalia University. He exposed balsam plants to classical music and found that their growth rate increased by 20% compared to a control group, along with a 72% increase in biomass. He then

exposed crops to raga music over loudspeakers and found they yielded 25% – 60% more than the national average.

The researchers at Annamalia University then experimented with flute, violin, harmonium, and reena music, and even saw positive results exposing plants to the vibrations from traditional Indian dance. They ultimately concluded that the violin was the most effective instrument to enhance plant growth..

These results were replicated by Canadian engineer Eugene Canby. He exposed his wheat fields to J.S. Bach's violin sonata and experienced a 66% increase in yield.

Researcher Dorothy Retallack of Colorado's Women's College wrote about her research on plants and music in her book: *The Sound of Music and Plants*. She conducted experiments where she exposed plants to an extended F note and found that they were much healthier than the control group where no music was played.

She then experimented with different types of music, including classical, jazz, and rock. Plants exposed to the more soothing classical and jazz music grew towards the speaker and even entwined themselves around it. Plants exposed to "discordant" rock music, on the other hand, grew away from the speakers and showed signs similar to overwatering.

According to Reda Hassanien of China Agricultural University in Beijing, sound waves significantly increased the yield of sweet pepper, cucumber, tomato, spinach, cotton, rice, and wheat. Additionally, pests such as spider mites, aphids, gray mold, late blight, and virus diseases of tomatoes decreased in greenhouse conditions with sound treatment.

In 2004, the popular TV show *MythBusters* grew plants in seven greenhouses with different conditions: one had no music, one played classical music, one played death metal, two played recordings of negative speech and one played positive speech. In this experiment, it was the death metal plant that grew better than the rest! Classical music was second, followed by the greenhouses playing speech, both negative and positive, exhibiting similar growth. The plant exposed to no sound was dead last.

The "jury is still" out when it comes to hard and fast evidence that music positively impacts plants — or, in some cases, has a negative impact. As a consequence, a majority of commercial growers do not incorporate music into their cultivation regiments. On the other hand, an increasing number of vineyards worldwide are exposing their vines to music on a consistent basis and believe it helps.

Thatch Roofs



I love the Brits and their television shows. I watch T.V. late into the night, and enjoy British detective dramas, and shows like *You Deserve this House*, *Filthy Garden SOS*, and *Escape to the County* – where retiring Brits with a half a million pounds or so just laying around search for luvly houses out in remote areas of Great Briton and Wales.

The Brits have interesting words for things. For instance, most houses have "reception rooms", which are living rooms in American. They sometimes will have two or three reception rooms where we Americans usually have just have one. A really small reception room is called a "snug" – a really cute term.

If you are fortunate, a British family might have a “conservatory” which is American for sun room. Many estates have a “garden” – which is really a turf lawn surrounded sometimes by flowers. To have a large lawn is really a big deal with Brits – who mostly have very small areas of lawn in their “garden”

Land and houses are really at a premium in Great Britain because they do not allow extensive development into suburbs the way we do in America. They value their countryside, so many houses built in the country are not new builds, but converted barns, small churches and other structures. Many estates offer glamping and bed and breakfast options for extra income. Vacationers can become absolutely “gob smacked” by renting “caravans” (trailer homes) near beaches.

Older traditional homes out in the country have thatched roofs – which can be a plus or minus for potential homeowners. When the Bronze Age inhabitants of England wanted to put roofs on their houses, they gathered up the materials at hand—long-stemmed plants such as wheat or straw. They’d bundle the plants together and pile them atop one another to create a thick roof that sloughed off rain and kept the house cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

Most thatched-roof houses in the British Isles are remnants of that earlier time, dating to the 19th century or even as far back as the 1500’s. But as 21st-century buyers build second homes in the countryside, they often choose to have the older, rustic thatched roofs. The craftsmen who make and maintain these roofs are called master thatchers. Their work looks deceptively simple. While one would think that it requires nothing more than piling up bundles of plants, in fact the variations of roof styles, their curves, windows and ridgelines demand a skill that takes a five-year apprenticeship to gain qualification. It’s also expensive and time-consuming, and that has changed who owns England’s most traditional houses. “Thatch used to be a poor man’s roof, now it’s a rich man’s roof,” says Bev Fowler, master thatcher and co-owner of B&S Fowler Master Thatchers, Ltd., in Oxon, Oxfordshire. “Our clients used to be old ladies who had lived in the houses all their lives. Now it’s young people with money.”

But while rethatching a roof runs into the thousands of pounds and has to be done every 20 to 25 years, homeowners are rewarded with an attractive roof that is remarkably resistant to the elements. The plants’ natural water resistance makes rain simply run off the roof. A wire mesh is placed over the whole roof to keep out birds and vermin.

Because of England’s prevailing dampness, moss will regularly grow on thatch, but it is not usually harmful. Mold can be a problem, and often needs to be stripped off, taking some of the thatch and the roof’s lifespan with it. Strangely enough, modern Europe’s cleaner air may be responsible for a recent rise in mold on thatch. With the reduction of sulfites as coal plants close or burn more cleanly, mold can once again thrive.

The most important part of the roof, and one of the trickiest to do right, is the ridge at the top. While on the main part of the roof the bundles of thatch are laid all in the same direction in orderly rows, here they are placed in opposite directions and folded over the ridgeline of the roof.

Creating or repairing thatch is slow and repetitive. Fowler takes a small bundle of straw, taps it down so that butts are even, lays it down, and gets all straw running in the same direction so it is all smooth and level. Then he takes a stick of split hazel sharpened at both ends, twists it to make a pair of tongs, and pushes it in around the bundle. This simple device, called a spar, fastens the bundle to the surface, the hazel’s natural springiness holding it in. The new thatch is 10 to 14 inches thick, and the tools Fowler uses would be instantly recognizable to the thatchers who originally covered the house. He uses a mallet, shears and a leggett—a rectangular, ridged plate on the end of a handle used to tap the ends of bundles flush. The leggett is now steel instead of wood, but the shape is the same.

They'll get a lot of wear. The half roof Fowler is working on will take about 480 bundles of straw, weighing approximately three tons, and it is not cheap. One bundle costs £7, while the spars cost 15 pence each. Thus the cost of the materials alone comes out to nearly £3,500. Because of the expense, Fowler and his brother Steve, also a master thatcher, own 28 acres that they plant with triticale wheat, providing enough straw for eight months of work. The straw has to be harvested with an antique harvester to preserve the stems because modern harvesters destroy them. It's a craft that hasn't really changed much in centuries," he says. "If you took a thatcher from 150 years ago and plopped him on a roof today with a modern thatcher, he would know what was going on."

Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic



To my caregiver: *I have conducted my own research and found my overall growth and development have been hampered by your boring folk style music you play occasionally. Please play the soundtrack of the classic movie "Cats" at very loud volumes for my future development and happiness.*

To subscribe to this electronic newsletter, ask questions, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com - or text 260-431-6893. I will not share information with others. Ricky Kemery will not knowingly discriminate in any way based on race, gender etc.

Neighborhood Code – Summer Weed Program



There is nothing more annoying than to receive a code violation for tall vegetation on a property. The Weed Program was developed to protect the public safety, health and welfare and enhance the environment of the City of Fort Wayne by eliminating tall grass, high weeds and other noxious vegetation (including poison ivy). Per the City's Ordinance (Chapter 100: Nuisances), a violation exists when the grass exceeds nine (9) inches or there is other poisonous vegetation on the property.

Neighborhood Code Compliance's Weed Program is both proactive and reactive in its enforcement. Complaints come through the 311 Call Center, and the Weed Inspectors are responsible for canvassing their specific territory. Once a yard is deemed to be in violation, a placard is placed in the yard, and a letter to abate is sent to the owner of record. Property owners then have five (5) days to correct the violation. If grass, weeds, or noxious vegetation are not removed within that timeframe, the City's mowing contractors will cut the lawn and/or remove the noxious vegetation, and subsequently, the owner will be charged for the cost of the mowing which will include an administrative fee. If the mowing invoice is not paid within 30 days, a lien will be placed on the property.

It all sounds reasonable, but the system is less than perfect. Often neighbors report other neighbors out of spite when they don't get along. One person I knew had a code violation for the seedheads of plantain – the weed itself was low to the ground, but the flower spikes in a few plants was nine inches- petty. Some folks growing wildflowers or other native plants have been reported to code for violations. I was reported for a code violation for having few goldenrod plants (butterfly nectar plants). Even utility easements are subject to code violations for weeds. The weed program is only a small part of code – which has violations for about any type of issue on a property – rats, unsafe living conditions – you name it. Such is life in the city.