

# 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](mailto:kemeryr7@frontier.com).

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## A High Maintenance Relationship - Privet



Privet (*Ligustrum* spp.) is a shrub originally imported from Asia in the mid-1800s for hedges and other landscaping use.

Privet hedges are widely used in Great Britain and other European countries primarily as clipped hedges in formal garden settings. In the U.K it is planted widely along the narrow roads in rural areas and makes driving a real adventure.

Large clusters of white flowers cover ligustrum in late spring and early summer (between April and June). They are followed by dark purple to black fruit clusters (called drupes) from late fall through the winter. This is when the plants are most easily identifiable. Birds easily disperse the fruit seeds to areas outside of where it was planted.

The real issue with privet is that it needs to be pruned constantly or it will quickly overgrow a landscape. If you are a scaredy cat, then remember the scene in the movie *The Shining* where large hedges chase a family member in a manner that says “Oh you look so good to eat? Yep –nightmare privet hedges.....

Unless you like weekly pruning – or you want to shape the privet into the shape of a large devil hound--- then it is best not to plant privet hedge in your landscape.



# The Twilight Zone – Electroculture Gardening

*Rod Serling from the Twilight Zone – a bizarre TV show from the late 50's and 60's*

*Imagine if you will.. a lovely garden – a healthy garden full of flowers and vegetables. It looks like any garden except for a strange pole in the center of the garden. A tall copper pole wrapped in copper wire. Only the hapless homeowner who placed the pole in the ground knows its secrets- revealed in thunderstorms that visit this area in – The Twilight Zone! Strange music fills the background....*

## Electroculture gardening

Electroculture gardening was first recorded to have been practiced in the late 1700s and became officially recognized around the early 1900s. Electroculture is an ancient practice of increasing yields utilizing certain materials to harvest the earth's atmospheric energy. This was presented in 1749 by Abbe Nollett, in the 1920s by Justin Christofleau, and 1940s by Viktor Schauberger



### Some interesting findings of Justin Christofleua on Electroculture plant growth:

- In fields in which were not manured or irrigated Oats grew upwards to 7 feet+
- Potatoes grown in the same condition 6 feet 3 inches high, carrying 30 to 35 tubers, and weighed 1 to 2 pounds per potato.
- Grape vineyards impacted by Phylloxera were healed and rejuvenated. The grapes ended up sweeter and had a much richer flavor.
- Carrots grew to the lengths of 19 inches, beetroots to 18 inches, and nearly 17 inches in circumference.
- An old pear tree which had hardly any bark left was fully rejuvenated by Electroculture and started producing pears of up to 1 pound each.

Justin also reported that wrinkles on his face and bags under his eyes were eliminated by a strange silica compound made from shale rock.....

Electroculture gardening utilizes the flow of an electric charge to stimulate plant growth, amplifying results. Studies have shown that plants do indeed respond to electricity with the most obvious result of an even larger plant and overall more successful yield. In 2006, a biotechnologist from Imperial College London named Dr. Andrew Goldsworthy explained why plants seem to be showing such positive results in Electroculture experiments. He proposed that it all has to do with certain evolutionary traits developed in response to thunderstorms and heavy rainfall. Plants can sense it! Their genes trigger after receiving an electrical charge. This spikes their metabolism and the amount of water their roots can soak up, thereby increasing their growth rate and potential. Goldsworthy also found extracts from a miracle melon in southern France kept his skin glowing and rejuvenated. (I told you I watch a lot of late night television).

All you need is the sun, the clouds, the rain, the nitrogen in the air, and the ability to harness atmospheric energy. These atmospheric antennas can be created from materials such as wood, copper, zinc, and brass. When adding these atmospheric antennas to your garden, soil, or farm they will amplify your yields, combat frost and excessive heat, reduce irrigation, reduce pests, and increase the magnetism of your soil leading to more nutrients in the long run. In addition, anytime your cat uses the garden as a litterbox, colored spots indicating

your cats overall health will be left behind – and a voice in the garden that sounds like Martha Stewart will be heard.

Atmospheric antennas can be made out of wood dowels found at Home Depot, Lowes, or a local piece of wood from your backyard. The taller you make the antenna the larger your plants will grow. Justin Christofleua recommended 20 feet+, but any height will do. You can wrap the wood dowel or local wood with copper & zinc wiring making a Fibonacci spiral or vortex up in the air facing Magnetic North. The combination of zinc and copper can work like a battery when the sun hits the antenna. You will then place this antenna about 6-8 inches into your soil and let Mother Nature do the magic. Get creative, try different designs, and you will see the true potential of Electroculture.



The antenna harvests the energy of the earth through the series of vibrations and frequency such as rain, wind, and temperature fluctuations. These antennas lead to stronger plants, more moisture for the soil, and reduced pest infestations. This is one of the many reasons we have not been taught about this ancient practice. You can use a copper pipe, but the best results coming from copper coils. The copper coil harness the flow of energy. Electroculture works wonderfully on indoor plants! A simple chopstick can be used to create your indoor antenna.

You can make your atmospheric antennas as tall as you like. On average the best antennas are 6 feet+ to gather more atmospheric energy.

**Ricky's Notes:** Once again totally fantastic claims on the Internet that these devices work based only on observations – not reliable research. The Internet is full of these ideas that seem sensible at first glance but are likely to be horse hocky. This all goes back to the IF THEN philosophy. I dumped coyote urine in my garden and then noticed I saw no rabbits for the rest of the year. So It must have been the coyote urine that kept the rabbits away – not the fact that the rabbit found a better garden – or unfortunately was run over by a large pickup truck – or was shot by an aggressive neighbor. Anyway..... I am tempted to try this in an area of my garden-just to see if my day lilies increase growth by 70% compared to others on the same property. I think a 20 foot pole will do- and I look forward in explaining this to visitors.....without sounding like Doc in “Back to the Future”.



# Purveying Phlox — *Compiled from The Farmer's Almanac*

The name Phlox is derived from the Greek word *phlox* meaning flame in reference to the intense flower colors of some varieties. Most phlox are native to the Americas. I must confess I never associated Phlox with being native, and I don't hear a lot of discussion from native plant enthusiasts about growing phlox in a native landscape.

The earliest phlox to be cultivated was summer phlox - *P. paniculata* - which was sent to Europe from Virginia in the early 18th century. Selected forms were on the market by the early 1800s in England and by the mid-1800s in France. The earlier modern selections of *P. paniculata* were made during the mid-1900s in England by plant breeders Symons-Jeune and Alan Bloom and in Germany by Georg Arends. Present day *P. paniculata* breeding takes place for the most part in The Netherlands and the United States

Symons-Jeune and Bloom selected mostly for flower size and color and for vigor. Although Symons-Jeune seems to have had little understanding of the basis of inheritance he was a skilled breeder, and many of his selections are still in the trade. Many of Bloom's selections, too, have become standard varieties. Arends was basically a hybridizer and experimented with crossing *P. paniculata* with other species. Some of his *P. paniculata* × *P. divaricata* hybrids are still available.

Phlox has five fused petals, five sepals, five stamens and an ovary with three fused carpels and a nectary disk at the base. In the language of flowers, phlox means: "Our souls are united. or We think alike."

If you spot low-growing blankets of flowers in bright pink in springtime, it's often Creeping Phlox! But there are medium and tall varieties of phlox as well, which grow in late spring and summer; these perennials are the cornerstone of many perennial flower beds.

Low-growing Creeping Phlox works great as ground cover in sunny yards.

Ankle-high Woodland Phlox is perfect for dappled, shady beds.

Medium-height Garden Phlox is often the 'backbone' of the perennial garden, providing a layer of color midway through the garden, and filling in gaps.

Tall Garden Phlox are excellent as a colorful backdrop with large flower clusters, and they are often fragrant.

Phlox is also beloved by bees, butterflies, and pollinators. And, fortunately, phlox is deer-resistant

Tall garden phlox do best in full sun, while woodland species thrive in partial shade

Phlox prefer soil that is nutrient rich and evenly moist. They do not like to sit in wet soil,

It is easier to grow phlox from cuttings/transplants than from seeds, although established plants will readily spread by seed in the garden. Space plants according to their mature size. If you are transplanting a plant from a pot, dig a hole about twice the size of the pot's diameter and place the plant so that the top of the root ball is even with the soil's surface.



**Creeping phlox** or **moss phlox** (*Phlox subulata*) is a low-growing species that works excellently as a ground cover. It spreads slowly, growing in mounds that get 4–6 inches thick. The whole plant turns into a carpet of color in spring when flowers cover every square inch of foliage. This phlox is particularly stunning when allowed to drape over a rock wall—imagine a waterfall of color! Creeping phlox grows best in well-drained soil and partial to full sun.

‘**Candy Stripe**’ is a popular variety with pink-and-white-striped flowers.

‘**Emerald Blue**’ produces a sea of lilac-blue flowers (perfect for that waterfall of color!).

*Phlox stolonifera*, which also goes by the common names **creeping phlox** and **moss phlox**, is similar to *P. subulata* in name only. The main differences between it and *P. subulata* are that its leaves are oval-shaped (rather than needle-shaped) and its flowers are produced on stems that rise 6–10 inches above the foliage (rather than directly on the foliage). It prefers a shadier growing site with rich, evenly moist soil.

‘**Sherwood Purple**’ is a delicate little phlox with purplish-pink flowers.

**Woodland phlox** or **blue phlox** (*Phlox divaricata*) is another low-growing species. As its two common names suggest, it prefers partial to full shade and moist, rich soils, and produces bluish flowers in early spring. Like *P. stolonifera*, its flowers bloom on stems that rise about a foot or so above the creeping foliage.

‘**Chattahoochee**’ and ‘**Blue Moon**’ are two great varieties with beautiful blue-to-violet flowers.

**Garden phlox** or **summer phlox** (*Phlox paniculata*) is the tallest phlox in cultivation and is probably the species that most folks have in their gardens. It grows in clumps that reach between 3 and 5 feet in height and produces panicles of flowers in mid- to late summer. Though tolerant of most lighting, it grows and flowers best in partial to full sun. It has a reputation for being very susceptible to powdery mildew, but resistant varieties are available.



‘**David**’ has bright white flowers and is resistant to powdery mildew.

‘**Jeana**’, another mildew-resistant variety, produces panicles of petite purplish flowers—similar in appearance to a butterfly bush.

## **Ricky Has Moved!!**

I decided to sell my house on Lorman Court. It was a difficult decision as I had many good memories there. I had to deal with the fact that I would really need to cut corners a lot if I remained there.

My email address and phone will not change. My mailing address will be 2714 Hoagland Ave. Fort Wayne Indiana 46807.

This is my friend Gwendra's house, and she has a downstairs room I can stay in. It's a big change. Sigh.

The selling process is very stressful. Houses are in great demand, and many folks use rather creative methods to try to have you select them as buyers. I am eternally grateful to the DABL program "Selling Your House"- where Tanya and Roger help stage homes for frustrated homeowners to sell.

One needs to declutter, depersonalize, and stage the house. My realtor said my house was the best staged home he has ever seen.

Speaking of realtors, my realtor Scott Hope went above and beyond his duties to help sell the house. He even came and painted an entire entry and hallway so it would look more attractive and did a great job with a sense of humor to deal with buyers. I would highly recommend him.

## **Look in the "Dead and Dying" Bargain Racks**



The price of plants in the Box Stores has risen to astronomical heights this year. Online purchasing of garden plants is also off the charts. Interestingly enough, it was really difficult to find any plants in stock on the Internet. Despite the prices, folks have gone wild this season.

So now, the first place I go when I am out and about locally looking for plants is to the back of the stores where there is often a rack or two of plants on discount racks. They often look terrible with brown foliage from lack of watering or missing tags so it can be a mystery to know what they are for the average gardener. These Dead and Dying plants can be dirt cheap and many can be easily revived with a little TLC.

I also like to purchase plants late in the season when stores are trying to reduce inventory. Last year I purchased Monterey Jack daylilies (pictured above) at a garden center in quart containers for two dollars apiece. They are spectacular in my garden this season. So look on the bargain racks for super deals and purchase plants on sale later in the season to plant in early fall.



# Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

**To my caregiver:** Since you are moving to a new place, I have several demands befitting a cat of my stature..

*A new litterbox would be nice – a two story condo style that gives privacy to “do my cat business” in seclusion.*



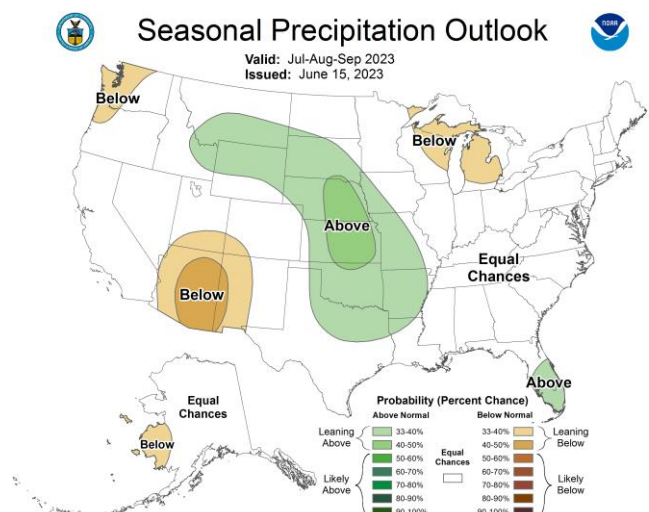
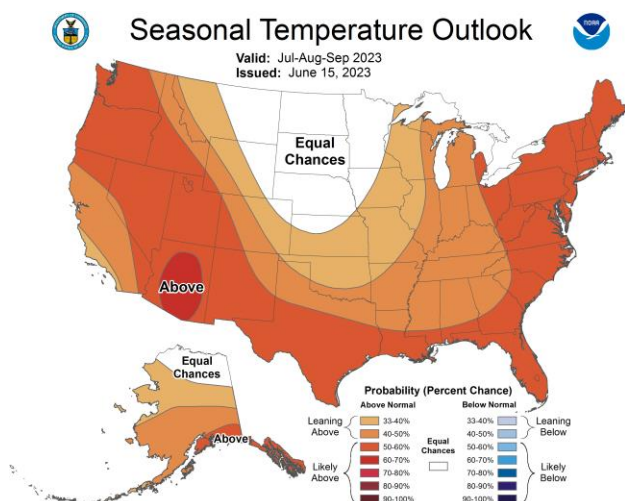
*A comfy cat boudoir would also be nice, something in a modern Chip and Joanna Gaines style- meaning an all-white kitchen with a huge island and arranged books and flowers.. I deserve this because I have endured your minimal care for way too long mister.....*

## El Nino

The folks at NOAA have finally decided that a strong El Nino has set up this summer. Without a word of apology for continuing to post long range forecasts with a La Nino setup – suddenly the forecasts have changed. Might I remind you readers that the almighty Ricky predicted this weather change a few months ago, so yes indeed it will be hotter and drier in the months to come. “We will probably have, in 2024, the warmest year globally on record,” Josef Ludescher a senior scientist at Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, told CNN. The hottest year on record is currently 2016, which followed a very strong El Niño.

Unlike La Niña, El Niño tends to reduce Atlantic hurricane activity, but creates the opposite effect in the Pacific, where warm waters can fuel more intense typhoons.

The Great Lakes region will typically see warmer temperatures as a result of El Niño, especially in the fall and winter months. The entire Midwest also typically sees below-normal levels of precipitation in El Niño years.



# One Day on Facebook Forums



These are excerpts from a real Facebook thread about dead arborvitae. They are dead- nothing added to the soil-or to the plant will help- I repeat..... they are deader than a doornail.

*Mary: Hi all, does anyone know what happened to my arborvitae shrubs? (Shows picture of seven 4 foot tall arbor-vitae shrubs- all but one is dead.). I bought them in April and watered them every day. I am so disappointed.*

*Comment: I have seen vapor trails in the sky recently. Nothing good happens when I see them.*

*Comment: I think you need to test the soil....*

*Comment: Some vapor trails last a long time....*

*Comment: Try adding some compost and fill dirt around them – It might help..*

*Comment: I lost 15 of those shrubs last year they are no good.*

*Comment: Try adding fertilizer – It always works for me...*

*Comment: Maybe you needed to water more—are you sure you watered enough?*

*Comment: I think bagworms.... **Note:** Bagworms have not emerged in northern Indiana....*

*Comment: There is one that is green-so maybe the others will recover.. **Note:** They are dead- all will die.. There is no hope.*

*Comment: Maybe moles have eaten the roots....*

**Ricky's Comments:** One can speculate forever about why these plants have died—many commenters seem unaware the plants are dead. Often it takes an actual visit to determine what went wrong. I would visit and take a soil probe to check the area near the plants. My suspicion is that the soil nearby is waterlogged beyond belief and the plant's root systems rotted away from the constant watering. The one remaining plant should be given a special citation from the mayor. I know some will say that the commenters were only trying to help, but bad advice and suggestions in my opinion actually do damage when the suggestions do not take into account real observations on site to determine what is wrong.





# Canadian Smoke



Who would have predicted that a major issue this year would be smoke from Canadian wildfires creating dense hazes in our air that are detrimental to human health? Extremely dry conditions in Canada have resulted in tons of wildfires and the smoke from those wildfires can have long term negative effects on our health. In addition the smoke could have negative effects on crop fields in the Midwest.

The Minnesota Extension Service notes this aspect in an online article titled "Managing Wildfire Smoke: Impacts to Crops and Workers" published in August 2021. Specifically, the article notes: "Plant stomata are pores on the leaf surface where gas exchange occurs, and while we've probably all learned that plants intake CO<sub>2</sub> and exhale oxygen, other gases also enter plants through their stomata. When high concentrations of ozone are present in the atmosphere, it enters plants through their stomata, and can interfere with photosynthesis. These impacts can occur hundreds of miles from the area that's actively burning.

Negative aspects include the reduction in sunlight and the increase of ozone levels which can lead to leaf photosynthesis reductions. In that case, the plant remobilizes carbohydrates from stalks to satisfy grain demand making stalks weaker and susceptible to lodging.

Based on what is known about the effects of reduced solar radiation and ozone on crops, it's very plausible that wildfire smoke could cause reductions in crop yields. The effects of wildfire smoke on both agricultural and natural ecosystems are likely to be an active area of research in coming years, as smoky days become more common.

***Ricky's Comments:*** *I can find no discussion of what effect this smoke could have upon our weather- the winter weather in particular. Some folks might remember how smoke from the eruption of Mount St. Helen's resulted in a colder winter after the eruption because the smoke blocked sunlight to warm our region.*

*So it will be interesting to see what the upcoming winter of 2023-2024 looks like. I probably need to whip out my N95 mask to garden this year – so sad.*

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