

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

and Home Horticulture

October 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.

From Summer To Fall

It is usually around the vernal Equinox that the transition from summer to fall occurs. This transition happens usually with a period of damp cold rains that occur – followed by high temperatures falling from daily highs in the eighties to low seventies – and then high temperatures in the sixties or lower. Nighttime temperatures dip down reliably to the forties and lower.



The dates of this transition can vary, but it happens every year. I have become very sensitive to this transition – I can feel it in my bones – I can feel it in the air. The geese fly south for the winter, and I can feel stillness in the atmosphere. As I have mentioned before – it is a melancholy time for me.

I know that it is a good time to plant. Fall planting at this transition time gives the plants a time to get settled in – to put on a bit of root growth before the winter. It's a time for plants to get a head start – so in the spring they are better prepared to grow and flourish. This season, we have planted a gallica rose, one of my favorite roses. We have planted numerous fruit trees to create a more sustainable garden. I found a clove current, one of my favorite fragrance fruit shrubs that will fill any area near an entrance with its spicy scent. We planted a row of peonies along side of an entry sidewalk that hopefully be spectacular to show off the architecture of a hundred and sixty-year-old house.

It's time to assess how well spring plantings have performed. It is a wonderful thing to plant a woody shrub, tree, or herbaceous perennial and then see how it establishes and grows in its first season. I have always said that plants are like children – whose success one is always willing to show off and take credit for.

For gardeners, one always has hope for next year – developing plants fill in and the beauty of a planned garden can reward both individuals and visitors.

When I taught Master Gardens at the Extension office, I always told them it was their job to go out into the world and make it a better place by sharing their knowledge with others. They so often made me so proud when they became involved with helping people with garden advice – planning school and public garden spaces, and teaching others to make the world more beautiful.

Late fall is also a time for soup making. There is nothing better than a hot bowl of soup to take the chill out of the air during fall and winter. Here is my recipe for cheesy potato soup. I am aware it is not a healthy soup, but the soup developed over time. My mother used to make potato soup occasionally when I was a child. My version is definitely different from my mom's, but that's Ok. I still think of her when I make it.

Ricky's Cheesy Potato Soup

Ingredients

About 5 potatoes- cut into small pieces.

2 -3 onions

1 – 1 ½ small boxes of Velveeta cheese

1 cup of parmesan cheese

½ cup of blue cheese

Enough milk to fill stockpot about ¾ full.

½ pint of heavy cream.

Salt pepper to taste

Hot pepper flakes to taste – I use about 2 teaspoons.

Maple syrup – about a quarter cup.

8 pieces of bacon -cooked to crisp.

I put potatoes in a stockpot about a third full of salted cold water (or enough to cover potatoes) and begin cooking over medium heat to a soft boil. While potatoes are cooking, fry bacon and place on paper towel to drain.

Cook onions in bacon grease until softened but not brown – about 10 minutes or so.

Keep checking potatoes until a fork easily penetrates the potatoes.

Drain the potatoes, leaving a small amount of the potato water in the stockpot.

Over low heat, add onions to the potatoes.

Cut Velveeta into smaller chunks and add to stockpot. Stir the cheese and potatoes until the cheese melts.

Add other cheeses to pot. Sometimes I add some extra bacon grease to the soup.

Pour in milk and heavy cream and turn up heat to medium.

Stir often and add salt and pepper and hot pepper flakes to taste. Add a touch of maple syrup.

The soup will scorch easily, so I stir often and usually finish heating it on low heat.

Add crumbled bacon over the top before serving. Sometimes add croutons to the soup at the end.



Asparagus is a good side for the soup. One can add other ingredients such as canned red peppers, ham chunks, or frozen cauliflower and/or broccoli. This soup is a decadent treat on cold days...I try and use mostly organic ingredients in the soup. I long for the day when organic Velveta becomes available, but I fear this may occur long into the future – about the same time organic Spam becomes available.

Protecting Some Plants From the Dreaded Winter



In a perfect world – winters would not exist or only exist so a winter only produced snow for Christmas and only enough cold to be a mild annoyance – so that making soup was barely necessary. In real life Midwest winters can be brutal – enough to damage plants with desiccating winds – brutal wind chills – or black ice that can produce heavy loads to smash plants to oblivion.

One can be proactive to prevent winter damage to plants. Some plants, such as boxwood, cut leaved Japanese Maples, and evergreens such as arbor vitae, can develop what I refer to as brownchitus - where parts of the plant appear as if scorched by fire when the

snow melts in early spring. If plants are exposed enough, they can die due to the loss of water from desiccating winter winds.

One way to protect plants from deadly brownchitus is to wait until November and then place cages around the plants and then wrap burlap around the cages to help protect the plants. Dry leaves placed around the plants inside the cages can also be very beneficial. Sometimes, one can tie the plants using jute rope to make it easier to use cages and burlap around them. Sometimes it works better to drive stakes around a plant, and then wrap burlap around the stakes to help protect larger plants from cold and wind. This method can help protect hydrangeas and rhododendrons.

Tender roses can be protected by the methods listed previously. It is the graft union at the base of the plant that really must be protected. Use a cage with dry leaves placed around the lower portion of the plant is necessary. Remove the leaves in early spring so that the roses isn't smothered.

Sometimes ice or heavy snow loads can break up limbs and literally smash plants such as arbor vitae. It helps at least to tie the branches together with jute twine so that the plants are protected.

Of course, one can purchase pre-made wraps to protect plants from winter damage on the Internet. These products can be pricey but can save work so one has time to make soup and binge watch shows like the Bachelor and Dancing With the Stars.



Monstera – Swiss Cheese Plant

The Swiss Cheese Plant made its way to Europe in the late 19th century, where it quickly became popular as an ornamental plant. The Swiss Cheese Plant belongs to the Araceae family and is known by several names across different regions and cultures. Some of its common alternative names include the Hurricane Plant, Mexican Breadfruit, and Ceriman.

Swiss Cheese Plant, scientifically known as *Monstera deliciosa*, is named for its distinctively holey leaves that resemble Swiss cheese. It is one of my favorite botanical names. The holes in the foliage are known as fenestrations. Swiss Cheese plants can grow to impressive heights, reaching up to 20 feet indoors and even taller in their natural habitat. In some countries, *Monstera deliciosa* roots are used to make baskets and ropes, treating snakebites and arthritis, even though the plant is considered poisonous.



This fascinating plant is native to the rainforests of Central and South America, where it thrives in warm and humid conditions. It can often be found climbing trees or growing on the forest floor.

A mature Swiss cheese plant has broad leaves that can measure nearly three feet across. They are perforated with holes and deeply split along the edges. The thick stems bear aerial roots that can be cut off if desired. The plant is a climber and will require some support.

In good conditions, white plumed flowers are followed by edible fruit. The fruit must be fully ripe to be eaten safely. The fruit is often described as having a tropical flavor, similar to a combination of pineapple and banana. Although tolerant of low light, plants without at least some sun per day will lose their holes and revert to their juvenile heart-shaped form.

When grown indoors, the Swiss Cheese Plant thrives in bright, indirect light. Exposure to direct sunlight can scorch its leaves.

One of the reasons why the Swiss Cheese Plant is so popular is its low maintenance requirements. It can tolerate a range of light conditions, and its watering needs are moderate, with the soil needing to stay slightly moist but not soggy. It is relatively resistant to common pests such as spider mites or mealybugs.

In some cultures, the Swiss Cheese Plant is considered a symbol of prosperity and good fortune. It is believed to bring luck, wealth, and positive energy to the household, making it a popular choice for gift-giving.

Like many other houseplants, the Swiss Cheese Plant has been found to have air-purifying properties. It can help remove toxins such as formaldehyde and benzene from the air, making it beneficial for indoor environments.

It is important to note that it is toxic to pets, particularly cats and dogs. If ingested, it can cause digestive upset, drooling, and difficulty swallowing. Therefore, it is advisable to keep the plant out of reach of curious pets.

One can easily propagate Swiss Cheese plant through stem cuttings. Simply take a cutting from a healthy plant, allow it to callus over, and then place it in well-draining soil. With proper care, the cutting will develop roots and grow into a new plant. There is a variegated cultivar that is highly prized by plant collectors.

The Holidays

It is interesting to see how some people adore the holidays – all the food – connecting with family – decorating – and so on. Others I talk with dread the holidays usually filled with conflict over long ago transgressions – or even worse – political and ideological differences – misbehaving children and adults – you name it.

I have seen both sides of the holiday gatherings. The ones I have enjoyed the most are when music was involved. My father in particular would play and sing songs he use to play when he was younger. I never was tired of hearing those songs. He would love to pretend he was a dee jay and regale us with all genres of music on his stereo system.

I sometimes wonder what family gatherings were like long ago. In Great Britain and Ireland Halloween was a huge deal. Part of this is based on Celtic traditions, druids, faries, and celebration of the dead.

Trick-or-treating—setting off on Halloween night in costume and ringing doorbells to demand treats—has been a tradition in the United States and other countries for more than a century. Its origins remain murky but traces can be identified in ancient Celtic festivals, early Roman Catholic holidays, medieval practices—and even British politics..

Halloween has its roots in the ancient, pre-Christian Celtic festival of Samhain, which was celebrated on the night of October 31. The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom and northern France, believed that the dead returned to earth on Samhain. On the sacred night, people gathered to light bonfires, offer sacrifices and pay homage to the dead.

In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future. For a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world, these prophecies were an important source of comfort during the long, dark winter.

By A.D. 43, the Roman Empire had conquered the majority of Celtic territory. In the course of the 400 years that they ruled the Celtic lands, two festivals of Roman origin were combined with the traditional Celtic celebration of Samhain. The first was Feralia, a day in late October when the Romans traditionally commemorated the passing of the dead. The second was a day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The symbol of Pomona is the apple, and the incorporation of this celebration into Samhain probably explains the tradition of bobbing for apples that is practiced today on Halloween.

During some Celtic celebrations of Samhain, villagers disguised themselves in costumes made of animal skins to drive away phantom visitors; banquet tables were prepared and food was left out to placate unwelcome spirits.

In later centuries, people began dressing as ghosts, demons and other malevolent creatures, performing antics in exchange for food and drink. This custom, known as mumming, dates back to the Middle Ages and is thought to be an antecedent of trick-or-treating.

By the ninth century, Christianity had spread into Celtic lands, where it gradually blended with and supplanted older pagan rites. In 1000 A.D. the church designated November 2 as All Souls' Day, a time for honoring the dead. Celebrations in England resembled Celtic commemorations of Samhain, complete with bonfires and masquerades.

Poor people would visit the houses of wealthier families and receive pastries called soul cakes in exchange for a promise to pray for the souls of the homeowners' dead relatives. Known as "souling," the practice was later taken up by children, who would go from door to door asking for gifts such as food, money and ale.

In Scotland and Ireland, young people took part in a tradition called guising, dressing up in costume and accepting offerings from various households. Rather than pledging to pray for the dead, they would sing a song, recite a poem, tell a joke or perform another sort of "trick" before collecting their treat, which typically consisted of fruit, nuts or coins.

Halloween gained popularity in the United States in the 1840s by way of a massive Irish immigration to escape the Irish Potato Famine. The Pagan roots of the celebration may be what led to it being popular with farm communities and people looking to connect with the land as the seasons turned.

In past generations, Halloween was integrated closely with mischief—namely, pranks. Throwing cabbages and stealing garden gates were among the most popular shenanigans. Nowadays, well-known pranks like egging houses or hanging toilet paper from tree branches can result in hefty fines. If you were trick-or-treating in the 1940s or before, you would likely receive a popcorn ball, nuts, fruit, or money. Manufactured (and pre-wrapped) candy didn't fully take off in the United States until the 1970s. Why? Parents were worried about the potential tampering of handmade treats.

In the early 20th century, Irish and Scottish communities revived the Old World traditions of souling and guising in the United States. By the 1920s, however, pranks had become the Halloween activity of choice for rowdy young people. The Great Depression exacerbated the problem, with Halloween mischief often devolving into vandalism, physical assaults and sporadic acts of violence. One theory suggests that excessive pranks on Halloween led to the widespread adoption of an organized, community-based trick-or-treating tradition in the 1930s. This trend was abruptly curtailed, however, with the outbreak of World War II, when sugar rationing meant there were few treats to hand out. At the height of the postwar baby boom, trick-or-treating reclaimed its place among other Halloween customs. It quickly became standard practice for millions of children in America's cities and newly built suburbs. No longer constrained by sugar rationing, candy companies capitalized on the lucrative ritual, launching national advertising campaigns specifically aimed at Halloween.

Until the 1920s, most Halloween costumes were handmade by the costume wearer or their family. This all changed in the 1920s with the advent of manufactured costumes from companies like Ben Cooper, Collegeville Flag and Manufacturing Company, and H. Halpern Company. Ben Cooper, in particular, gained Halloween popularity through the production of officially licensed costumes of popular characters.

Emerging in the 1990s, trunk-or-treat events emerged as a safer alternative to trick-or-treating. Children gather candy from the opened trunks of cars parked together in a designated parking lot. The practice can inspire creative car decorations and has been nicknamed "Halloween tailgating."

Americans spend half a billion dollars to dress their pets in Halloween costumes, according to the Canine Journal, and 20% of pet owners are planning on dressing their furry friends up in 2021—an increase from 18% in 2020.

The National Retail Foundation reported in 2019 that for the first time in 16 years, superheroes beat out princesses for the most desired children's Halloween costume. This year, the Foundation projects the most popular costume to be Spider-Man—the runner-up is a princess, and in third place is a witch.

In Mexico, Latin America and Spain, All Souls' Day, which takes place on November 2, is commemorated with a three-day celebration that begins on the evening of October 31. The celebration is designed to honor the dead who, it is believed, return to their earthly homes on Halloween. Many families construct an altar to the dead in their homes to honor deceased relatives and decorate it with candy, flowers, photographs, samples of the deceased's favorite foods and drinks, and fresh water. Often, a wash basin and towel are left out so that the

spirit can wash before indulging in the feast. Día de los Muertos festivities often feature breads, candies and other foods in the shape of skulls and skeletons. Candles and incense are burned to help the deceased find the way home. Relatives also tidy the gravesites of their departed family members. This can include snipping weeds, making repairs, and painting. The grave is then decorated with flowers, wreaths, or paper streamers. On November 2, relatives gather at the gravesite to picnic and reminisce. Some gatherings even include tequila and a mariachi band.

Today, Americans spend an estimated \$3.1 billion on candy on Halloween, according to the National Retail Federation, and the day, itself, has become the nation's second-largest commercial holiday.

Halloween Candy

In the olden days when I was a young whippersnapper, candy for Halloween was a little different. Here are a few of my favorites.

Bun bars the size of cow patties.



Zagnut bars – Clark Bars –

Candy Cigarettes – how naughty

Jawbreakers – especially the fiery ones

A box of red hots that turned your entire mouth and tongue red.

Pez - Just getting the candy out was a treat.



Lemon Drops

Taffy of any sort- Bit O Honey taffy

Rocky Road Cabdy bars – Delicious

The Wax bottles filled with sugary syrup.

Double Bubble Bubble Gum – It would last forever.

Pixie Sticks were a favorite of my sisters.

Swedish Fish – Were they from Sweden? I think not.

All we needed for Halloween was a pillow sack for the candy and a cheap mask



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: This year I have decided that my Halloween treats be Swedish Fish- real fish of course - such as delicious haddock, cod and even smoked salmon. I cannot promise not to engage in trickery- such as scattering my litter everywhere, tearing off toilet paper from the rolls and hanging it off furniture, and perhaps scratching a fine piece of furniture into a ragged mess. It is Halloween you know... grins....

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