

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

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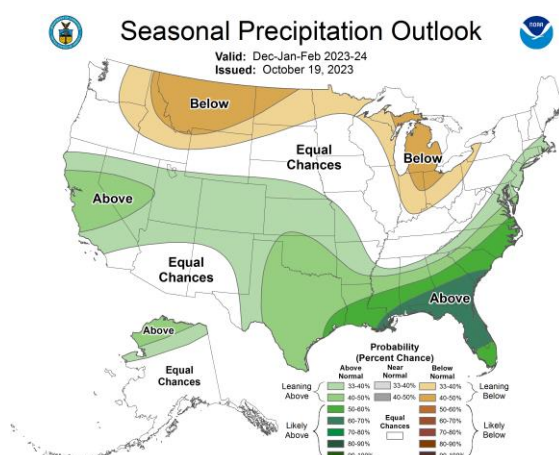
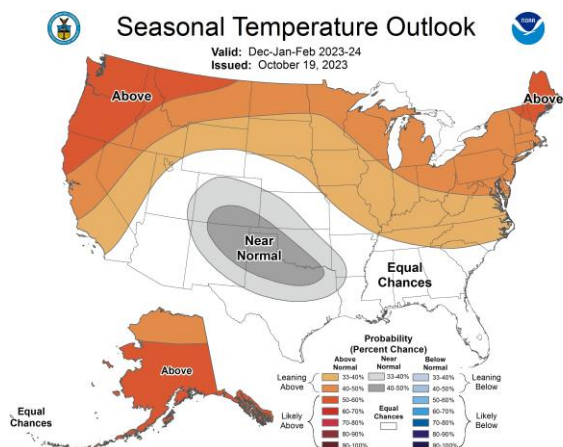
Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture and home issues, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com.

At the time of this writing, the weather forecast is for snow to arrive on Halloween night. The wind is supposed to blow about 40 mpg with about a half inch of snow accumulation. I have visions of huddled Halloweener's roaming neighborhoods freezing to death – much like cattle exposed in a pasture in a blizzard.

I have seen many moons of Halloweens over my years. I usually hide away in my home with the lights down – hoping no one comes trick or treating to my door. This year I plan on sitting on my front porch with Halloween candy at the ready – with Halloween decorations – ready to hand out candy to frozen trick -or-treaters brave enough to roam the streets. I plan on having a warmed libation handy to help me make it through the night. Maybe I will play the Kris Kristofferson song 'Help Me Make it Through the Night' and 'Me and Bobby McGee' as I tipple in the snowy weather. Sounds like a blast.

I must say that the fall color display this year has been miserable. Obviously the bizarre spring and summer weather delayed the fall color display. The lack of sunny conditions has made the sporadic fall color even more drab. My new digs do not have any views of garden space – I miss that.

Below is the long range outlook for this winter from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center. Maybe their prediction of warmer than average and drier than average weather for the next three months will put me into the holiday spirit – and the Halloween snow is not a true prediction of the winter weather for this season. We will see- Bah Humbug!!!!



Book Learnin' and Real Life

I have read tons of research papers and books on how trees grow. It has been pounded in my soul that the feeder roots of trees only are found in the upper two – three feet of soil under the drip line of a tree. Tree roots do not extend all the way to China like many folks think. Oh Boy...



The house where I now live in is approximately 160 years old. It has a tile drainage system that connects to the city sewer located by the alley that is located at least a hundred feet away from the house. The backyard is on a slope, so the tile system is buried at least six feet under the soil. Other tile systems I have encountered are usually about three feet under the surface – just below the frost line.

Tile systems are also found in farm fields. The systems were used to drain water away from the fields so farmers could use heavy equipment to plow fields in the spring without getting mired in mud. Much of the land in our area was a part of the Great Swamp which existed after the glaciers melted. The swamp was drained so farmers could use the land, plus the swamp was considered unhealthy.

Tile systems consist of clay/ceramic sections of pipe – usually about eight feet in length – with small gaps between the sections. The gaps are what cause issues sometimes as mud, soil, or roots can grow in the gaps and clog the system. When tile systems fail, it can be disastrous. Fields – or home sewer systems - can fail. Replacing or “fixing” the systems can be very very labor intensive – and expensive. “Modern” tile systems are now constructed using PVC pipe that is continuous – there are no gaps that roots can grow into.

Recently – the drains in the house began to drain more slowly. After inspection by a plumber using a small camera it was determined that an area of the tile system was clogged by tree roots. Remember the system is six feet under the ground. When I informed the plumber that I was puzzled that the tile was clogged by feeder roots that were only supposed to be 2-3 feet below the surface, the plumber said he often sees deep tile systems clogged by feeder roots. “They will find any source of water below ground no matter how deep the systems are”, he said.

As it turns out, the feeder roots clogging the system were probably from a large black cherry tree located at least thirty feet away from the system. The tile system is well beyond the drip line of the tree- where the experts says there should be little- if any – tree roots.

My book learning was wrong- so discouraging.

The only real fix to this problem is to replace the entire tile system with a more modern system. The cost to do this is staggering – to replace the system would involve tearing up the yard – and all the plants that were just installed this season. All the work to install the beautiful garden would be for naught.

Companies that unclog ancient tile systems do very well in our area, as many older homes still have clay tile systems clogged by tree roots. Some companies use high pressure water to remove the roots. Others use long snakes to unclog systems, much as a snake that is used to unclog drain systems in the house. Others use twirling blades to cut out the roots. These systems will only temporarily unclog the tiles because the roots will grow back after a period of time. It is a treadmill that never stops, unless the trees causing the clogging are removed. It is why most experts say to never plant trees close to tile systems. As it turn out, even a tree planted a decent distance away from a line can clog the system – even though the system is buried below the distance where feeder roots are not supposed to exist. I do have a fairy garden, and I suspect the fairies have put a spell on the trees to cause its roots to grow into the tile line. I have gnomes also- and they could be digging underground to allow access to the system by the tree roots. Or- it just could be – that experts can sometimes be wrong.

Generators

I recently had a generator installed at the property I am living at in central Fort Wayne. I thought hard about doing this, as generators do not come cheap. I based my decision on past incidents where for various reasons, I was left without power for extended periods of time. The worst incident was when I was a college student living in the small town of West Point, Indiana – located about 10 miles southwest of West Lafayette, Indiana. West point was literally in the middle of nowhere. The most exciting attractions in town were the local post office and a small country store. Visiting either location and asking the right questions would let one know everything – I mean everything – that was going on.



In early spring of one year, a terrible ice storm hit the area. Trees were covered in thick ice. The landscapes were beautiful. Tree limbs fell everywhere. We were without power for 3 weeks. It was horrible. Trying to keep food cold while we were freezing was a real struggle. We wore heavy coats and bundled up in blankets to stay warm. Thank goodness we had a gas stove to cook food.

The memory of that experience and other incidents lead me to my decision to have a generator installed.

Types of Home Generators

A home generator produces electricity when the power supplied from your electric utility is out. There are numerous types of home generators but essentially one has two choices.



Many folks purchase portable generators just to provide limited power to run lights or small appliances when the power goes out. I must mention that aging power grids and high demand result in more frequent outages as years go by. Also squirrels are very naughty as all it takes is one mischievous squirrel chewing on a line at a power station to take out half a town.

According to home improvement website Fixr.com, the national average cost to purchase and install a whole house generator is \$10,000 to \$20,000. That said, you can find portable home generators for as low as \$200,.

Portable generators can be inexpensive. They usually involve starting the unit that runs on gasoline or propane or diesel fuel. They tend to be noisy and more short term solutions for power. Think of a large lawn mower engine running to provide power. Many require manual starting. This can be a problem if they are not properly maintained or if one has to start a generator in freezing or stormy conditions in utter darkness. The units must be located away from the house as the fumes can produce carbon monoxide. There have been incidents where portable generators have killed folks who placed the generators too close to windows or vents. As a general rule, it is best to work with professionals when setting up systems. Units must be hooked up to the electrical house systems properly.

Home standby generators are the most expensive type of home generator. But if the power goes out, it automatically kicks in. Standby generators are typically whole house generators and are powered by natural gas, liquid propane or diesel fuel. They are permanently installed on the outside of the house.

A typical three-bedroom home will be able to keep most things running with a 5,000-watt generator.”

If you're planning to buy a home generator to power your home, you'll want to hire a professional to install it, which will add to the overall cost.

You should plan to pay an average of \$3,000 to \$5,000 for the installation of a whole house generator, which doesn't include the price of buying the generator, so your total costs could be quite a bit more.

Generator Quick Tips

Aim to buy a home generator when you have power and are not in a rush.

Get a Carbon Monoxide Monitor - Consider getting several of them, and make sure they work.

Only operate generators in dry areas away from rain or flood waters.. Don't store a generator at the lowest point on your property. Always use a transfer switch and have the (home generator and transfer switch) system installed by a licensed electrician..

Don't Plug a Generator Directly Into Your Home's Power Outlets.

Assuming you have a portable generator and not one that is always hooked up to your home, you should store it outside your home, away from the elements. You should start up and run your generator for about 30 minutes every three months.

Whole house generators can run on natural gas, liquid propane or diesel fuel. My generator is hooked up to natural gas. Most folks that install systems offer maintenance agrees where they will come and check the system to make sure it is working properly. In addition most systems will run for a brief time every two weeks or so to test the system and to ensure it is running properly. In our case, we had to have a larger gas meter installed (an extra cost) to provide enough gas to operate the system.

I always tell folks that having a generator installed will be either the best decision I ever made – or perhaps a waste of time and money. Installing these systems can add considerable value to a home. Only time – and a considerable power outage – will prove if I made the right choice.

Soil Compaction – Hardpans and

Fragipans - – Condensed Article from GrowerExperts.com Crop Farming In Northern Ireland

Late night television has been filled with commercials about pans – pans so slippery that eggs roll around them like ball bearings, so strong with titanium bottoms, surfaces that do not scratch, and heat tolerant to 500 F. Perfect pans – replacing fry pans from the olden days with Teflon surfaces that we later learned contained forever chemicals sooo bad for human health.

Bored beyond belief, I finally purchased an attractive copper gothic pan and began to use it for cooking. The pan was cool looking, and the surface was indeed as slippery as a con person selling cheap watches on a streetcorner. Unfortunately, the non-scratchable surface quickly proved to be easily scratchable – like a codependent cat.



In the gardening world there are also pans – having a pan in your soil is not a good thing. There are several types of pans formed in soil.

Hardpan soil is soil that has a layer of densely compacted soil beneath the topsoil. The hardpan layer may be a few inches below the topsoil, or there may be several feet of topsoil before hitting the hardpan layer.

Hardpan soil is so densely compacted that neither water nor air can permeate it. It is rock-solid and may even be mistaken for a ledge or rock layer beneath the soil's surface when you try to till an area for planting or digging in the soil. The hardpan layer ranges from a mere few inches to several feet in depth. Plant roots cannot grow in hardpan soil. Hardpans form more easily in clay soils. Bad for us.....

There are two causes of hardpan soil: soil composition and soil compaction. Clay soils contain high amounts of clay and have a high pH. The high pH causes salts, like copper and iron salts, to crystallize and fill in the soil's air pockets, preventing water from penetrating and sealing off air pockets that typically provide water and fresh oxygen to plant roots. This results in rock-hard soil – similar to a bowling alley.

Soil compaction from heavy loads can also cause hardpan soil to form. This may occur with farm equipment, landscaping equipment, or heavy traffic over the ground, mainly when the soil is wet. The pressure from above forces air and water from the pores in the soil and causes the particles to glue together to form a rock-hard layer of hardpan soil. Hardpan soil close to the surface may prevent plants from growing in the area because their roots cannot penetrate the hardpan, and the hardpan soil does not contain the water and nutrients plants need to grow. Types of hardpan soils include:



Caliche. This hardpan soil can be found in the Southwest and is the result of lime in the soil that binds the soil particles tightly together. Caliche hardpan looks light and chalky and generally has a high pH. I once helped build a dome house out in the middle of nowhere in the desert. We had to dig out the caliche to create a central area below the dome. It took days of chipping away the caliche with a pickaxe in 100 degree heat, and then making adobe bricks from mud to make the dome walls. It turned out wonderful in the end – but it was a tremendous amount of work.

Claypan. Claypan forms from a layer of soil with high clay content. It is sometimes found on top of a harder layer of hardpan soil. Claypan may soften when it is wet but is hard when it dries. Claypan prevents water from draining through the soil and makes it difficult for plant roots to get the water and nutrients they need. It is the most common type of hardpan found in clay subsoil backyards in our area.

Fragipan. Fragipan is composed of a cemented layer of silt and sand. This type of hardpan is rock solid when it is dry but becomes brittle when it is wet. It can be common in farmfields.

Ploughpan. Ploughpan is caused by moldboard plows that compress and compact the soil from the weight of the plough. It is typically a few inches thick and can be found on farmland.

Traffic Pan. This hardpan can form from repeated foot traffic over some time. You may find traffic pan under footpaths, along walkways, and where repeated traffic occurs.

How does one know if a hardpan is present in your landscape ? Here are some things to watch for.

Poor Drainage or Pooling Water: Hardpan soil prevents water from draining into the soil, which often causes pools of water to form on top of the topsoil after it rains. The water takes an unusually long time to drain away.

Poor Plant Growth: Poor plant growth may be a sign of hardpan soil under your topsoil. If areas of your lawn remain patchy and lack good growth despite your efforts to water and seed the area, hardpan under the topsoil may be the cause.

Rock-hard Soil: If your rototiller struggles and bounces when you try to till the garden, you may think you have hit rocks, but hardpan soil could also be the culprit. Likewise, digging with a garden shovel or spade may be impossible in the area. (see pickaxe above).

Dealing With Hardpans

Make a note of the depth of the hardpan to determine if breaking the hardpan up is feasible. Breaking up a hardpan thicker than a few inches may be more work than is reasonable for the home gardener or homeowner that wants to plant a few flowers and veggies. Use a pick, crowbar, or other sharp tools to chip through the hardpan layer. To put yourself in a better mood, sing the song “Don’t Worry be Happy.” – or the amended Beatles song “We all live in a Hardpan Submarine”

Use a post-hole digger or a chisel to break through the hardpan layer near trees or shrubs. Fill the post hole with gravel. This method also works well with compacted athletic fields or lawns..

Hire a contractor with a backhoe, chisel plow or subsoiler to break up the hardpan in a larger area. Hand the contractor large amounts of money afterwards.

Breaking up small hardpan areas can be done with an auger, pickaxe, or deep digging with a fork. A deep chisel plough or subsoiler on a tractor is probably the best option for larger areas. If you don’t have access to these machines you can hire a local contractor to do the work for you.

Avoid heavy traffic or heavy equipment in the garden (especially when the soil is wet). Encourage family members to go around the garden instead of taking a shortcut through the garden every day. Excessive foot traffic along a path can cause the soil to compact.

Plow or rototill the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches in the spring once the soil has dried. If soil sticks to the tines of the rototiller, it is too wet to till. I once burned out a rototiller in the Purdue Horticulture gardens deep tilling compacted soil caused by foot traffic.

Add earthworms to the soil. Earthworms add nutrients with their casting and make holes through the soil, helping keep it well aerated.

Amend the soil with organic matter, such as Canadian sphagnum peat moss, compost or well-rotted manure. Amending clay soils ultimately will greatly diminish the chances of hardpans forming in the home landscape.

Recipe Update

Several readers sent me feedback on my cheesy potato soup recipe. My daughter Jessica commented that it was a travesty to put maple syrup into potato soup. Adding maple syrup is purely optional - I add it because in my opinion it diminishes the richness of the soup by adding sweetness. Also, I like Yukon Gold potatoes in the soup because they retain their firmness better than other types of potatoes, and their glycemic index is lower than other potato types. Every little bit helps.

Katsura Tree

In the years when I was a student at the then IPFW campus - Japanese Katsura were planted in a row on the eastern side of Ketler Hall. A few Katsura still remain there on the campus. I have so many fond memories of traveling around the campus learning about the trees as a part of my Dendrology class. *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* is a tree named because its heart shaped leaves are similar to our native Redbud tree – though it is actually related to Tulip Popular and Magnolias. This tree is named after a town in Tokushima prefecture in Japan and is an excellent specimen tree for Midwest landscapes. In the spring, the leaves emerge reddish-purple, changing to blue-green as they mature. In autumn the leaves turn a clear yellow or apricot color. It is nicknamed the "caramel tree" because the leaves have a sweet, caramelized sugar or cotton candy fragrance in the fall.



Ancient Chinese and Japanese folklore says that the shadow on the moon was created when a man being punished by the gods was sentenced to cut down a giant Katsura tree.

Katsura is a dioecious plant, producing male and female flowers on separate trees. Female trees produce pods which contain winged seeds. Katsura trees prefer rich soil, so mix compost with the soil when planting. Sometimes the leaves can scorch in very sunny and dry sites, so it would do well in a protected site with a bit of shade in the afternoon.. Katsura can be grown in USDA zones 4 to 8. Several cultivars exist in the trades with some dwarf and weeping forms available. Following are descriptions of a few cultivars.”

Pendulum’: ‘Pendulum’ weeping katsura tree, is one of the most beautiful cultivars of *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. Its delicately spreading growth with gently drooping branches create such an idyllic sight. The tree should be planted in a solitary position, if for no other reason than to show it off to its best advantage. It can be planted in the ground outdoors or in a pot. Due to its slow growth, a potted weeping katsura can also be placed in an unheated garage during the winter months. The cultivar ‘Pendulum’ is the variety most commonly found in plant nurseries, with other cultivars being trickier to find.

‘Red Fox’: Another variety of katsura which has enjoyed lasting popularity is *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* ‘Red Fox’. It can grow up to 6 meters in height and width and forms an umbrella-like crown of strikingly red leaves. As a tree which prefers warmth, it is sensitive to late frosts.

‘Strawberry’: The cultivar ‘Strawberry’ grows reddish-pink leaves with soft yellow tones in summer. This variety is difficult to find in nurseries and garden centers.

Ruby’ Katsura is a smaller (30 feet tall) tree that sports blue-purple leaves

‘Dawes Ascension’ Katsura (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum* ‘Dawes Ascension’): On the taller side for Katsura (50 feet); has a columnar shape - green-blue leaves turn apricot yellow in fall

Dwarf varieties ‘Heronwood Globe’ Katsura, ‘Glowball’ Katsura, ‘Boyd’s Dwarf’ Katsura, ‘Herkenrode Dwarf’ Katsura, and ‘Kruckeberg Dwarf’ Katsura - Smallest of the cultivars, topping out at 8 to 15 feet

The Drive Through Lane – The Words You Never Want To Hear

This can happen at other drive through lanes, but it happens most often at you popular take out place that begins with MC.....Followed by a favorite Disney character that stutters like a drunken duck...

I remember the first McDonalds that opened in Fort Wayne – hamburgers cost a dime each. Nowadays, there are Happy Meals, McRib's, Sausage Bagels and Biscuits, Big Macs and a plethora of sides.

Recently we stopped at a MacDonalds on the S/W side of town. I ordered two sandwiches and a small strawberry shake. Big Mistake.... We paid and received our bag of food with the most hated words in carry-out history. "Pull up to the empty space and we will bring out the shake." It seems as if drink items cause problems at Mickey D's. The shake, ice cream and iced flavored coffee machines are often broken, or no one appears to be around to actually make the items. Hence the banishment into Fast Food purgatory.

In my opinion, there is over a 75% chance that your shake will never arrive. After a twenty minute wait, one then must go inside the store to try and retrieve the item. Usually one has to stand in a long line with other frustrated customers whose iced coffee was never made. When one finally talks to a real person, one is usually met with a blank look of puzzlement, The person disappears and then one hears " Does anyone know about a strawberry shake that someone ordered? The person appears after a short search and asks "What did you order?

Another ten minutes goes by – eventually they come back with a vanilla shake. "Sorry".....

I always want to ask " What exactly happened to my shake? Did it disappear in some sort of space time dysfunction? Swallowed in a black hole? Was the shake stolen by rats? No one will ever know....

There have been a few times where I refused to move my vehicle to the designated empty space. I told the check out person : I am not moving.. I'll wait here till the end of time – through a nuclear holocaust - for all of my food – I don't care if you don't have any hash brown potatoes ready – I am waiting here... After a few efforts to get me to move- they gave up, After 10 minutes or so- I was given my hash browns in sullen silence..

So what can one do? I could offer to bribe the check-out person. I could pretend to talk on the phone with my cousin Vinny and feign a conversation where I say " Vinny no don't come and tell the checkout perron if they would like to be thrown in the river with cement blocks tied to their shoes.. No please.....

If one is assigned to checkout purgatory here are several things you can do.

Read a copy of War and Peace.

Play an entire game of Risk with your partner.

Begin to direct traffic around the building - sending people in the wrong direction.

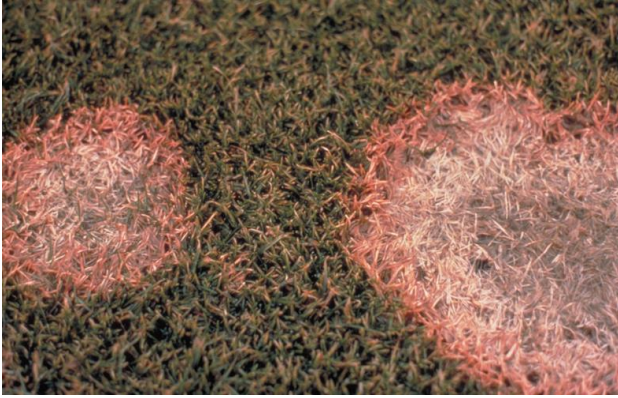
Begin begging for spare change at the check-out windows.

Pretend you are an employee and take orders from customers waiting in line. Toss the orders in a trash bin.

Cover the speaker at the ordering stations with duct tape..

I do feel bad for the underpaid workers who exist in an environment where the business is understaffed. But honestly someone just needs to make a crappy strawberry shake...

Leave The Leaves



When I review social media posts – I am surprised about the number of people who believe that if leaves are left on a lawn – the leaves will somehow kill a lawn. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leaving leaves on a lawn in general will recycle nutrients back into the lawn. It's like a free fertilizer treatment for the lawn heading into the spring.

There are exceptions. Huge deep piles of leaves left on a lawn can sometimes cause issues – especially if we have big snow on top of the leaves. Snow molds can develop under the leaves where snow is slow to melt.

Snow molds are fungi that develop in lawns when soils are saturated with water under snowbanks and matted leaves. This creates a perfect environment for snow mold fungi that develop best when temperatures are between 35-45 degrees. The types of snow mold are either pink or grey – named after the colored fruiting bodies of the fungus. The lawn area initially is matted – and the turf area develops circular patches where the turf dies or is damaged as the spring arrives. The worst thing about snow molds are the overwintering structures called sclerotia that remain in the area and reinfect the area each year.

Snow molds are notoriously difficult to control once established and often professionals must be hired to rid a lawn of snow mold because they will reappear and spread each year.

Snow molds are the reason that experts recommend mowing the lawn shorter before the winter hits. Shovel off deep snow that can accumulate in areas of drifting – or areas where one has piled snow after clearing sidewalks for example. Rake the grass in matted areas to improve air circulation. One can mow piled leaves in a lawn in autumn to help lighten the load on turf areas, or rake and use leaves for winter protection - or use the leaves for compost.

Snow molds usually won't affect large areas of lawn, but they are just one more thing to worry about as we move from winter into spring. Happy holidays everyone...

Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic



To my caregiver:I am deeply upset with your care. Don't tell me to go to a designated area while you take your sweet time or completely forget to deposit my cheap food in my dish. Telling me that you are short staffed (a staff of one) is no excuse. I will notify my cat kingdom and they will picket your front door to tell everyone in the neighborhood what a careless and lazy caretaker you really are...

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