

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks

and Home Horticulture

March 2024 Issue

Written and compiled by Ricky D. Kemery, Allen County Extension Educator Retired, phone: 260 - 431- 6893

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.

Local Horticulture Expert to Offer “Sensible Sustainability” Gardening Seminar at Aboite Library Branch

When: Tuesday April 2 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Where: Aboite Library Branch - 5630 Coventry Lane, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46804

Ricky Kemery, Purdue (Allen County) Horticulture Extension Educator (retired) will discuss innovative – common sense - sustainable gardening techniques to attract pollinators, grow healthy vegetables and flowers with less maintenance and less “chemicals”.

Ricky Kemery spent 23 years as a Horticulture Educator in Allen County. He also writes bi-weekly articles for the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, and is the author of an online newsletter, Home Horticulture, that has over 1650 subscribers. He also teaches Hort 101-Beginning Horticulture at PFW.

Ricky will also give away two copies of his new book “Sensible Sustainability” at the end of the free seminar.

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Early Spring Stuff

The winter months are good for catching up on gardening info. This winter, I learned that it is good to fertilize peonies early in the year before the peonies emerge. Use a well balanced fertilizer to give the peonies a great head start. This is also a good time to fertilize tulips as they emerge. Fertilizing now will give the tulips a bloom burst heading into spring. Fertilize once more after bloom to give the bulbs a boost for next year.

This year I will fertilize all the emerging perennials early to get them off to a good start. Any well-balanced fertilizer will do to scatter about – hopefully just before a rain.

My perennials are emerging now with the warm weather. It's good to have a few piles of loose leaves to cover any tender perennials that could get zapped by late spring frosts or freezes.

Now is also a good time to begin removing weeds as they appear – but I would wait to mulch until mid to late April after the soil warms up more. Mulching too early can actually prevent soil from warming up in the spring and delay plant development. Beware of some businesses that want to come in and mulch - even when the ground is still frozen. Naughty Naughty.....



Fungus Gnats

Some info compiled from The Spruce

There is nothing worse than to brush against one's houseplants and be rewarded by a cloud of flying insects that land on your face and fly around in an annoying fashion. Although they look like tiny mosquitoes, fungus gnats are small flies of the *Orfelia* and *Bradysia* species. They are fairly tiny insects. They can be identified by their narrow legs, light gray or clear wings, and segmented antennae larger than their heads. The adults grow to be about 1/16 to 1/8 inch long.

Fungus gnats are relatively slow flyers that typically hang out on the soil of plants or nearby the plants, although they may venture out far enough to fly near your face if you're sitting close to a plant. Again, they are harmless to humans, and they do not bite. Think of them as fruit flies that hang around plants instead of fruit.

Fungus gnats do not bite people or pets. Adult gnats don't do much damage to plants; instead, the larvae will munch on your plant's tiny feeder roots, limiting the plant's ability to take up nutrients and stunting its growth. Fungus gnats are primarily a problem in nurseries, where many susceptible young seedlings are grown in damp conditions. While you may not be growing your plants in a nursery or greenhouse setting with a large enough population, they can also pose a threat to common houseplants.

The easiest first step to control fungus gnats is to allow the soil to remain dry for several days before watering again. Both the eggs and the larvae will eventually die off in dry soil. Also, remove any standing water from runoff saucers.

Hydrogen Peroxide As Larvicide

Mix one part of hydrogen peroxide and four parts of water. Use this solution to water your plants. Hydrogen peroxide will kill the gnat larvae and not injure your plant. Keep reapplying weekly until you notice the gnats are gone.

Vinegar for a Gnat Trap

Pour apple cider vinegar into a cup or glass and mix in a few drops of dish soap. Cover it with tape or cheesecloth, leaving holes large enough for the bugs to get to it. They'll be attracted by the scent, try to sip the solution, and drown.

Potato Traps

Existing fungus gnat larvae can be trapped using pieces of raw potato. Place the potato pieces flesh side down on the soil and check under them every couple of days. Remove any feeding larvae and replace the potato with fresh pieces. Do not let the potatoes dry out.

Sticky Traps

The adults have short lives, but reducing their population will also reduce the number of new eggs being laid. To control adult fungus gnats, use yellow sticky traps. These are exactly what they sound like: sheets of yellow paper with adhesive. Yellow sticky traps are sold in the pesticide section of your garden center. You can also find small versions that come with little stakes that you stab into the soil.¹

Fungus gnats are attracted to the color yellow and get stuck in the traps. When the trap is full, throw it away and place another one. It's not a pretty sight, but it is an easy, nontoxic way to eliminate large quantities of adult fungus gnats. It is also a great way to monitor fungus gnats' presence and see if their population has become a problem.



Biological control options include *Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies israelensis (Bti), the same bacteria used for mosquito control in ponds. These bacteria control gnats but pose no risk to people or pets. Look for "Bt" in the form of mosquito dunks or granules (in the pest control section or near pond supplies in a home or garden center). **Mosquito dunks** are dissolved in water, and the solution is used for watering the plants. You will probably need more than one application but follow the label instructions. Granules are sprinkled over the soil, introducing some bacteria with each watering.

Knock out Gnats is another biological control option containing Bti. This product was offered by a company called Gardens Alive based out of southern Indiana. It appears as if Gurneys (a large garden supplier) purchased Gardens Alive. I just purchased some Knock-Out Gnats from Gurneys for use at the PFW greenhouse as we have some fungal gnats there. We will see how it works.

Permaculture Guilds and Food Forests

The idea of establishing a permaculture “guild” around plants is a very hot topic nowadays. I have written about permaculture before in past issues. The use of guilds came about by observing how certain plants would naturally group themselves together in an unmanaged setting. Bill Mollison – a permaculture advocate from Australia – developed this process - moved to Canada – and continued to advocate for permaculture - beginning in the Pacific northwest.

Some scientists have been able to demonstrate that certain plants’ proximity to one another was mutually beneficial. Its like companion planting taken to a new level.

The concept of designing human-made guilds is relatively new, and many early experiments are still in progress. Still, guilds may provide a roadmap for developing interconnected ecosystems, which may reduce our workload and increase yield over time.

The goal of the guild is to underplant a central element, such as a fruit or nut tree, with plants that are highly useful, multifunctional, and that might naturally be found growing together. For example, under-plantings in a guild might include plants that fertilize, repel pests, attract beneficial insects, create mulch, and suppress grass, and more. It is about the idea of creating a “food forest” as an alternative to conventional gardens and landscapes.

The most common example of fruit tree guild is that of the apple tree guild. You can prevent grass from creeping under the tree and repel wildlife by planting a ring of daffodils and garlic chives at the drip line of the tree. Bee balm, dill, and fennel peppered underneath can attract pollinators.

Comfrey, dandelion, yarrow, and white clover may accumulate nutrients and fix nitrogen to fertilize the soil. Comfrey and nasturtiums provide mulch or green manure. Bee balm, garlic chives, and yarrow emit strong scents that may repel pests.

Because apple scab fungus is a common ailment of apple trees, fennel and garlic chives provide some anti-fungal properties. Below is an example of a guild planted under and around a small cherry tree. Examples of various guilds are found in a guide called Gaes garden. I found a free copy online- and it also can be purchased as a part of course offered by permaculture experts. I have talked with a few people who claim the guild process improves plant growth, reduces pest and disease pressure, attracts pollinators, and reduces weed pressure. Most of the observations are based on short term observations. I am still not convinced that establishing permaculture guilds is the end all solution system for plants. The claims seem to be greater than the results I have seen – which involves a lot of work establishing a guild while fighting the inevitable weeds that appear early in the process. It certainly does no harm in trying to establish a guild under fruit trees for example- Let me know how it all works out long term with observations other than “I am sure my plants are doing better”



There are many books about permaculture out on the market – and they all cost money. Here is a recent review of one series of books about permaculture offered by Amazon. “Although Volume 2 ostensibly emphasizes "practical" information building on the "theoretical" ideas in Volume 1, it is clear that both volumes are essentially theoretical. That's because (as we discussed in our review of Volume 1) nobody has yet convincingly shown the viability of forest gardening (relying heavily on perennial crops) in temperate areas as a sustainable alternative to conventional gardening (based mainly on annual crops). Jacke and Toensmeier are, admirably, attempting to disseminate ideas gathered from a variety of source that might enable such viability. Ultimately, at this stage of development of temperate-zone forest gardening techniques, virtually all approaches are experimental and in need of validation. We simply do not currently know their limitations.” There ya go –you are in uncharted territory.

Trends in Style

I like to watch T.V. programs on interior design and also garden design. “Filthy Garden SOS was a fav British program where a troop of garden experts attempted to rescue abandoned gardens in merry old England. I loved the title of the show and they did good work.

The thing is that styles change – especially between generations. So it no wonder that Millennials have rejected the minimal – rather sterile – designs favored by the Boomers. Forget the clean white kitchens promoted by Joanna and Chip Gaines and others. Its time to go Gothic.

Gothic design was popular around Europe in the Middle Ages when style tended to follow church and cathedral design. It became popular again in Victorian England and is enjoying a renaissance once again in 21st Century interior design.





Think pointed arches, wood paneling, and stained glass. And, while dark colors are definitely featured, they don't have to adorn every surface, and you don't have to be limited to black.. **Gothic-style homes** typically use dark colors like navy, burgundy, and black to create a mysterious feeling. Gold and silver accents are also popular to add some glamour. Neutral shades like grey or cream can help balance out the overall look. Wallpaper is a must-have in Gothic room design. It was used extensively, and if you want an authentic look to your room, you have to have at least some of it on your walls. Arched windows and stained glass are popular - curtains not only need to be made from a dark material but a heavy one. Velvet drapery is popular.

Whimsigoth is the newest trend in gothic design. It mixes some of design's best elements: rich colors, elegant patterns, and a combination of styles and finishes. Whimsigoth is an eclectic style, which gives it some serious design flexibility. Of course, it's easy to sway more gothic or whimsical, but you can also play up greenery and wood finishes for a more organic style. Or go romantic with florals and lace or lean into dark academia with plenty of books and leather. The key to whimsigoth style is not going full goth. It's not macabre. Whimsy is essential. It's more otherworldly and ethereal than it is creepy and sinister." Celestial elements like moons and stars are often used to add that lighthearted character. Contrasting elements also define the look: whimsigoth mixes heavy and light fabrics, uses both hard and soft materials, and adds bright colors among the dark. Stone floors, heavy rugs, ornate chandeliers, wrought iron accessories, and maximalist walls filled with pictures are also considered classic goth design.



Gothic style in the garden Modern-day goth gardens are a captivating blend of Victorian-inspired aesthetics and a macabre atmosphere. These gardens evoke a sense of mystery, romance, and a touch of the eerie. Here are some key elements that define modern goth gardens:

Dark and Moody Plants: The heart of a goth garden lies in its plant selection. Look for

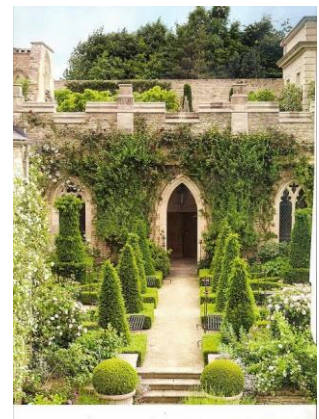
deep-hued flowers that create a striking presence. While true jet-black flowers are rare, there are near-black cultivars of popular favorites like petunias, irises, and tulips. These plants add drama and intrigue when in bloom. Consider varieties like the 'Beaujolais' sweet pea, 'Black Magic' bachelor's buttons, and 'The Watchman' hollyhock. Deep red Amaranth also adds gothic interest with its unique shape.



Spooky Foliage: Even when flowers aren't in bloom, a goth garden maintains its allure through foliage plants. Opt for dark and ominous colors like black, dark purple, and deep green. Coral bells, coleus, and sweet potato vine are excellent choices. Their leaves take center stage, creating a year-round macabre atmosphere.

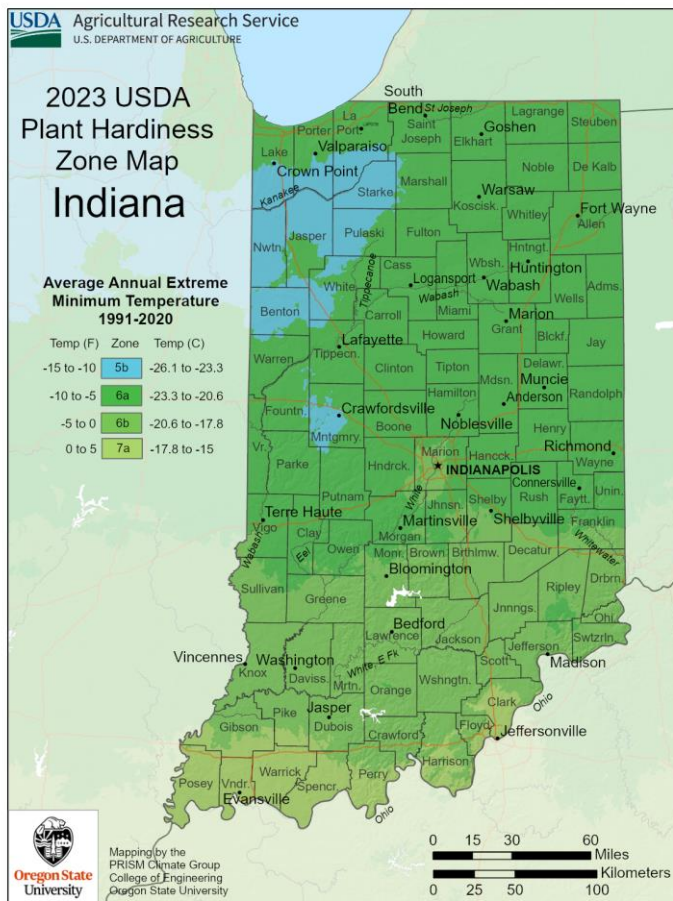


Victorian-Inspired Décor: Incorporate elements reminiscent of the Victorian era. Think of ornate wrought-iron gates, stone arches, and elaborate fountains. These features add to the gothic charm of the garden.



Hardiness Zone Changes - Once Again

Below is the most recent USDA Hardiness zone map for the state of Indiana. The feds have basically turned almost all of northern Indiana into zone 6 A – showing the effect of climate change on how cold it actually gets in the winter months. Only a section of northwest Indiana remains in zone 5. The Map is based on average minimum temperatures recorded over the last several years. It is important to keep in mind that this doesn't mean it still doesn't get really cold in northern Indiana – it just means it just hasn't gotten as cold – on average – than in previous decades. My advice is to take any change with some caution and use with caution plants hardy to zone 6a in your landscapes.



English Daisy



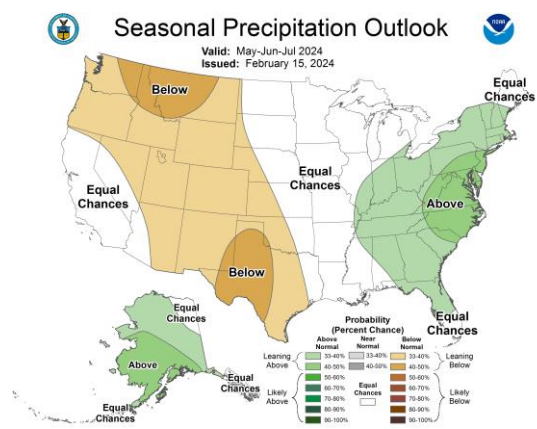
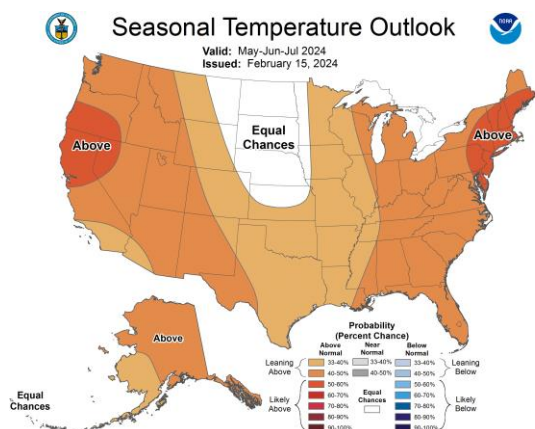
Muhly Grass

With these zone changes, it may not be necessary to dig Cannas, Dahlias, and other tender bulbs in the fall. Some tender azaleas and rhodos may be available to plant in our area. Evergreen shrubs such as False cypress may perform better in our landscapes. Roses could winter over with less damage. Our last frost days have changed so one many be able to plant a week or so earlier in the spring with less fear of cold injury. We will see how it all works out- on average – in the years to come. On the right are three plants that may be more plantable in our landscapes.



Previously "tender"
Perennial Salvias

Here are the **Climate Prediction Centers forecasts** for May- through August/ For our area they predict above average temperatures and rainfall. It could be a hot humid summer – oh My!.



Apples at the Grocery Store

Many grocery stores now have a wide variety of different apples on display. Now more and more organic apples are offered also. This is good because apples – primarily grown in the Pacific Northwest – are sprayed with a plethora of chemicals so your apples at the store are free of any blemish that might cause concern. Most apples in a grocery have been coated with wax to make them last longer in the store. Anyway the wonderful thing about apples is they usually come with a story – how they were found- the people who found and developed them – most have a history.

Red Delicious - Red Delicious is still one of the top five most popular apples in the world. Jesse Hiatt was a Quaker farmer who lived in a log cabin with his family of 12 in the late nineteenth century. He and his family planted an orchard on their farm, and eventually a chance seedling grew between the rows. Jesse Hiatt tried to chop down the seedling three years in a row. The tree kept growing back, so he gave up and let the tree grow. Ten years later, the apple bore fruit. The bright red and yellow fruits were sweet and crisp, and Jesse Hiatt and his family were delighted with the fruit. They brought the apples to fairs and fruit shows for years. Eventually, the Stark Brothers Nursery recognized the apple's potential and bought the variety in the 1890s, naming it Red Delicious. If you're making apple juice or apple cider, consider using Red Delicious apples. Grocery stores wax Red Delicious apples and store them for months.

Envy - Envy apples have quickly risen to the top in terms of popular, exciting apples available today. They are a cross between two other beloved varieties – the Royal Gala and the Braeburn. HortResearch, located in New Zealand, developed the Envy apple in 2009. Envy has thicker, tougher skin than other apples. Envy apples are known to be very sweet and low in acidity. Many people prefer to eat them fresh.

Granny Smith - This variety is the perfect apple to use for all of your favorite apple treats, from caramel apples to apple pie. Granny Smith apples were named after a real-life Granny Smith. Maria Smith lived in Australia in the late 1860s when an apple seedling sprouted from the pile where she'd disposed of the crab apples she'd used for baking. She'd never seen a seedling like this one, so she let it keep growing.

Once the Granny Smith seedling bore apples, the flavor and color impressed her. She began selling the seeds to other local farmers. The apples became popular in Australia over the next fifty years. In the 1970s, Granny Smith apples reached the United States and immediately became just as popular as it had been in Australia. Sour apple enthusiasts love the tart, bright flavor of this apple, and bakers everywhere regard this apple as the perfect fruit for fall baking.

Evercrisp - The Evercrisp apple has taken nearly twenty years to evolve. Mitch Lynd of Lynd Fruit Farms in Pataskala had a mission to create an apple variety that held all desirable apple traits and qualities, such as flavor, crispness, and being pleasantly crunchy. In 1998 this variety evolved from collecting Fuji apple blossoms, removing the Fuji tree pollen, and then transferring this Fuji pollen to Honeycrisp tree blossoms.

Fuji - most popular apple variety in all of Japan. Their crisp, refreshing flavor is a favorite all over the world, making them one of the best apple varieties for snacking. Fuji apple variety was developed in Fujisaki, Japan, in the late 1930s. Researchers at Tohoku Research Station crossed the Red Delicious and Ralls Janet apple.

Gala - Gala apple became the apple with the highest production in 2018, taking the place of Red Delicious. They are similar in color to Envy although they usually have striping as well. Galas have a fine texture to the meat of the fruit and are very aromatic. This apple also originated in New Zealand.

Golden Delicious - Golden Delicious apples are a versatile variety. They can really be used for almost anything. Golden Delicious is the perfect apple for making homemade apple juice or cider, since they are naturally sweet and juicy. It was found by chance during the early 20th century on the Mullins farm in West Virginia. Anderson Mullins was a family farmer who kept a small orchard. He discovered a crop of yellow apples on a tree that he didn't remember planting. He sent some of the apples to the Stark Brothers, who were impressed by the rich flavored yellow apples.

Honeycrisp - The Honeycrisp is another apple that might seem new but was actually created in 1960. In the last decade they've exploded onto the market and can be found alongside seasonal favorites. Great for eating fresh, as it has a great balance of sweet, tart, and crisp flavor.

Pink Lady - The Pink Lady has been around since the 1970s. John Cripps began developing the apple on his farm in Australia. John Cripps was a horticulturist born in England but moved to Western Australia to work for the Department of Agriculture. Throughout the mid-1900s, he worked on developing different varieties of plants. In the 1970s, he naturally bred the Lady Williams and Golden Delicious apple. The result was a beautiful pink apple that became popular worldwide.

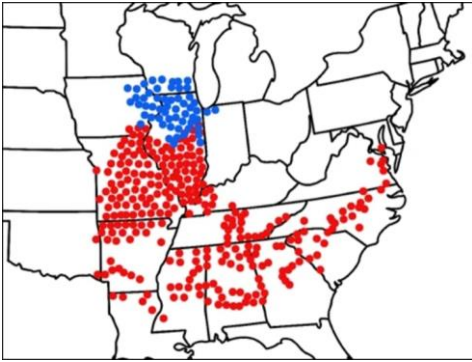
Cicadas Gone Wild Compiled from NBC News



This spring, two different broods of cicadas — one that lives on a 13-year cycle and the other that lives on a 17-year cycle — will emerge at the same time from underground in a rare, synchronized event that last occurred in 1803. Billions of the winged insects will make an appearance across the Midwest and the Southeast, beginning in some places in late April, for a raucous mating ritual that tends to inspire fascination and annoyance in equal measure.

This year's dual emergence is a once-in-a-lifetime event. While any given 13-year brood and 17-year brood can occasionally emerge at the same time, each specific pair will see their cycles aligned only once every 221 years. What's more, this year's cicada groups, known as Brood XIII

and Brood XIX, happened to make their homes adjacent to one another, with a narrow overlap in central Illinois.



“Thomas Jefferson was president the last time these two broods came out, so is it rare? Yes,” said Gene Kritsky, an entomologist at Mount St. Joseph University in Cincinnati and author of “A Tale of Two Broods,” a book about this year’s dual emergence that was published earlier this month. After 2024, Brood XIII and Brood XIX cicadas won’t sync up their emergences again for another 221 years.

These types of cicadas are periodical insects that spend most of their lives underground feeding on tree roots. After 13 years or 17 years, depending on their brood, the cicadas will tunnel to the surface to reach maturity and engage in a monthlong, noisy search for a mate. Cicadas

typically surface in the spring once soil reaches a temperature of around 64 degrees Fahrenheit.

Brood XIII cicadas appear in the Midwest, mostly centered in Illinois but also stretching into Wisconsin, Ohio and Iowa. Brood XIX cicadas have been spotted over a much larger geographic area that includes Missouri, Illinois, Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland. When these insects emerge, they do so in big numbers. And they're not exactly quiet in their mating frenzy. The insects are known to emit a high-pitched buzz, or mating song, that can reach up to 100 decibels — roughly equivalent to a motorcycle or jackhammer.

But even beyond science, this year offers a chance to experience a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon, Kritsky said.

“This is my 50th year studying cicadas,” he said. “I know there will be a lot of us in that boundary zone in Illinois, driving back and forth, meeting for coffee and having pie.

The last time two broods of cicadas emerged at once in Indiana, the year was 1803 and Thomas Jefferson was President. In 2024, the 13-year Brood XIX cicadas will appear in 8 western counties across the Hoosier State, according to Purdue University, from Posey and Warrick counties near Evansville in the south, to Newton and Jasper counties on the north.

Ricky’s Comments: I can hardly wait to meet for coffee with someone and talk about cicadas. Maybe we can have a special locust infused latte.

Big Events and Everyday Life



In 1986 the year I first began college at the ripe age of thirty, Halley’s comet approached our solar system as part of a long 75 year journey. It’s a special thing to see something as rare in one’s lifetime. It’s a big comet yet it makes a person feel small in relation to one’s place in the big scheme of it all. It’s due back in 2061 when it’s predicted to make a relatively close pass to Earth and be as bright as the brightest stars in the night sky.

On April 8, 2024, much of North America will experience a solar eclipse: a cosmic alignment of Sun, Moon, and Earth, in that order. The Moon’s shadow path will make landfall on Mexico’s Pacific coast, cross the United

States from Texas to Maine, and exit North America via Newfoundland, Canada, continuing into the Atlantic Ocean. Fort Wayne is on the edge of the “path of totality” where one can view – with protective eyewear – The

full eclipse for the longest period of time. I have experienced a few total eclipses in my lifetime – its an eerie feeling to see the daylight dim as the eclipse occurs. One precious memory I have was viewing a total lunar eclipse long ago with my daughter Jessica in New Mexico – a great place to view such events because of the clear night sky at higher altitudes. We stayed up until the wee hours talking and observing the night sky.

One's life is marked by such momentous events – some celestial – and some not – some happy events like weddings – and some tragic – when a loved one passes away. JFK's assassination was a huge traumatic event- I was at school about 8 years of age – when all of a sudden teachers began crying and the principal announced the event. The entire school was hushed with sadness. It was a terrible day.

Everyone remembers getting married – usually a joyous day..

When children are born is another huge event – my first wife decided to have a “natural “ childbirth and about ¾ of the way into birth – decided she did indeed want painkillers. It was too late and the words that came out of her mouth to the doctor expressing her unhappiness were legendary. My son Richard's birth seven years later.

Deaths are the most difficult – I lost my parents at a young age. My mother's death was the most difficult as it was sudden. Her death affected my sisters and I greatly. I wanted so badly so have her come when I graduated college, but it was not to be. My friend Steve's death was really tough, as we played music together for many years when I lived out west. My second wife's death from Alzheimer's was a long process and a very difficult journey.

Other momentous events:

The Nixon years – from “ I am not a crook” The Vietnam War, to watching him resign and leaving his presidency.

The tragic events of 9/11- I had quit smoking the day before.

My trips to England with my second wife in 2007 – meeting my friends Michael and Annette – who drove us around England and Ireland. Wonderful memories,

My older sister's death last year.

The events of Jan 6 – very traumatic to watch.

The toxicity and events leading to my forced early retirement at Purdue Extension – Betrayal and Lies- so bad...

Reuniting and playing music with my friend Dan. Producing two music CD's with my friends Gwendra and Tommy and our sound engineer Austin.

Teaching students at Vincennes University on short notice- one of the most difficult and rewarding experiences of my life. Teaching Master Gardeners – I especially remember being given a potted silver maple by Beth Ann Sickafoose who happened to be on roller skates.

Getting a job working at the Purdue Horticulture Gardens working for and with Rosie Lerner and Mike Dana at Purdue. Getting into graduate school at Purdue. Being hired by Purdue University to teach beginning horticulture has brought joy and redemption.

Everyone has momentous events that mark their lives –I still struggle now on how to find joy in everyday life. I become lonely and isolated – getting around with severe arthritis in a wheelchair is a struggle. I find my patience and tolerance levels to be thin. Many people in everyday life just drag everyone down with their toxic behavior. They sometimes go out of their way to spread their unhappiness by lazy, disrespectful, unhelpful, selfish, and sometimes violent behavior.. They are the people that seem to love to do damage– at both

momentous and everyday moments. My first boss at Purdue, Roger Moll, once told me that it takes 15 people who spread joy in their lives to make up for the actions of just one damage dealer. All one can do is to try and spread joy – through music, art, and everyday behavior to spread joy in the world, and try to find happiness whenever and wherever we can.



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

I plan to live forever, so I will see the next cicada emergence, 17 years from now, and the next Halley's comet in 2053. I like to keep several cicadas in the house and bat them around into senselessness' – then placing them on my caregiver's bed.

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