

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks *(and Gnome Tales)*

April 2018 Issue

The Plant Medic - Ricky D. Kemery, Allen County Extension Educator Retired, phone: 260-431-6893

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks is an online newsletter designed to provide citizens of Allen County and northeastern Indiana with up-to-date information about Horticulture, written in a lighthearted style! To subscribe, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com stating: "Please add me to the email list for **"Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks."** (Or your own words to that effect.)

If you need a speaker for neighborhood association meetings, business groups, or other organizations, I will be glad to come and talk about gardening, landscaping or turf, the environment, sustainability. Just contact me at 260-431-6893. You can also email or text me with gardening questions, or pictures of poor sick and dying plants.

A Late Spring

Unusually wet and cool weather has dominated our area this spring. What a drag. Folks are in a bad mood and impatient for the warm weather. The gray skies have resulted in short tempers and dark moods

The trend is ultimately towards warmer than average temperatures and above average precipitation for this area.



Based on my experience La Nina pattern springs tend to be wetter than normal. Depending on how long the la Nina stays established, the summer could be generally cooler than average.

For the garden and landscape; this means narrow windows to get things done. Make sure the soil is workable. A good measure of when the ground is dry enough is when you cannot squeeze any water out of a clump of soil held in the palm of your hand.

According to the website [gdtracker](http://gdtracker.com), we have about a week or so to apply crabgrass controls to the lawn.

Apply a slow-release fertilizer application to the lawn in the next two weeks.

It will probably be May before any broadleaved herbicides can be applied to the lawn. Remember wait for the weeds to appear in the lawn before treating.

Planting perennials and shrubs and trees can begin – I have seen city crews planting trees already.

The window to plant spring cool season vegetables will once again be narrow. Get them out as soon as you can.

Based on climate predictions, it will be warm soon enough for all of us to pine for the cool temperatures of spring.

A Flying Squirrel Story



I enjoy watching birds as I have morning coffee and lollygag about planning my day. That is the great thing about being retired. One can lollygag without much guilt. My father also enjoyed watching birds as he grew older. I found that amazing because in his earlier years he could have cared less about birds. He was interested in everything else - music, citizen band and Ham radios and antennas, speed boats, fishing, and t-birds. As I turned out t-birds were the only kind of birds he noticed. He would buy a new t-bird every year because he travelled from Hamilton to Fort Wayne every day to work at Dana Corporation.

My father would research intensely his crafts for 2-3 years. He would lose interest after a while and move on to another passion. At the end it was birds. He would call me and excitedly describe some rare finch that visited his feeder, At the time I listened with bored amusement. It is funny how things go full circle.

Every morning the same birds drop by to gorge on the seed I provide. I placed the feeder in a yew shrub in which I pruned the lower branches. The yew makes a great haven for the smaller birds.

I have had squirrels visit other feeders in the past, and I found their cleverness at getting to the seed amusing.

I had yet to see a squirrel approach the feeder hanging in the yew bush. The feeder was similar in design to the feeder above, except there were many feeding stations located on the feeder so as many as 8 birds could feed at the same time. The feeder would often twirl like a carousel when birds flew on and off.

One dull grey rainy morning (as were 90% of the mornings this spring) I was gloomily sipping my morning coffee. Suddenly, I saw movement out the window. I watched as a squirrel perched itself on a yew branch near the feeder.



I could almost feel the squirrel's anticipation as it surveyed the full feeder- a motherlode of seed protein waiting to be relished by the squirrel. I swear I could almost see it licking its lips in anticipation.

Suddenly the squirrel gathered itself and leaped onto the feeder. Have you ever witnessed a child who tries to leap upon a merry-go-round circling at full speed? The foolish child usually spins off the merry-go-round and lands in a crumpled heap.

I watched as the squirrel landed on the feeder and did several revolutions as the feeder spun around. The squirrel flew off the feeder at the speed of light it seemed and landed in a clump of needles below on the ground. It all happened in an instant.

The dazed squirrel staggered off across my driveway. I never saw the squirrel again.

My dark mood and frown turned into a smile as I recalled in my own life how the best laid plans – often filled with anticipation- are dashed in an instant-often with disastrous results.

Hopefully the squirrel will learn not to leap on the feeder again. I am sure I heard the birds laughing as it tottered off in the distance...

Shrub Dogwoods

Shrub dogwoods are not used in landscapes as much as the small flowering trees that also belong to the genus *Cornus*. Shrub dogwoods can have attractive flower or berry displays, along with a host of other interesting features.

Most dogwood shrubs love moist, rich soil and they flourish in wet sites. In nature they are usually found growing at the edges of streams and other bodies of water. They are a great choice for an area of the garden with boggy soil. They can be quite shade tolerant, often found growing under large deciduous trees. Dogwood shrubs generally are very cold tolerant, but in hot places they tend to suffer unless they are planted in a location with afternoon shade.

Types of Dogwood Shrubs

Red Osier Dogwood (*C. stolonifera* or *C. sericea*) Red and Yellow Twig Dogwood

This native deciduous shrub has bright red twigs in the winter and grows about six feet tall and twice as wide. Some cultivars have yellow stems, such as the variety 'Yellow Twig'. The flowers and fruit are white. It grows in sun or shade and prefers wet soil. Stem color is more vivid when shrub is grown in full sun. It's hardy in USDA zones 2 to 9. I use mixed groupings of yellow and red-twig dogwood in combination with River Birch and ornamental grasses. Prune away older growth in late spring,



the like



Bloodtwig Dogwood (*C. sanguinea*)

This European species also has red stems in the winter. The flowers, which bloom in late spring, are white, and the fruit is black. Individual shrubs are taller than red or yellow twig dogwood, and grow to a height of ten feet. The cultivars 'Winter Flame' and 'Artic Flame' have red, yellow and orange stems with fantastic fall foliage. It's best suited for USDA zones 4 to 8.

Gray Dogwood (*C. racemosa*)

This dogwood is native to eastern North America and is known for the grayish cast to the leaves though young leaves also have a reddish color. Both flowers and fruit are white.

It grows to a height of 12 feet with the same spread. Grey Dogwood is more drought-tolerant than the other species of dogwood. It can be found in ditches and waste areas in addition to wet sites. It is much more rangy in appearance than other shrub dogwoods, but its berries are attractive to wildlife.



Tartarian Dogwood (*C. alba*)



This type of shrub dogwood has a more upright habit than the others, growing about 10 to 12 feet tall and six to eight feet wide. The flowers are white, two-inch clusters and are followed by white fruit.

The variety 'Argentea Marginata' is most common – and has variegated leaves. This variety is much less drought tolerant than other shrub dogwoods and is also more susceptible to fungal leaf spot.

The Lesser Known Cousins

Cornelian Cherry Dogwood (*Cornus mas*)

Cornelian Cherry Dogwood is native to central Europe. It is more drought-tolerant than other varieties. Left alone it can become a small tree or a very large shrub. Cornelian Cherry has edible red berries that were used in jams and jellies by early settlers. It also has very attractive forsythia-like yellow flowers that appear before the foliage in spring. Cornelian Cherry dogwood also develops attractive bark over time, so it is very useful as both an ornamental shrub or as a food source for humans and critters.



Silky Dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)

Silky Dogwood is less cold hardy than its other shrub dogwood cousins; but is still adapted to our area. This large native shrub has very distinctive bluish berries that are quite attractive and desirable by birds. There used to be a planting of silky dogwoods at Messiah Lutheran Church (on the north side of Fort Wayne).

Some information compiled from Brian Barth, Landscape Designer

Rose slugs are one of the first pests to appear in the spring. They are the larval stage of flying insects known as sawflies. They secrete a slimy substance over their body surface that makes them resemble small slugs. Rose sawflies are yellow-green in color and can grow to a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch maximum length. As the name suggest, rose sawflies feed on the leaves of rose shrubs.

Sawfly larvae feed on the surface of leaves of their respective host plant, removing the soft tissue leaving behind the papery, translucent surface and veins. Heavy defoliation gives plants a brown scorched appearance. In general, light to moderate infestations are cosmetic in nature and rarely harm the host plant. Heavier attacks, however, can weaken plants when leaf loss stresses them to the point of vulnerability to other insect and disease attacks.



Rose slugs are not a true caterpillars, so controls such as spinosad (Monterey Garden Insect control) can be effective. The control should be applied at the first sign of leaf damage, as rose slugs can do a t lot of damage quickly. Make sure not to spray on or near the flowers. We want to save the bees from pesticide exposure.



Wind Chimes

When I was growing up in the 1960's and 70's, I rarely saw or heard wind chimes

As it turns out, wind chimes have been around for thousands of years. Archeologists have unearthed wind chimes in Southeastern Asia, Greece and Egypt made from bones, shells and stones. The earliest wind chimes were thought to be used to ward off evil spirits.

The wind chime had also been developed independently along the shores of the Mediterranean and was being cast in bronze by the ancient Egyptians. However, evidence exists that wind chimes had a more practical use as well; farmers used the sound wind chimes and wind clappers make to scare birds and other animals from their cultivated fields.

In China and Japan, they became decorative art in private homes as well as on sacred structures.

In Asia and the ancient Mediterranean, wind chimes were used to attract benevolent spirits.

The Romans believed the sound of bells kept evil spirits away. The same is true for the Chinese who hung them on the corners of the pagodas and temples to frighten away birds as well as evil spirits and attract benevolent ones. Today the Chinese believe wind chimes connect people to nature and themselves to bring greater awareness and to live in the moment.

In many parts of Asia, wind chimes are thought to bring good luck and are used in Feng Shui, the arrangement of objects to achieve harmony and peace in a home or garden. Many teachings of Feng Shui say that wind chimes cure negative energies, provide protection and bring calm and balance to people.

By observing a wind chime, you can see the changes in the wind's direction and strength as well as being a signal for oncoming storms. This made them an effective tool for sailors, loggers and farmers.

The use of wind chimes moved from China to Japan and into the western world by the 1800s. Europeans and Americans were influenced by Asia art, design and philosophy.



By the 1970s, wind chimes gained popularity as companies began producing sophisticated and precision-tonal musical chimes.

Today wind chimes are seen both inside and outside, integrated in rituals and ceremonies and heard in music, including some of the Beatle's songs. Wind chimes are also used for decorative purposes in homes and businesses.

The editors of How Products Are Made, describe a wind chime as a musical instrument "that harnesses the wind as its player and composer." There are three main types of wind chimes; a cluster

of small objects that clink together, a group of objects that are struck by a clapper, and a bell with a clapper.

According to Guinness World Records, the largest wind chime ever built measures forty-two feet and hangs nearly fifty feet from the ground. The instrument was designed by Jim Bolin in 2012 and currently resides in Casey, Illinois. Casey is also the home of the world's largest pitchfork, golf tee, mailbox, clogs, and rocking chair.

Many people today hang wind chimes in doorways and windows to keep bad luck from entering their home. Wind chimes hung in the front door can also alert you when someone enters. In movies, the sound of wind chimes and bells signals danger.



Today, they are widely used around the world. Many people consider wind chimes to be good luck.

Wind chimes can have a healing effect on the mind and body.

The positive sounds of wind chimes are thought to promote relaxation and reduce anger and tension.

Author Resource: Glenn Mast - Seeds of Wellness

Miner Bees are Out And About

I have received a few reports of solitary bee activity. There bees usually are small, and either make nests in the ground, or sometimes will excavate nests (or try to) in brick. The entry holes are a ¼ inch in diameter or less.

Digger or miner bees are solitary bees that emerge early in the spring, and create underground galleries, with queens living individually and raising their own young. The entrances to the nests are located in small piles or patches of bare soil. They do not form hives, but several females may nest in the same area. Digger bee queens do not defend their nesting areas and are very docile and unlikely to sting, posing little or no threat to people. The males often patrol an area inhabited by females seeking mates. While the males can be very active and seem aggressive, they lack a sting and are also harmless. Like other bees, they are active foragers of nectar and pollen from flowers, making them beneficial pollinators.



Their nest entrances are small mounds of soil a few inches across. While they may briefly detract from the aesthetics of a well-tended lawn, they do absolutely no harm to the grass or soil—the nests are abandoned after the spring nesting season and the soil washes back into the holes when it rains.

If you feel you must get rid of ground bees even for the brief time they live in your lawn, there is no need to use pesticides. Ground bees prefer dry soil to nest in, and simply watering the area that they have chosen will cause them to move to another area. If you find ground nesting bees return to your lawn in large numbers year after year, run a sprinkler on the area before they show up; ground nesting bees prefer dry soil to wet soil and will look elsewhere to make their nests.

I must point out that later in the spring, we will see the activity of Cicada Killers and Carpenter bees. There bees require a different strategy. Later on in summer, the aggressive yellow jacket wasp will also nest in the ground. These require great caution to control. Here is a good website on all sorts of ground nesting bees

<http://www.bumblebee.org/OTHERbees.htm>

Source: TURF, LAWN CARE, PEST CONTROL, NEW GARDEN SELECT March 27, 2013

Hoggles'



A Cat Complaint Letter:

To my Caregiver: I must protest the use of wind chimes that you recently installed outside your window (see picture at left). Not only am I affronted by this unabashed exploitation of cats; but any feline knows that cats and fish are not “friends” as this ridiculous contraption suggests. We eat fish, we don’t stand on top of them listening to calming sounds of bells! —furthermore my precious cat sleep is being interrupted by the incessant sound of chimes- I will write letters to anyone who can resolve

First Flowers



Red and Silver Maples are producing flowers later this year – about a month late, actually. These soft maples are one of the first to produce flowers in the spring. Their red to red-orange flowers provide some welcome color during the grey spring days. Waiting on deck are the magnolias – Star Magnolia with its white flowers, and Saucer magnolia with pink flowers. Sometimes the flower displays

are shorted by spring freezes. We will have to wait and see what happens this year.



Many folks worry about the effect of freezes on the flowers of daffodil, crocus, and other spring flowers bulbs. The flowers can wither and die when freezing temperatures occur. The plants are quite cold hardy. Sometimes one can cover the flowers with a light blanket. This will give an extra two to three degrees of protection.

Donations to support the cause are accepted – any amount in the form of checks is fine to cover some expenses. Send to Ricky Kemery 5929 Lorman Court Fort Wayne, Indiana 46835. Ads for businesses are also accepted a small fee / donation will be gratefully accepted.

Tell a your friends this newsletter is available for all who want it- just send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com - Or text 260-431-6893 *I will not share information with others.*

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