

Ricky's Gardening Tips and Tricks and Home Horticulture

October 2021 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.

Handy Apps for Plant Identification

I learned how to identify plants the old-fashioned way in college. One memorized the ID characteristics unique to a particular plant, and then looked at the plants out in the field. Tests were a nightmare. Nowadays, all it takes is a cell phone with an application – so when one takes a picture of a plant, the app will tell you what it is.

I am not sure if any real learning takes place when one doesn't really have to know the characteristics of a plant to know what it is – or its role in an ecosystem. Then again, most folks don't want to be identification specialists – they want quick answers. Here are some cool applications for Android phones. I am sure they also exist for I-Phone users.



PlantNet - If you are looking for a free app that enables you to identify plants simply by photographing them with your mobile phone, you should definitely try Pl@ntNet.

LeafSnap - LeafSnap has a very nice user-friendly interface and makes it simple to find out the name of every app-known plant. LeafSnap can identify about 90% of all known species of plants and trees. This app is free but contains ads. It also has a premium version that removes these ads. LeafSnap can also identify a plant from any photo containing various parts of the plant such as leaf, flower, fruit, or tree bark.

PlantSnap - With the help of a huge plant database and artificial intelligence, PlantSnap is able to identify a large variety of plants in the blink of an eye. The PlantSnap creators claim that at this time, their app can identify over 625,000 plants, trees & mushrooms. All I can say is the app better be 100% correct on mushroom ID, or bad things could happen.

Google Lens - Basically, with Google Lens, you can search and identify anything you see, - animal, an object, or a plant. If you are one who uses the plant identification apps only to find the name of specific flowers, trees, or weeds, Google Lens is all you need.

PictureThis - PictureThis is one of the most popular mobile apps for identifying plants from a photo on Google Play. According to the information displayed on the apps description page, PictureThis is able of distinguishing 10,000+ species of plants with an accuracy of 98%. The free subscription contains ads and only a limited number of free shots (IDs). You can, however, earn more free IDs by watching an ad, by sharing the app with your friends, by accessing the app daily to claim your free IDs, or by playing “feeling lucky,” which is like a spin-to-win game.

Chelsea Garden Show You Heard It Here First?

A brand-new hot gardening trend was introduced at the annual and prestigious Chelsea Garden show this year.

The trend in question involves growing vegetables and flowers together in one space – with an abundance of benefits in the garden – and the kitchen.

Garden experts predict this trend will take over patches far beyond the festival. Arthur Parkinson “The Pottery Gardener” discusses its benefits for wildlife. 'It's really good because it means rather than having a monoculture of one crop, you're making it much better for insects,' he says. “Flowers and veg make sense. If you grow your sweet peas amongst your runner beans, you're going to get more bees, and therefore you'll get more pollination. It just makes the vegetable garden look fuller, more romantic, and abundant.” “This trend is also effective as 'organic pest control' as you are naturally protecting your vegetables with flowers.



Landscape designer Alan Williams similarly showcased the trend through his Parsley Box Garden at Chelsea, where he combined vegetables such as kohlrabi and cabbages amongst beautiful blooms in stunning shades of yellow and orange, mauve and burgundy. “Cook, eat, and garden within the same space.” It's just those little things you can do that will transform your garden and add even more texture and colors. It just gives you joy. This is the garden idea that you're about to see everywhere – you heard it here first”.

Ricky’s Comments: While this idea might be new for conservative British gardeners – it is not new for us yokels here in the midwestern United States. I personally have been growing “the veg” with flowers for many years. The idea of companion planting has been around for at least a decade or two in the U.S. I am glad that the Brits have actually come around to the idea of more sustainable approach to gardening and they have “woke up” and smelled the coffee – or perhaps a cuppa tea – with milk – of course.

Raspberries

Now would be a good time to prune raspberries.

Red raspberries were cultivated in Europe for centuries, growing wild as far south as Greece - north to Spain and as far north as Norway. Red raspberry was gathered by the people inhabiting Troy from vines growing at the foothills in the first century B.C. Romans spread the seed of raspberries throughout their empire – all the way to Great Britain.

There are many kinds of raspberries, but all are members of the Rose family. Rose family members generally prefer full sun and well-drained soils and are unfortunately susceptible to fungal diseases and various insect issues.



William Prince established the first plant nursery that offered raspberry plants in the American colonies in 1737 in Flushing, New York. Luther Burbank introduced many raspberry hybrids into American horticulture. He described raspberries as being the most complex genetic fruits in American fruit research. There are red, black, purple or yellow-fruited types.

Black raspberries are native only to North America, mainly the Eastern portions excluding the Gulf States. They are also known as black caps or thimbleberries. There are also native red raspberries (in addition to the raspberries introduced from Europe), and many cultivars have been developed from the wild species. Animals including black bear and coyote consume the juicy fruits. This species relies on bees and other pollinators to produce fruit.

Both types have a similar flavor, although some people find black raspberries sweeter. Like red raspberries, black raspberries have a hollow center and tiny “hairs” on the outside of the fruit. Healthy red raspberry stems are reddish-brown while black raspberry stems are greyish white. All I know is that when I used to ramble about in the woods, encountering a raspberry or “bramble” thicket resulted in torn jeans and numerous scratches on my arms and legs.

Many raspberry cultivars produce a non-bearing cane the first year, this cane then flowers and grows berries during the second season. For most raspberries, one must remove at ground level the canes that produced fruit this year, while allowing the canes that did not produce fruit to develop into fruit bearing canes for next year. Seems simple – if you can remember the phrase – out with the old - in with the new - you will be Ok. The fruiting canes are easy to spot later in the season as they will look withered and dried up. Sometimes there will be a bit of remaining fruit on the canes. In general, the remaining canes after pruning should be approximately 2 ½ - 3 feet apart.

If you mess up, and the potential fruit bearing cans are pruned, then little or no fruit will be produced the following year. Write yourself a note filled with self-recrimination and regret.

Of course, there are exceptions – everything in this group of plants is an exception. There are “everbearing” varieties that can produce two crops a year. ‘Heritage’ is the most common ever bearer. Since most of us can’t remember who we are most days, it is easier to just mow over ‘Heritage’ at the end of the year to produce one good crop a year.

Cornell University released a study that compared disease and survivability to planting depth and soil type and found that raspberries grown in raised beds performed much better compared with raspberries planted at soil level or below soil level - especially on heavy clay soils - which we have in our area. Beds that are about a foot in height are appropriate. Use a blend of compost, Canadian sphagnum peat moss, professional’s grower’s mix, and sand to fill the beds. You should not use a heavy potting mix or topsoil that contains mostly muck. These materials hold way too much water and will cause issues. Fertilize your raspberries using compost and well-rotted manure. Spraying the foliage with compost tea may help with fertility and disease issues. Drip irrigation during times of drought can also reduce disease problems. I am going to spare you more confusion by not discussing blackberries – also native to the U.S– or dewberries, loganberries, juneberries, jostaberries etc. Blame Luther Burbank for those varieties. Here is a nice website that discusses how to find and identify many brambles out there in the woods. [How to find blackberries, black raspberries and black dewberries - Farm and Dairy](#)



Chicken of the Glades

Florida is considering a new strategy to cull its Burmese python population by convincing Florida residents to eat the invasive snake. “They can be tasty if prepared correctly”, said water management district python hunter Donna Kalli. Kalli, who bakes cookies with python eggs, said she hopes python meat catches on if it's deemed safe because she doesn't

like killing an animal without being able to use all parts of it. Her python meat marketing suggestion: “Chicken of the Glades”. There are two things that jump out from Kalli’s remarks – pay for district python hunters is so low that they must resort to eating pythons for sustenance. Secondly – never leave marketing to a python hunter. Kalli eats python only a few times a year, using a mercury testing kit to look for high levels of the chemical element in her meat. I knew it was too good to be true.... A decade-old study found Everglades National Park pythons carried alarming amounts of mercury, a neurotoxin that can impair brain functioning and damage the reproductive system – of humans who foolishly eat pythons for sustenance. Kalli said the white meat of the python, though very chewy, can be used in recipes that normally call for chicken or pork. To make the python meat more tender, she uses a pressure cooker to cook it for 10 to 20 minutes before putting it in a recipe, such as a stir-fry, chili or spaghetti sauce. She also eats python eggs, which she said are good hard-boiled with Sriracha sauce.



Kalil with her python cookies - don't they look scrumptious?

“If you try to cook them like a fried egg, it will come out like a pancake and kind of rubbery,” Kalil said. “I add milk, garlic, mushrooms and peppers and scramble it also.”

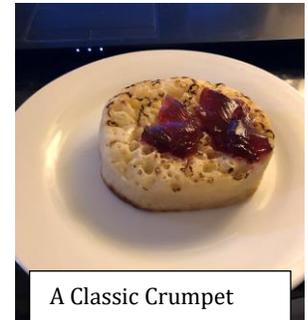
Well, a tire is rubbery – but I suppose that Sriracha can fix pretty much anything – Sriracha is what cooks use on the television series Chopped to “disguise” the flavor of - say - a rancid chicken in a can. Of course, judges on Chopped will chop a cook if they disguise the flavor too much – saying things like “I am just not tasting the rancid chicken in this dish”. You know that chef is doomed. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Service estimated, 99,000 Burmese pythons were imported to the USA. Python hunters from the water management district and FWC have removed about 6,300 pythons since 2017, including a recent record catch coming in at 18 feet, 9 inches.

In addition to hiring more hunters, investing in near-infrared technology to better see the snakes, and training python-sniffing dogs, the Fish and Wildlife Service have added 10 “scout” snakes into its Burmese python

research and removal program. Scout snakes, also called sentinel snakes, are male pythons with surgically implanted radio transmitters. Experts track these snakes to find female pythons that are reproductively active. Perhaps experts can use “terminator” pythons brought from a “future world” where flying pythons who can shapeshift will eliminate all life on earth as we know it. Of wait, that has already been done. Free roaming pythons, alligators, fire ants, and the constantly repeating song “It’s a Small World After All” at Disney World, are some of the many reasons I will never live in the state of Florida.

Crumpets Vs. English Muffins

A friend asked me recently (after watching an episode of the Great British Baking Show) “What is the difference between a crumpet and an English muffin?” Both are cooked on a griddle or stove top, they’re about the same size, and have craters or holes. The differences are that crumpets are always made with milk (you won’t find any milk in English muffin recipes) and are only griddled on one side, leaving one side toasted and the other soft—think sort of like a pancake’s texture only a little spongier. Crumpet recipes don’t require yeast and they have a looser batter. They’re also served whole, while English muffins are split.



A Classic Crumpet

In the 1800s, “English” muffins were created in New York after Samuel Bath Thomas moved to America from England. You’ll likely find them referred to as just muffins or American Muffins in the United Kingdom.

Crumpets are commonly enjoyed for breakfast (or with afternoon tea) throughout the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa. You can find crumpets in many grocery stores here in the U.S. now, but they are not as common in the bread aisle as English muffins

Spiders Invading Homes!

There are about 2,500 different spiders in North America. Spiders are beneficial, feeding mostly on other insects. Most spiders found in homes and buildings are “accidental invaders” that have entered a home around doors, windows, or other openings – sometimes after flooding or disturbance of the area. Other spiders hitchhike from the landscape into the home on humans or pets. The most common spiders that find their way indoors are wolf spiders, funnel web spiders, and grass spiders. All have some markings (usually stripes) on both the head and abdomen – and in the case of a grass spider - bands found on their legs. Halloween spiders are also found at this time of year - characterized by the orange abdomen with unusual markings. These spiders – though formidable in appearance - do little harm to humans. There are only two spiders found in our area which have venom that is very toxic or harmful to humans. Both are more common in southern or western regions. The brown recluse spider is quite rare and only has a dark violin on its head. Black widow spiders have a red hourglass on their abdomens. WebMD has good information with pictures and information about both spiders. In the 20 years I was an Extension Educator, I only saw two samples of a brown recluse



submitted to the Extension office. Both spiders remind me of Shelob in the book Lord of the Rings.

Spiders have poison glands that connect with the fangs - used to kill or paralyze prey and in defense. They also inject enzymes that help digest prey before it is eaten. Most people bitten by spiders have either no - or slight reactions - to the bites or the digestive enzymes. Some folks – especially those with allergies – can react to the bites with itching, swelling, infection, and flu-like symptoms. Consult with your doctor if severe symptoms occur.



Most outdoor spiders have enough "antifreeze" in their bodies so that they won't freeze, even when temperatures are below zero. Outdoor spider species are not adapted to indoor conditions. The few typical outdoor spiders that do end up indoors, die or at least don't reproduce.

House spiders belong to a small number of species specially adapted for indoor conditions, and end up in homes by hitchhiking on furniture, appliances, building materials, etc.

Sometimes folks find spiders and place them back outdoors. Outdoor spiders will survive - relocated house spiders will die.

The best way to avoid spiders is to prevent their entry into homes. Caulk and seal cracks and other entry areas. Some citizens use insecticides around foundations to prevent outdoor spiders from making their way indoors. Some sprays containing citrus extracts or other botanicals used indoors can help control spiders – along with sticky traps available from hardware stores and online.



Halloween Spider

Wear gloves when handling leaves, or when rummaging through attics, garages, basements, or crawl spaces. Spiders love to hide, so tell the kids to pick up their rooms. There are always perks- even with spiders.

Joro Spiders

Georgia and South Carolina are seeing “extreme numbers” of invasive spiders this year. The Joro spider, a palm-sized spider with yellow stripes, comes from China. Joro spiders have spread widely since they were first spotted in Hoschton, Georgia, in 2013. They probably arrived by hitching a ride in a shipping container from China or Japan. Despite their fearful look, they are not considered dangerous. Their bite equals a bee sting resulting in redness, localized pain, and blisters on the skin that mostly heal in a day unless the affected person has severe allergies.



So.. Uh... No problem at all.....

Female spiders have deep blue and yellow bands on their legs, and the abdomen is an infusion of red, yellow, and black in beautiful asymmetrical patterns. Experts remark that males are not “that attractive” as they have a

brown body and are much smaller than the female. Their enormous three-dimensional webs are a striking golden color and tend to be located higher off the ground than those of other spiders. And Joro spiders also appear to be able to capture and feed on at least one insect that other local spiders are not: adult brown marmorated stink bugs, an invasive pest that can infest houses and damage crops. In turn, Joro spiders are vulnerable to predators like mud dauber wasps and birds. Joro spiders travel by ballooning, letting the wind carry them on a strand of gossamer.



The male has to drift in and find a willing female. Sometimes there'll be four or five males on a web, sometimes there'll be one, so the males are moving between webs. It is kinda like the "Bachelor or Bachelorette" T.V. series – except in this case the male is in extreme danger, because an ill-tempered female will eat him. I admire the "less attractive" male – poor thing - whose diminutive size makes it appear as if a bluegill is approaching a whale hoping to mate.

Progress Report As far as I can tell, few, if any, lawns were infested by a horde of voracious armyworms numbering in the millions. I think they just gave up when they hit the Indiana / Ohio border. Sensational media reports predicting the end of civilization as we know it – several. Actual armyworm reports of lawns ravaged to a burnt crisp –??

What to Do in The Fall

A favorite topic for famous garden writers and speakers is "Fall Cleanup" or "Fall Gardening Tasks", since there really isn't anything else to discuss once the fever and obsession of gardening in the spring is long gone. How many times have we overplanted or over planned with unbridled enthusiasm in April to give up in July when we are totally exhausted? Anyway, if you are hitting your gardening second wind – here are some things to do – especially since warm weather is persisting this year.



Compost your leaves – or leave your leaves in the yard - or use them as mulch around trees and shrubs.

Fertilize your lawn with a fertilizer with a higher first number on the bag in late October or early November.

One can still plant trees and shrubs as long as the warmer weather persists.

Mow the lawn until we receive a hard freeze or frost – and mow the lawn a bit shorter the last mowing to prevent any possible snow mold.

Fall color may be a bit of a downer this extended fall season. Windy days and frequent rains also negatively affect fall color. Prepare yourself for disappointment - It is my motto.

Wait to cut back perennials until daytime temps are reliably in the lower forties – or wait until early March of next year – to reduce insect and disease pressure.

Check evergreen plants to see if any bagworm “cones” are on the plants. The overwintering bagworm nests do indeed look like small cones attached to the branches. Use a pair of scissors to cut them off and destroy them.

One can prune shrubs and trees that do not flower in the spring.

Mulch strawberries and tender roses when daytime temps are reliably in the twenties.

I would consider ordering seed or plants early this season because of potential supply chain issues and delays in the regular mail.



My Alexa is Getting Old

I purchased my Alexa “disc” when the product first came out on Amazon. Things were fine at the beginning, but now I am concerned. It seems as if Alexa can’t hear as well as the early days. Many times, I give her instructions and she either doesn’t do the task – or does something completely different. I have the code word “Elvis” to turn on a particular light. Alexa will say: “There is no device called June bug” - or just give a harrumph sound and not do anything at all. June bug – really” Sometimes she will play music on her own – ranging from Bette Miller to the B-52’s, to obscure jazz or fifties songs. She will interrupt the dead of night with comments about how she can tell a joke, offer items on Amazon, ask if she answered a question correctly, or from the right place. She is getting paranoid. My plan is to report this strange behavior to Amazon. Perhaps she needs therapy – or a nursing home - or both.



Spiders and Snakes

“I don't like spiders and snakes and that ain't what it takes to love me You fool, you fool I don't like spiders and snakes And that ain't what it takes to love me Like I want to be loved by you”

These compelling, sensitive, and meaningful words are from “Spiders & Snakes” - a 1974 hit song recorded by Jim Stafford and written by Stafford and David Bellamy. It was the second of four U.S. Top 40 singles released from Stafford’s debut album. Born James Wayne Stafford on January 16, 1944, in Winter Haven, Florida, Jim is an American comedian, musician, singer-songwriter, and actor.

His songs include: "Spiders & Snakes", "Swamp Witch", "Under the Scotsman's Kilt", "My Girl Bill", and "Turn Loose of My Leg". Stafford has his own theater in Branson, Missouri, since 1990, and still performs there three nights a week. He is self-taught on guitar, fiddle, piano, banjo, organ and harmonica. He was the supervising writer for "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour", which aired on NBC in 1988. He was a good friend of Glen Campbell, who often stopped by Jim's theater in Branson to play in his show. Jim has two adopted children, Schaeffer and GG, and son, Tyler, born during marriage to Bobbie Gentry. If you are a Boomer and Beyond, then you know that Bobbie Gentry performed the famous ballad “Ode to Billie Joe”. She is a retired American singer-songwriter who was one of the first female artists to compose and produce her own material. "Ode to Billie Joe" spent four weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and was third in the Billboard year-end chart of 1967, earning Gentry Grammy awards for Best New Artist and Best Female Pop Vocal Performance in 1968.



Beach Plums

Beach plums were among the first of the New World plants the Colonists saw when they came ashore in the 1600s. Most beach plum populations are found from northern Massachusetts to southern New Jersey. There are also small, isolated populations of beach plum in northern Indiana and southern Michigan. No one really knows how they made it here from the east coast.



The beach plum grows in a tree-like form or as a low, bushy spreading plant that can reach to a height of 10 feet. The edible fruit, which usually ripens in August in our area, ranges in size from a half an inch to an inch in diameter. The fruit color can be red, purple, deep blue, and, rarely, yellow. The plum fruit has a tart acidic flesh.

Decades ago, Cape Cod was famous for its beach plum jelly - sold at specialty markets in New England. Today, many so - called beach plum jellies and jams contain no beach plums. The recent interest in native plants, dune stabilization and sustainable crops has led to renewed interest in the beach plum. The beach plum is an excellent conservation and erosion-control plant that can grow in poor soil.

I think this a great plant to grow for many reasons. Beach plum is disappearing because of development and loss of habitat. It is a smaller sized plant that is relatively easy to grow. It is native or naturalized in our area and is in danger of becoming extinct. To me, it could provide an excellent opportunity for someone looking for a new product to sell - let's say - at farm markets and specialty shops. Beach plums are available at only a few nurseries online. Fedco nursery in Maine is where I purchased my trees – and you need at least two trees to produce fruit. Here is a guide from Cornell University.

<http://www.beachplum.cornell.edu/bpguide.pdf>



Hoggles – Demented Cat Logic

To my caregiver: *I am convinced that I have some ancestors who were of British origin. Please add both crumpets and English muffins and a few “biscuits” to my menu options. You do know that biscuits are cookies – don’t you?*

To subscribe to this electronic newsletter, ask questions, send an email to kemeryr7@frontier.com - or text 260-431-6893. I will not share information with others. Ricky Kemery will not knowingly discriminate in any way based on race, gender etc....