

Shelby County Master Gardener

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



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Program Coordinator's comments

By Doug Benson

The weather continues to be a subject of concern, as it has been most of the year. First, it was cold, and then it was wet; now it's hot and dry. This has presented many varied challenges to gardeners, farmers and landscapers. The one class of plants that seems most unaffected by the changing conditions is the weeds. They just keep growing! I was out of town the week before Labor Day, so that pretty much finished my garden. The only exception is the pepper plants that are growing in the shade of the sunflowers. For some strange and now seemingly foolish reason, I planted two sunflower seeds on each of the four sides of my raised bed in between the pepper plants. As luck would have it, every one of those eight seeds germinated, and the plants are now between eight and ten feet tall. When I pull them up at the end of the season, there probably won't be any soil left in my raised bed. Oh well, the birds are well fed right now.



Our Master Gardener season is winding down as well. By the time you read this newsletter, we will have had our final library program. The programs have been well received thanks to those who have helped organize and those who presented. I plan to submit the project for a state award next spring. Our library seminars and the cut flower program fall into the same category of awards, but we can only submit one entry per category. Based on what I've seen from past judging of awards, I think the library series has the better chance of winning an award.

Given the challenges Mother Nature has put forth, the Memorial Garden is probably doing better than we might expect. I think the plan of having volunteers sign up for a week of maintaining the garden has been pretty successful. Thanks to all who signed up and fulfilled their commitments, the garden looks good. Except for the creeping wood sorrel, the weeds are under control; and some volunteer or volunteers have done a great job of edging the beds. We will be scheduling a large group session sometime in October to finalize the cleanup.

At our September meeting, we will be selecting officers for 2026. Unlike most years in the past when we've had to twist arms, I think we have volunteers for all the positions. Thanks to those who are stepping forward to serve. Thanks more to Dave, Janet, and Russ for the excellent service they have provided during their terms of office. Thanks as well to Missy for her first year as treasurer. Having the office do the bookkeeping continues to be both a blessing and a challenge as coordination of information takes some extra effort by both Missy and the office staff, especially Amy.

Remember that reservations for our October 15 banquet at Arrowhead Golf Club are due by Friday September 26. The September meeting will be an ideal time for you to turn in your reservation and your dues for 2026. If you need an RSVP form, I will have some available at the meeting. Even if you're unable to attend the banquet, we would appreciate you paying your 2026 dues of \$20.00 at the meeting. Remember to make your checks payable to OSU Extension. You can cover your banquet reservation and dues with the same check. You don't need to use separate payments.

You still have time to register for the Master Gardener State Conference, which will be held October 9 and 10 on the campus of the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, Ohio. The deadline to register is September 29th, and the fee is \$99. Most of the programming, including the awards luncheon, will take place on the 10th. We have been notified that Janet Nelson, our nominee for Outstanding Master Gardener Volunteer, has been named as one of ten semi-finalists for the five awards being given. Janet, Dave, and I plan to drive over that Friday morning. We'll be leaving from the Armstrong Museum at about 6:00 in the morning, so if someone wants to register and ride along, let us know. Conference details are available at: <https://u.osu.edu/stateconference25/>.

The organizers of the state conference have requested that each county submit a few PowerPoint slides to highlight what's happening within their organizations. I developed six slides showing some of the activities going on in our three-county area, and I will try to show it at the meeting.

(Continued to page 2)

Next Meeting: September 17 at 2pm & Zoom

Be mindful of Memorial Garden maintenance.

(Continuation of Program Coordinator comments.)

As we approach the end of our season, be sure that you have your hours entered in Hands On Connect. Let me know if you need help entering your hours, and we'll set a time to work on them. Remember that the state minimum requirements to remain an active Master Gardener are at least 20 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of continuing education. If you are short on continuing education hours, there are numerous webinars available on the state Master Gardener website: <https://mastergardener.osu.edu>.

I will probably have more to report at the meeting. I hope most of you will be able to attend. I plan to have Zoom coverage for those who can't make it in person. Until then, happy gardening! 🌱

Poison Ivy

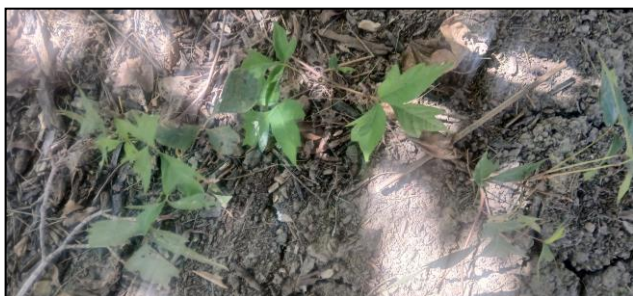
By Karen Seger

Poison ivy is a type of allergenic plant in the genus *Toxicodendron* native to Asia and North America. Formerly a single species, poison ivies are now generally treated as a complex of three separate species: *Toxicodendron radicans*, *Toxicodendron rydbergii*, and *Toxicodendron orientale*. They are variable in appearance and habit, and despite its common name is not a "true" ivy, but rather a member of the cashew and pistachio family.

Though *T. radicans* is commonly eaten by many animals and the seeds are consumed by birds, Poison ivy is most thought of as an unwelcome weed. It is well known for causing urushiol-induced contact dermatitis, and itchy, irritating, and sometimes painful rash, in most people who touch the plant. The rash is caused by urushiol, a clear compound in the plant's sap.

Poison ivies can grow as small plants, shrubs, or climbing vines. They are commonly characterized by clusters of leaves, each containing three leaflets, hence the expression "leaves of three, let it be". The leaves can vary between an elliptical to egg shape and will have either smooth, lobed, or toothed margins. Additionally, the leaf clusters produce white berries in the fall a few millimeters in diameter. 🌱

Poison Ivy photo from Seger's Gecko Lounge, Houston, Ohio.



Dealing with Farm/Garden Stress

Rylee Kay Puthoff, ANR Educator

The last two years have been difficult for the agricultural world. All prices have increased, but sale prices are not as high as they need to be, and two years of finicky weather do not help that equation. Times have been tough, and it is not hard to see the reports rolling in that agricultural stress is high this year. Whether you own 1,000 acres of corn or a quarter acre of gardens, it is important to know that stress influences our daily lives.

Stress has an impact on our physical and mental health. Stress can harm your blood pressure, your heart, your hormones, and suppress your immune system. Mental stress can increase the chance of depression, worsen anxiety, and cause other issues. But there are ways that we can reduce stress in our lives.

First, tell others that you are stressed. Sharing your burdens with others is healthy and encourages the mind to process emotions. Even admitting to yourself that "I am stressed" allows you to begin processing.

The other is to make sure that you take care of yourself. Take time to do an activity that brings you joy. Make sure you spend time outside and get vitamin D. Bake some cookies, have a smoothie, or eat your favorite food. Make sure that you schedule time to rest. Take time to do nothing, have no plans, and relax. I am sure some will find this difficult, as many of us love to volunteer and be a help to our communities.

Something I hope you can get from reading this article is that in these stressful times, it is important to care for others and ourselves. I challenge those who made it to the end of this article to take time this month to do one thing a week to reduce your stress levels. Take a walk, pull some weeds, talk to a friend, or grab a treat from your favorite restaurant. Do something that will make you happy. I hope you all have a wonderful week, and I will see you at the banquet in October! 🌱

Rylee Kay Puthoff

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LOWERING SOIL pH

By Ann Heeley

While trying to figure out why my blueberries didn't produce as well this year as they have in the past, I came across several YouTube videos from a series presented by "The Plant Doctor", Tom Warren, PhD, a biology and horticultural science instructor at Snead Community College in Alabama. All of the information in his videos are research based, not Facebook posts. One of Dr. Warren's videos was specifically on blueberries. But the one I found more helpful was the video on lowering soil pH. You can view the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVqjvfjn-XA>.

I learned that the hints he provided and the myths he exposed also applied to some of my hydrangeas and azaleas. Lowering soil pH is not a once-and-done prospect, especially Shelby County where our average pH tends to be slightly more alkaline than in eastern Ohio due to underlying limestone. For acid-loving plants, we need to amend the soil with substances that increases hydrogen ions...and we need to repeat applications because rainfall and snow melt constantly raise pH. Azaleas, rhododendrons, pieris, and blueberries grow best with pH levels of 4.5-5.5, whereas our soil tends to be in the range of 6.0-7.0.

Pine bark mulch will lower pH slowly and gradually, but its effects diminish rather quickly. Pine needles, on the other hand so absolutely nothing to the soil pH. However, they help keep moisture around plants without caking.

Coffee grounds, much to my dismay, do not lower pH, although in small amounts, they can feed healthy soil and improve its structure. The pH of coffee grounds is actually around 6.8. As it turns out, the acidity is in the coffee you drink rather than in the used grounds. More problematic is that the caffeine in the grounds or in brewed coffee actually inhibits plant growth. It can kill the worms in soil, too, if you add too much. Don't use coffee grounds as a mulch since they develop a crusty surface that repels water.

Ground up leaves from deciduous trees also have no impact on soil pH. Like coffee grounds and pine needles, they may enhance soil structure or provide a winter mulch.

Elemental sulfur is the best way of lowering soil pH. If added to the soil around acid-loving plants in the late fall or early winter, the heave and thaw and moisture by springtime will activate the biological reactions needed to lower soil pH. For individual plants in the ground or in containers, Dr. Warren recommends

looking for soil additives containing 30% sulfur (such as Holly Tone, Berry Tone, Dr. Earth, or ferti-lome.) For larger applications, it is cheaper to buy sulfur at a farm supply store.

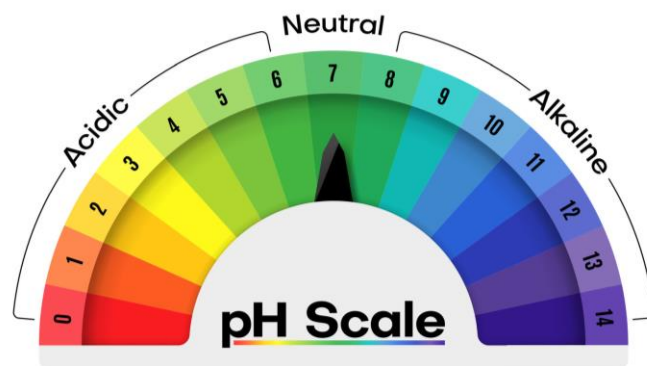
Peat Moss, with a pH of around 5.5, will also lower soil pH. But that's not really enough to benefit acid-loving plants. It does help, however, to increase water retention when added to a soil mixture.

Aluminum sulfate will decrease soil pH with a much faster chemical reaction. Care must be taken since you'll need 5 to 7 times as much aluminum sulfate compared to sulfur to produce the same decrease in pH. Furthermore, aluminum levels can get to a point at which they're toxic and remain in the soil for years. If a soil test isn't done prior to adding aluminum sulfate, it's very easy overdo the amount needed resulting in a poisoned soil.

Iron sulfate is another additive that may lower soil pH, but it should only be used if a soil test determines an iron deficiency.

An important point when choosing fertilizers is to look at the analysis of ingredients on labels. If the label shows nitrogen as a nitrate (NO_3), this will raise the pH levels. If it is ammonium based ($\text{NH}_4\text{-N}$), it will lower pH. If it is urea based (the cheapest form of nitrogen- $\text{CH}_4\text{N}_2\text{O}$) it will lower pH.

So overall, the best way to lower soil pH for acid-loving plants is to do a soil test first. Then, based on those results, use sulfur in late fall and an acid fertilizer in the spring to produce the healthiest plants. 🌱



“Grow Ohio” food donations

By Doug Benson



Again, this year, we are participating in the Grow Ohio food program. It is no longer a contest; however, participation is one of the minimum standards that counties must meet to receive the sticker for their Award of Excellence plaque. A more important reason is the opportunity to help those who depend on their local food pantries across the state. This will be the tenth year of the program, and we have participated in all ten. In the first nine, we donated over 28,000 pounds of produce, an average of slightly over 3000 pounds per year. Jim M. has provided more than 17,000 pounds, primarily to Agape, Holy Angels Soup Kitchen, and Alpha Community Center. The People’s Garden, under Conelia’s leadership, has provided more than 4000 pounds to Agape.

If you have donated produce to any of these or other charitable organizations here in Shelby County or surrounding counties, send me an e-mail or a text message indicating how much of what and to whom you donated. Already the People's Garden is over 1000 pounds and Jim is over 600 in 2025. That's a lot of people helped! I will probably have a reporting deadline sometime in late October or early November, so get me your totals. 🌱

How to Prune a Lavender Plant: A Gardener's Guide

By Carol Strayer



Lavender is one of the most beloved garden plants—valued for its fragrant blooms, silvery foliage, and pollinator-friendly nature. But to keep lavender healthy, bushy, and long-lived, regular pruning is essential. Without it, plants can become woody, leggy, and produce fewer flowers each year.

Here's a step-by-step guide to pruning lavender, along with important dos and don'ts to ensure success.

Why Prune Lavender?

- Encourages bushy growth instead of long, straggly stems.
- Promotes more blooms by stimulating new flower-bearing shoots.
- Extends plant life by preventing woody, brittle centers.
- Maintains shape so the plant stays compact and attractive.

When to Prune Lavender

- **Light prune:** After the first flush of blooms in early to midsummer.
 - **Main prune:** Late summer to early fall, once the flowers have faded.
- ⚠️ Don't prune in winter or early spring—new growth may be damaged by frost.

Step-by-Step Guide

1. Gather Tools

Sharp hand pruners or garden shears, plus gloves.

2. Remove Spent Flower Stalks

Snip off the faded flower stems just above the leaves.

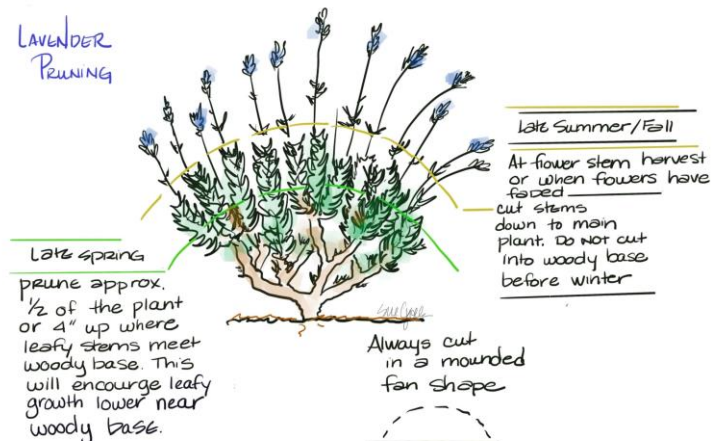


3. Shape the Plant

Cut back green stems by about one-third of the plant's height. Always leave some green growth above the woody base.

4. Maintain a Dome Shape

Shape the plant into a soft, rounded mound. This prevents splitting in the center and keeps it compact.



Dos and Don'ts

✔ Do:

- Prune every year.
- **Cut back by one-third of green growth.**
- Shape into a rounded mound.
- Use sharp, clean tools.

✘ Don't:

- **Cut into the woody base.**
- **Prune in winter or early spring.**
- Leave plants unpruned for years.

Long-Term Care

With proper pruning, lavender can thrive for 10–15 years or more, remaining beautiful and fragrant. 🌿

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Note: Last newsletter for 2025 will be October. Articles due by October 8th. Thank you.