



Dear Friends,

Here is the second issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. This is a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith and John Ferguson and Mark Bowen of Nature's Way Resources. We also have a great cast of contributors/writers who will chime in regularly. We would love to keep receiving your input on this newsletter . . . comments . . . suggestions . . . questions . . . Email your thoughts to: lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com. Thanks so much for your interest.

Please .

Enjoy!

Of Weeds and Winged Wonders

By Brenda Beust Smith

If weeds aren't already driving you insane, they soon will be. That's just life in a subtropical pocket like the Greater Houston area.

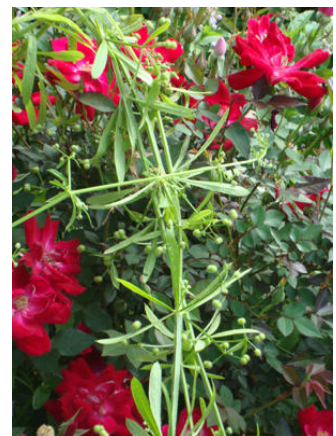
Everything grows so well . . . especially weeds!

Right now I'm fighting with stickyweed, which we usually call velcroweed. Nasty sticky stuff. I don't care if it was the inspiration for that wonderful product known as Velcro. (After which the plant was named, not visa versa, by the way)

It's silly to get too upset about this weed. When it gets hot, it'll disappear on its own. But it's so annoying to look at and it pulls out so easily, especially after a rain, ignoring it is hard to do.

Besides, even though I know you don't want to hear this, it does have some good points. Officially it's called cleavers (*Galium aparine*). It's been used for centuries almost all around the world as a medicinal, and it is edible (although, I hear, not all that tasty). Some say it makes a good weight loss trigger. (I can believe that.) It's used in some places as a coffee substitute, as a diuretic, and to treat skin problems, hepatitis, tonsillitis and cystitis. I personally don't recommend trying it on any of these.

On the other hand, it's said that some Native American tribes used stickyweed (as it's most commonly called) as a love potion (women bathed in a solution made from it), as a hair tonic, to produce red dye (especially effective on bones), to remove freckles and as a snakebite treatment.



Stickyweed (velcroweed) invades my Martha Gonzalez antique rose.

Every spring Husband and I do our great weed-pull. We make the rounds of the gardens, pulling out and digging up as many weeds as energy levels will allow. Then, while he drives off to get some mulch, I spread newspapers - four or five layers thick - over all the exposed soil around plants.

Don't do this in areas with reseeding plants, of course.

He returns with the mulch, dumps it on and I spread it around.

Not a full-proof remedy for weeds, of course. Some will return. But it definitely slows them down.

Now, one word of warning. With mulch, you get what you pay for. Go the cheap route - as we very stupidly did after Hurricane Ike totally devastated our yard - and you're liable to end up with materials that aren't completely decomposed.



My two "great mulch fiasco" survivors, giant coneflower and

As mulch decomposes it adds valuable nutrients to the soil. But its decomposition processes require nitrogen, which it temporarily draws out of the soil. True the decomposing mulch returns this nitrogen back to the soil. But the temporary deficit can be traumatic to plant roots.

This is what happened to me. Normally the newspaper I put down will not only retard weeds, it also keeps the mulch from pulling nitrogen out of the soil. Buying mulch from a reputable dealer you can trust is very important, so you can be sure it's ready to be used.

Still-too-ripe mulch will gradually decompose anyway, but it's not such a traumatic event if - as we did that time - it was MUCH too ripe and should never have been sold.

After Ike, I ran out of newspaper-laying steam by the time we hit a stretch of garden along a back fenceline. Husband wanted to get the mulch-laying finished. So I said, "Just put it down."

He did. By six months later, almost every plant along that fenceline had died, including my Meyer lemon. What didn't die? A large vitex tree, a fig tree, Louisiana iris and my giant coneflower.

I guess they're pretty tough plants!

MONARCH UPDATE: Great news in from Diana Foss, who oversees the Wildlife Diversity Program at Sheldon Lake State Park and Wildlife Management Area (a great visit if you're looking for a Sunday ride). Diana advises us to start planting more milkweed (butterfly weed) for the monarchs that will be coming through.

Predictions are that re-immigration of monarchs back into the states this year will be "perilously low" for a variety of reasons including the extreme drought, heavy impact of tourism on trails to wintering-over sites in Mexico, urban invasions, heavy logging, etc.

These are all combining to compromise future monarch populations, hence the importance of providing nectar/host sites in our home gardens and encouraging native milkweeds in fields and prairies.

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/spring2013/update030713.html>

Since Diana Foss has urged us to plant for our "winged wonders," here's some news of great plants available at a sale that will help support the new White Oak Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden at 7603 Antoine Dr., site of the sale.

<http://www.nearnorthwestdistrict.com/Programs/WOCC.shtml>

Houston's local hardy-plant grower extraordinaire Heidi Sheesley of Treeseach Farms is heading up

development of this Near Northwest Management District project - so you know it will feature only the most wonderful of flowers.

The sale will, of course, feature plants native to, and well adapted for, our area. Be there when the doors open at 10 a.m. By the 2 p.m. closing, you can bet everything will be gone. Go at 9 a.m. to hear Heidi's presentation on "Planting for Butterflies and Hummingbirds." Featured plants will include: Pura Vida Passionvine, Dwarf Calliandra, Mexican Butterfly Weed, Peter's Purple Monarda, and Purple lochroma.

Cosponsoring the event with NNMD is the Near Northwest Community Improvement Corporation.

Weekly Events Calendar:

March 22, 8 am - 4 pm & March 23, 8 am - 2 pm, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd Humble, TX
http://www.hcp4.net/press_releases/pdf/mercer/032313MarchMart.pdf

March 23, 8 am - 12 pm, Farmers Market Fruit Tree Sale, Urban Harvest Farmers Market at Eastside, 3000 Richmond at Eastside St.
http://www.urbanharvest.org/events/fruittreesales_old2.html?utm_source=Markets+-February+9th%2C+2013&utm_campaign=Test&utm_medium=email

March 23, 8 am - 1 pm, Brazoria County Master Gardeners Annual Plant Sale, Brazoria County Fairgrounds, 900 Downing Rd. Angleton. Heidi Sheesly, Treeseach Farms will give seminar at 8:00. Over 2,000 plants for the home and veggie garden.
<http://txmq.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/brazoria/files/2013/01/2013-Spring-Plant-Sale-Cover.pdf>



March 23, 9 am - 7 pm, Texas Rose Festival, Cornelius Nursery on Voss, Houston. Meet and learn from rose expert Ryan Smith of J. Berry Nursery. <http://www.calloways.com/rose-festival-select-locations>

Submit calendar items to lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com. Events must be submitted by the sponsoring organization. Please note: "garden calendar request" in the subject line.

Need speakers for your group? Brenda's "Lazy Gardener's Speakers List" of area horticultural/environmental experts is available free for the asking. Email your request to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

TIME TO START THAT BUTTERFLY GARDEN!

By Soni Holladay

Trust the Cockrell Butterfly Center at the Houston Museum of Natural Science in Hermann Park to perfectly time its Spring Plant Sale with the Monarch and other butterfly explosions in this area.

Check out our list of great butterfly attractors that will be available at the sale, 9 a.m.-noon, Saturday, April 6, on the 7th Level of the HMNS Parking Garage:

#1 Hairy wedelia (*Zexmenia hispida*). Perennial bush, 2 ft, Hill Country native, full sun, drought-tolerant (Translation: needs to be very well drained and don't overwater!). One inch wide yellow flowers spring through fall. Dies back in the winter. Give good haircut in spring.

#2, Gaillardia pulchella or Mexican Blanket. Mounding clumps, 2-ft. flower stalks spring to fall. Full sun, don't overwater. Save seed heads to replant next spring.

#3, Red Porter Weed (*Stachytarpheta* sp.). Red spiked blooms

To read the full article, visit <http://www.natureswayresources.com/nl/butterflygarden.pdf>



Mulch Ado About Nothing (Part Two of a Series on Mulches)

By John Ferguson

In this column we are going to answer your questions on mulch. In the first issue we discussed the three best types of mulch hence this week we will look at the three worst types.

Researchers have found that healthy fertile soils with low insect and disease pressure have one thing in common, a 30:1 ratio of carbon to nitrogen. This is an important and common ratio found throughout natural systems.

COLORED MULCH - Colored or dyed mulch can be found in many colors from red to green and blue. The most common are red and black. The first problem with the dyed mulches is the carbon: nitrogen ratio. To get the dyes to stick to the wood producers use raw wood from pallets, crates and other trash wood. This type of wood has a C:N ratio of over 500:1! Hence when it is placed on the soil microbes will start to break it down. To do this they need lots of nitrogen. To get this extra nitrogen they pull it from the soil away from plant roots (microbes always eat first). When plants do not have enough nitrogen they are far more susceptible to insect and disease issues.



What to do in the Garden this Month.

By Brenda Beust Smith The Lazy Gardener

This month, you really should . . .

- Put tomatoes in the ground early this month.
- Mow the lawn when it needs it, then feed.
- Watch out for bluebonnets. They look like clover. Don't mow them down.
- Fertilize everything. Water first, feed, then water again.
- Gradually move hibiscus and other container plants into more light.
- Remove flowers on newly-purchased plants so they will set stronger root systems.
- Unwrap banana trunks and keep well watered. Want bananas? Remove baby plants.
- Plant Louisiana phlox around late-appearing shrubs like hamelia, lantana, dishplate hibiscus, etc. This perennial groundcover is green in winter, blooms in spring and goes dormant (almost disappears) in summer.
- Give hibiscus a slight haircut, then feed with hibiscus food to encourage lush growth.
- Attend area programs to learn about new-to-us hardy, low-maintenance flowers.



If the spirit moves . . .

- Continue pinching perennial tips to make them bushier. Stop when they produce buds.
- Dig up, thin out and transplant perennials so crowded they no longer bloom properly.
- Feed azaleas, spirea, climbing roses and other shrubby spring bloomers after they bloom.
- Remove spent flowers on spring bloomers to promote more bloom production.
- Work 1/2 cup of Epsom salts around roses, hibiscus and other bloomers for more flowers.
- Remove fading daffodil blooms so they won't go to seed. Leave fading foliage on.
- Feed plumerias with fish emulsion and superphosphate.
- Plant bell peppers, cucumbers, green beans, pumpkins, squash, tomatoes and watermelon - but cover if a late freeze is forecast. Start eggplants in pots.
- Put bluebonnet plants in raised, containers and/or hanging baskets. (Sow seed in fall.)
- In the water garden, remove leaves and muck from pond bottom if not done last fall. Remove toad eggs if you see them.

If you're really feeling energetic . . .

- Landscape with a wide variety of plants, instead of large masses of all the same kind. Masses of the same variety attract insects and disease.
- Donate excess plants to school, nursing home or community garden.
- Check grocery stores for white-flowering oxalis (clover) around St. Patrick's Day. It should be perennial in shady areas. Goes dormant in summer; reappears in winter.
- Plant antique roses, four o'clocks, gingers, jasmines and mock oranges for fragrance.
- Prune poinsettias; keep spent blooms picked off mums. Mums bloom spring and fall.
- Make a note of beautiful spring bulbs (tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, ranunculus, anemones, etc.)

now in bloom. Fall is the time to purchase and plant most of them.

- Remove tulip bulbs after the flowers fade. Discard; they won't bloom again.
- Watch tree trunks for webworm eggs in limb crotches on susceptible trees. Remove!
- Try crushed egg shells, coarse sand in ring around plant stem to discourage snails.
- Give all the plants a manure tea treat: Mix in washtub: 1/2 rotted (or bagged) manure and 1/2 water (preferably rainwater). Let it sit overnight. Drain off water and pour over plants. This tea is high in nitrogen, so don't use more than once a month on blooming plants.

Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- Don't prune off freeze-damaged limbs or remove what looks like freeze-killed plants just yet. Wait until April. They may come back out.
- Don't prune crape myrtles unless they are causing damage, have grown out of bounds or have dead limbs. (See page 6.)
- Don't cut foliage off bulbs that naturalize after they finish blooming. They use the fading foliage to set next year's blooms.
- Don't plant caladiums yet. It's still too cold.
- Don't put out any tender tropicals, like plumerias. We may have a late freeze.

The monthly gardening activities information above was excerpted from "The LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE." See below to find out how to get the complete guide:

"THE LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD" - Specifically for Houston Area gardens - WHAT TO DO EACH MONTH - when to fertilize, prune, plant what where, best plants for sun, shade, butterflies, hummingbirds, etc. Based on Brenda's quirky 40+ year Houston Chronicle Lazy Gardener column. PDF format, print out only the month you need. \$20 total, checks payable to Brenda B. Smith. Mail to: Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD, 14011 Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039-2103.

FIFTH WARD FARMER STREET GARDEN NEEDS SOME HELP TO KEEP GROWING FOR THE COMMUNITY

Please see the following letter from the Fifth Ward Farmer Street Garden's gardeners:

We, the members of the Greater Fifth Ward Farmer Street Garden, would like to make a plea to the larger community for help in restoring our community garden. On Saturday, February 9, 2013, we discovered that person(s) unknown broke through the garden gate and burglarized our locked tool shed of our donated equipment we had accumulated over the last several years. The equipment included a riding lawn mower, an electric saw, push mowers, weed eaters, wheel barrows, an assortment of shovels, rakes, hoes, machetes and other gardening tools. Over \$2500 worth of donated equipment was stolen.

The members have given generously over the past six years of its existence to the seniors, disabled and low income families of the Fifth Ward Community and surrounding communities. We participate in pantry



James Phillips

programs at the Julia C. Hester House, Peavey Center, Finnigan Park and other organizations in the Fifth Ward community with donations of fruits and vegetables grown in our community garden. We hope and want to continue to do so in the future, but we will need assistance in replacing the stolen items.

We thank you in advance for your support in restoring our garden supplies so that we may continue our charitable work in the community with little interruption. Although we are a small group with big plans and big hearts, we hope we can fulfill the need in the community for anyone needing food for a wholesale, happier community. You may contact us by visiting the garden at 4110 Farmer St, Houston TX 77020 on Saturdays between 8 am - noon or by calling James Phillips at (832) 607-4044 or Ernestine Lloyd at (713) 672-9314.

Sincerely yours,

James Phillips
Head Gardener



Tia Bonham



Collard Greens Going Strong



Ernestine Lloyd and James Phillips



Willie Nickels

GOT GARDENING QUESTIONS?



GARDENING Q&A

Each week, I will host a Q&A session in this section for some of the most common questions we receive. Here are the top two this week:

Question 1: When should I fertilize my lawn and landscape and what do you recommend using?

Answer: I would recommend using Microlife 6-2-4 for those of you in need of a great general organic fertilizer. This fertilizer has a high quality mix of quick and slow release nutrients. It is also inoculated with beneficial microbes to improve your soil's health and fertility. Additionally, it is organic matter based, so it will keep improving your soil's quality, organic matter content and structure over time. Your first fertilization for the spring season can start as early as February since this fertilizer feeds your soil in a way that does not overstimulate your plants as they use the nutrients from the soil as needed. If you have not already fertilized, go ahead and do so this month at the rate of 20 pounds per 1000 square feet (lawn and landscape). For lawns and landscapes that are not well established or that healthy, fertilize again with Microlife sometime in May at 10 pounds per 1000 square feet. If your plants need even more of a boost (as can be the case with heavy nitrogen feeding veggies for example like corn or cucumbers), then use Ocean Harvest liquid organic foliar fertilizer every 2-4 weeks. Be sure to spray the underside of the leaves too for best results.

Question 2: My neighbor tells me I have aphids on my crape myrtle trees. What should I do?

Answer: It is important for me to start by encouraging you to let your crape myrtles grow naturally in tree form and refrain from topping them each winter (known as "crape murder"). Treat them as you would any other tree and prune them strategically as needed. Topping trees such as crape causes enormous stress to them. As the new tender growth flushes out from stressed branches, it will be much more susceptible to being damaged by aphids, powdery mildew, etc. For starters, I would look around the areas where the aphids are to see if any beneficial insects such as ladybugs, lacewings, assassin bugs, etc might be in the vicinity. If you are not sure what the insects are that you are looking at, search around on the web for insect i.d help or take one of them in to your local independently owned garden center for identification. If beneficial insects are present in fair numbers, give them a chance to clean up the problem for you. If beneficials are not present, I would recommend using Safer Insecticidal Soap at label rates for small scale problems (for commercial growers, consider releasing lacewings). Insecticidal

soap breaks down the soft exoskeleton of aphids, causing them to desiccate to death. Add a kelp extract rich foliar fertilizer like Super Seaweed anytime you spray for insects to help increase the overall vigor of the plants affected to make them more resistant to pest problems. Spray with the insecticidal soap and kelp extract mix weekly until the aphids are gone. It is important not to spray soap on plants suffering from drought stress since it will dry out plants further. For drought stressed plants, water them first and then make the treatment the next day.

Be sure to check out our new gardening blog at www.lazygardenerandfriends.com to get more of your gardening questions answered and to interact with other gardeners.

Yours in gardening,

Mark Bowen



<http://www.arborgate.com/>

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!



Save 20%: March is Mulch Madness Month at Nature's Way Resources. Redeem this coupon for a big discount on our Fresh Double Ground Mulch! Please note: this offer is for retail customers only.

Offer Expires: 4/1/13

