



Dear Friends,

Here is the fourth 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](mailto:lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com). Thanks so much for your interest.

Please .

Enjoy!

## REDBUDS & MONARCHS & GREAT ADVICE

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

Karen McCarver sent in this picture of a redbud, but it's no redbud I've ever seen. Nor she. It's blooming, she wrote, in the Rice Military area (north of Memorial Dr. and west of Shepherd Dr.)



I had a couple of thoughts:

1. It's not the typical Eastern redbud that we normally see around here. Maybe it's a Mexican redbud?

2. Last year's drought is prompting incredible blooming this year, and maybe this is an example of an unusual trauma-triggered production. Plants don't bloom for our enjoyment. They bloom to produce seed.

And after a particularly rough-weather season (drought, lke, etc.), we often see unusually-large flower production - not to please us but to produce more seed because they've been so traumatized by the threatening conditions, they think they're going to die. Hence they have to produce lots of seed to continue the species.

But, since I made all that up, I turned to my plant ID guru, Suzzanne Chapman at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens for a "real" answer. She writes:

Mercer Director Darrin Duling will have an article on Redbuds in the next Houston House & Home magazine, which covers this interesting plant phenomenon. Cauliflory is the botanical term that describes the occurrence of flowers and fruits growing directly from the main stem or trunk instead of from new growth and shoots.

On young plants it doesn't look that odd since flowers cover the branches, but is amazing to see on trunks of old trees. It is a new term to me, and more common with tropical trees. I also found an article on this website from the Wisconsin Master Gardener Program at <http://wimastergardener.org/?q=Cauliflory>. - Suzzanne

Isn't it nice to know our gurus are constantly learning new stuff too? Thanks, Karen!

\* \* \*

A reminder about the April 6 Cockrell Butterfly Center plant sale. While you're at the Museum of Natural Science, do take in the "Flight of the Butterflies" 3-D movie at the Wortham Giant Screen Theater. This should be a must-see for the young, and the young-at-heart.

I had the great fortune to go on one of the Cockrell's trips to the Michoacan, Mexico, monarch wintering sites. This movie tells it exactly as it is. And the 3-D has butterflies literally flying all around you, an incredible experience.

More importantly, however, the film emphasizes how important it is for us home gardeners to help replace our increasingly disappearing "habitat highways" and to support efforts to help save this irreplaceable natural treasure site. Check out the threats on Texas Monarch

Watch: <http://www.texasento.net/dplex.htm>.

\* \* \*

We have some wonderful gardening advice resources here in the Greater Houston area. You are now reading my favorite one!

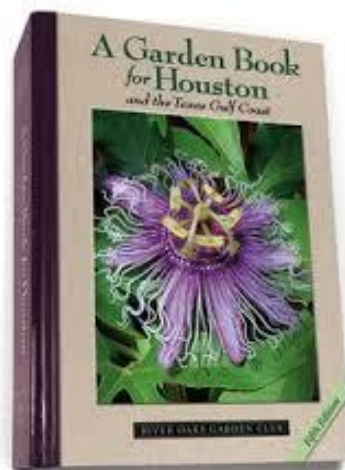
But given how important it is for local gardeners to follow local gardening advice, here are some more:

\* Kathy Huber, Houston Chronicle Garden Editor. Kathy's articles run every Saturday in the Chronicle, [www.chron.com](http://www.chron.com).

\* "Your Livable Garden" with Shawn Michael Kelly and Blinda Ann Kelly, Saturdays 6-8 a.m. and Sundays 8-10 a.m. on KPRC, 950 AM.

\* "Gardenline" with Randy Lemmon, Saturdays and Sundays, 610 a.m., KTRH, 740AM.

Another exciting brand new resource, now in bookstores, is the fifth edition of "A Garden Book for Houston and the Texas Gulf Coast" from the River Oaks Garden Club. The first edition of this book was published in 1929 - so you know you'll get intimate advice on gardening in this area!



Speaking of great resources, any others you've found particularly helpful? If so, email me [atlazgardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:atlazgardener@sbcglobal.net).

\* \* \*

Reader Margie had a question about her coral vine:

My husband (while I was gone) cut back my coral vine that had grown wild over our fence. He hated all those dead brown tendrils, but it already had a lot of new green growth on it. Did he kill it?  
— Margie

I doubt it very seriously. We had a similar situation in our yard. Coral vines (like many other super-hardy vines) may have had top dieback, but be assured the roots continued to grow all through our winter-that-wasn't. All that dead growth is best removed so you can route the new sprouting vines exactly where you want them to go.

Now is, by the way, a great time to plant vines. They need a little cold to get their roots going strong before the hot summer sun starts baking our gardens.



Super-hardy coral



In shade try bleeding heart vine





Rangoon creeper loves bright shade areas



For hot, sun-baked areas, it's hard to beat Mexican flame vine

#### ON BLOWING LEAVES INTO STORM DRAINS

Eric Gerber, Houston Chronicle SciGuy, recently did a great article on "It's Official - Houston's Now Back in a Severe Drought."

I penned a comment on the importance of residents putting in a bog/rain garden to help conserve rainwater for our trees. Among the many win-win aspects of these "gardens" (besides helping to prevent the subsidence that's cracking our walls!) is that they keep all our expensive lawn/garden fertilizers and improved soils on our property and out of the storm drains, where they, along with

decomposing leaves and other plant wastes, are wreaking havoc with our bayou ecology, contributing to problems with flooding.

My comment triggered an email from a reader who wrote: "I recently observed my neighbor blowing his grass clippings into the sewer system (which is in front of my house) in my neighborhood. I went outside to inform him that it is illegal to do so and he argued me down that it was just grass and it was not illegal."

WRONG!

According to Nancy Genz, a Harris County Pollution Control Supervisor:

"Harris County Pollution Control does receive and investigate complaints of this nature regularly. We are an enforcement agency, and can cite a violation for allowing a municipal solid waste to enter waters of the state . . . If the complainant takes pictures of . . . the person blowing, raking, or dumping grass or leaves into the storm drain, and the picture has a time and date stamp, and if the evidence is there when we arrive, we can cite them.

"The Harris County PID section has the Clean Water Clear Choice program, which is an educational program to help prevent this as well. They have placed stickers on storm drains throughout the county to help prevent dumping.

"The best course of action at this time, would be to have residents call our complaint line 713-920-2831 when they observe this illegal activity, and we will investigate the complaint."

So! It is illegal to blow leaves into the storm sewers and you can report this to Harris County.

\* \* \*

A TIP O' THE TROWEL TO JOHN FAIREY, founder of Peckerwood Gardens in Hempstead, TX, who has been honored by Scott Arboretum at Swathmore College for his outstanding contributions to the science and art of gardening. He's also one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet. Professor of design at the Texas A&M Department of Architecture, John created a 39-acre horticulture masterpiece at Peckerwood Garden in Hempstead with a strong focus on Mexican plants, Texas natives and Asian counterparts - just the plants all of us should be using more often! The gardens will be open to the public April 6-7 and May 11-12. Click on the link for admission details.

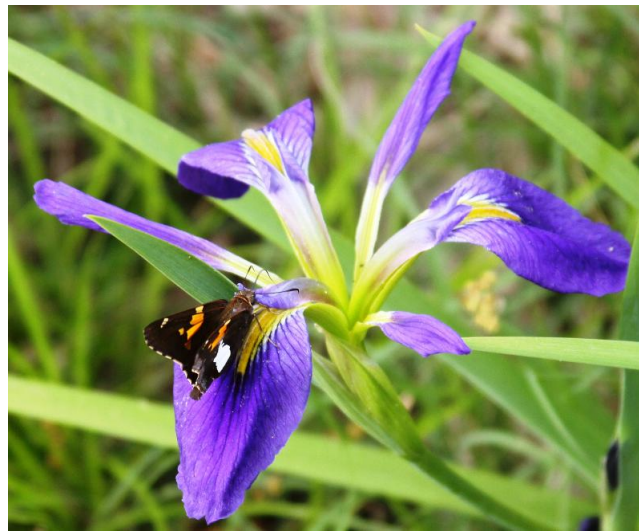
STOP BY AND SAY HI!

\* Friday, April 19: "I LOVE Oleanders!" by Brenda Beust Smith at the big Oleander Luncheon in the Moody Gardens Hotel, kickoff event for the 2013 Oleander Festival, April 20-21 at Moody Gardens Visitor Center. Luncheon reservation (and festival) details at <http://www.oleander.org/festival.html>

"THE LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD" - Specifically for Houston Area gardens - WHAT TODO 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.

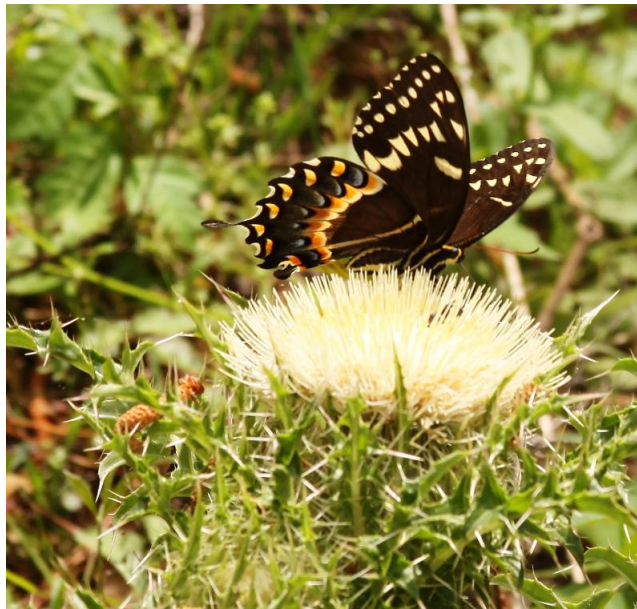
## The Conroe Butterfly Count

By David and Ednelza Henderson



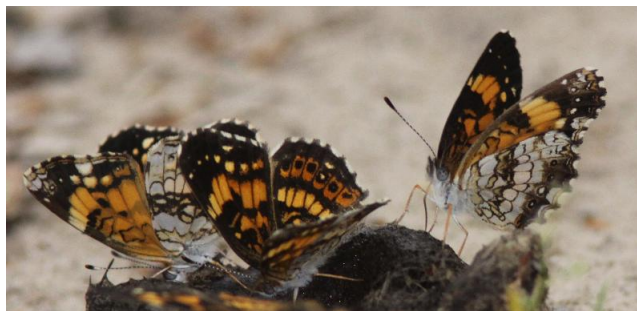
Silverspot on iris

On Saturday, 30 March, 13 nature lovers from all over the Greater Houston Area converged in The Woodlands to run the twelfth annual Conroe Butterfly Count. Over seven hours later, we again rendezvoused at Alfonso's Mexican Restaurant in Conroe to compare notes - altogether, we saw 48 species, including a late male Falcate Orangetip, six species of Swallowtails, a major outbreak of Silvery Checkerspots, and the highest numbers of Carolina and Little Wood-Satyr since the record drought of two years ago.



Palamedes on thistle

Count Coordinator David Henderson wishes to thank all that participated in this event, as well as the people who opened their lands to us: The Texas Forest Service, Nature's Way Resources, the Proudfts, the Magdalenes, YMCA Camp Owen, Bayou Land Conservancy, and The Montgomery County Extension Service. We truly could not have done this without your assistance!



Silvery Checkerspots on scat

Species seen on this count include:

Black Swallowtail, Pipevine Swallowtail, Giant Swallowtail, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Spicebush Swallowtail, Palamedes Swallowtail, Falcate Orangetip, Orange Sulphur, Cloudless Sulphur, Little Yellow Dainty Sulphur, Gray Hairstreak, Red-banded Hairstreak, Dusky-blue Groundstreak, Henry's Elfin, American Snout, Gulf Fritillary, Variegated Fritillary, Silvery Checkerspot, Phaon Crescent, Pearl Crescent, Question Mark, American Lady, Painted Lady, Red Admiral, Common Buckeye, Goatweed Leafwing, Gemmed Satyr, Carolina Satyr, Little Wood-Satyr, Monarch, Silver-spotted Skipper, White-



striped Longtail, Northern Cloudywing, Juvenal's Duskywing, Horace's  
Duskywing, Funereal Duskywing, Common/White Checkered-Skipper, Tropical  
Checkered-Skipper, Clouded Skipper, Southern Skipperling, Fiery  
Skipper, Whirlabout, Little Glassywing, Sachem, Dun Skipper, Eufala Skipper

And we saw this Cottonmouth at the count!

## Weekly Events Calendar:

Mar.28-April 7: Primavera, spring garden show at The Galleria. <http://www.simon.com/mall/the-galleria>

April 6: The Houston Museum of Natural Science Spring Plant Sale.

Attract Butterflies To Your Home Garden! Interested in Butterfly Gardening? The perfect opportunity to get started awaits you twice each year, at the Cockrell Butterfly Center's semi-annual plant sales! Once in spring and once in fall, we offer a wide variety of nectar plants for butterflies and host plants for their caterpillars. Plenty of experts are on hand to answer your butterfly gardening questions and help you to create the perfect butterfly habitat - right in your own backyard. "If you plant the right plants, butterflies will find you!"

-- Nancy Greig, Director of the Cockrell Butterfly Center

Don't miss the chance to embrace this wonderful hobby - or to add new varieties to an established garden. Come early for the best selection; plants go fast!

Next Plant Sale: April 6, 2013, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Location: Museum Parking Garage, Seventh Floor, 5555 Hermann Park Drive, Houston, TX <http://www.hmns.org>

April 6: Check out the 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.

April 6 & 7, Peckerwood Garden Foundation Open Days. Nursery open from 12-5:00 pm. Guided garden tours at 1:00 & 3:00 pm \$10.00.

[www.peckerwoodgarden.org](http://www.peckerwoodgarden.org). 979-826-3232. 20571 FM 359, Hempstead, TX 77445

April 6: The Tomball Garden Club's Annual Plant Sale is Sat. April 6th from 9:00 am - 2:00 pm at Granny's Korner, 201 Market St, Tomball. In addition to plants, pots, books, and garden-related crafts, there will be a "Ask the Master Gardener" booth from 10 - noon. Bring your questions and get help.

Contact [tomballgardenclub@gmail.com](mailto:tomballgardenclub@gmail.com) for more information.

April 8: Houston Urban Gardeners (HUG) will meet at the Houston Garden Center, 1500 Hermann Park Dr. in Hermann Park Houston, 6:30 PM. The topic will be: "Which Store is Good for Which Gardening Supplies." A panel of local garden center representatives will explain the strengths and features of their store. Where can you find bulk seed? Chickens? Beehives? Seasonal transplants? Good mulch? Come and find out! Free. Snacks provided. Read more at [www.houstonurbangardeners.com](http://www.houstonurbangardeners.com). Phone 713-528-1104.

April 13- Memorial Northwest Ladybugs Garden Club Annual Garage and Plant Sale: 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. at 17814 Shadow Valley Drive, Spring, TX 77379. Please assist the Ladybugs Garden Club, a non-profit organization and help raise funds for many deserving community projects.

April 13: "Orchids are Not Hard To Grow" class at Clown Alley Orchids, fee, 1:00 pm, 3119 Lily Street, Pasadena, TX, (281) 991-6841, [www.clownalleyorchids.com](http://www.clownalleyorchids.com).

April 16-17: Florescence Treasure, A GCA Major Flower Show  
Presented By The Garden Club of Houston, River Oaks Garden Club and  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 10th Biannual

April 19: Oleander Festival Kick-off luncheon, Silent Auction, Door Prizes; 11:00 am, Viewfinders Terrance, Moody Gardens Hotel. April 20-21 - Festival featuring Plant Societies, Tropical Plant Vendors and Children Activities; 10 am - 4 pm each day.

April 20: SFA Gardens to host Spring Plant Sale. NACOGDOCHES, Texas - The SFA Gardens at Stephen F. Austin State University will host its annual Garden Gala Day Spring Plant Sale from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Saturday, April 20, 2013 at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, 2900 Raguet St. in historic Nacogdoches, Texas. A wide variety of hard-to-find, "Texas tough" plants will be available, including Texas natives, heirlooms, tropicals, perennials, shrubs, trees, and exclusive SFA and Greg Grant introductions. Most of the plants are extensively trialed in the gardens before being offered to the public and most are produced by the SFA Gardens staff and volunteers. This popular event benefits the SFA Mast Arboretum, Pineywoods Native Plant Center, Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, Gayla Mize Garden, and educational programs hosted at the gardens. The educational programs at SFA Gardens reach over 15,000 students ages 1 to 100 on a yearly basis. The public is encouraged to arrive early and bring a wagon. For more information, call (936) 468-4404, or visit [www.sfagardens.sfasu.edu](http://www.sfagardens.sfasu.edu) and click on "garden events" for a list of available plants.

April 20: Clinic: Using Groundcovers in the Landscape.

Need an alternative to turfgrass? Looking to fill a void in your garden? Groundcovers offer many benefits in providing texture, color and variety. Discover the many varieties of groundcovers useful in hard to grow areas under trees, on slopes, and in rocky terrain. Use them as design elements, living mulch, traffic barriers or even visual guides in high traffic areas. Learn about tried and true groundcovers that perform well

in Texas sun or shade. Join us at 10:15 a.m. for the clinics, Using Groundcovers in the Landscape. <http://www.calloways.com/garden-events>

April 27-28 - BROMELIAD SHOW AND SALE The Bromeliad Society/Houston, Inc. will hold their annual plant show "Bromeliads: Spectacular Beauties" and sale on April 26, 27, and 28 at Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens (22306 Aldine-Westfield Road). Bromeliad growers will be on hand during sale hours to answer questions. SHOW HOURS: Saturday, April 27, 2-4 p.m. Sunday, April 28, 11 am - 3 p.m. SALE HOURS Friday, April 26, Noon - 4 p.m. Saturday, April 27, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday, April 28, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Free Admission Website: [www.bromeliadsocietyhouston.org](http://www.bromeliadsocietyhouston.org). Charlien Rose (713)-686-9969

April 27 & 28: Saturday-Sunday, April 27 12-4 pm., April 28 1-5 pm. Heritage Gardeners of Friendswood 21st Garden Tour, "Through the Garden Gate", 112 W. Spreading Oaks, Friendswood, TX. \$10, children 10 and under free. (281) 992-4438, [www.heritagegardener.org](http://www.heritagegardener.org)

April 28: American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star Chapter Show and Sale, 1-4 p.m.

May 4-5: 2013 Water Garden and Pond Tour sponsored by the Houston Pond Society and Lone Star Koi Club. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. both days, members open around 20 private water gardens and ponds of all sizes, with owners on hand to answer questions. \$10 for both days; tickets available at any participating garden. Details at sites [www.houstonpondsociety.org](http://www.houstonpondsociety.org) or [www.lonestarkoi.com](http://www.lonestarkoi.com). Advance tickets available at Nelson Water Gardens, Katy.

June 9: American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star Chapter Show and Sale, 1-4 p.m., Bellaire Community Center 7008 S. Rice, Bellaire, TX

Submit calendar items to [lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).

## MULCH CORNER

## WITH JOHN FERGUSON



# TOXIC MULCH SYNDROME

## PART 2

In the last issue we started exploring the reasons Brenda's plants died when using cheap mulch. This week we are going to look at a few more issues.



Tip 1: If mulch is piled too deep or if its texture is too fine (i.e. ground pine bark, ground hardwood bark or sawdust) it will easily become compacted preventing the soil from breathing. When this occurs the soil becomes oxygen depleted causing roots and beneficial microorganisms to die. This leads to increased plant stress which we sometimes see as insect and disease problems. Studies at Cornell University have found that soil oxygen depletion under coarse ground wood chips (not bark) is minimal, even when piled as deep as 10-18 inches. Note: Aeration is a function of particle size; coarse ground mulches will breathe better than fine ground mulches and will also allow water to soak into the soil more easily.

Tip 2: Fungal activity is the sign that nature is hard at work releasing the nutrients and energy stored in the mulch, which is required for good plant health. If the appearance of the fungus bothers you, the visible appearance can often be eliminated by raking the mulch layer, blasting it with the water from the garden hose, or both.

However, if there is a lot of raw or fresh wood (high C:N ratio) in the mulch, the fungus can form a hard barrier that is difficult for water and air to penetrate. This is common in cheap mulches like those produced after Hurricane Ike.

Tip 3: Odors are warning signs of low quality and potentially dangerous mulches and composts.

1) Anaerobic organic acids that have a strong odor from putrefying organic matter. The odor varies depending on feedstock or material and what is going on, however they are all very bad. These type organic acids form under conditions without oxygen (fermentation) which also produce alcohols. Plant roots are very sensitive to alcohols as little as 1 ppm will kill most plant roots.

Acetic acid - vinegar smell, loss of N<sub>2</sub> and P, alcohols present

Butyric acid - sour milk smell, alcohols present

Valeric acid - vomit smell, alcohols present

Putrescine - rotting meat smell, alcohols present

2) Ammonia - implies an immature mulch or compost (phytotoxic) and a loss of

nitrogen

3) Rotten egg ( $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ ) - implies an immature mulch or compost (phytotoxic) and a loss of sulfur

4) Color: Is often an indicator of potential problems with mulch or compost and other organic materials. A black color does not occur naturally in mulches or compost under good conditions, only a deep chocolate brown. However, many people believe black is good and some unscrupulous vendors like to take advantage of this idea.

Black organic materials in nature occur when materials decompose under anaerobic conditions (without oxygen). These conditions favor disease and other pathogens and use a different set of microbes to decompose the material. As a result pure "black" compost or mulch does not have good fertility, indicates anaerobic decomposition, pathogens and other problems. The sulfur is gone (out gassed as  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ ), nitrogen is gone ( $\text{NH}_3$ ) or in wrong form, and alcohols are usually present. Good composted mulch is a deep chocolate brown when dry.

Industrial wastes are often used to blacken products for marketing purposes. For example, some companies ground up old railroad ties to help darken material (Illegal in some states).

Smelter wastes are sometimes used as feedstock to blacken products. Copper sulfate ( $\text{CuSO}_4$ ) or other sulfur compounds may be present. As they breakdown elemental sulfur (S) may be produced which is a natural fungicide that kills the beneficial fungus that helps plants grow and prevents disease.

Boiler ash (bottom ash) is another industrial waste product used to color or blacken products. Boiler ash tends to be high in salts and extremely alkaline. The alkalinity is so strong that it will chemically burn raw wood black in a couple days. The black mulches produced tend to be very alkaline with high salt, with very high carbon to nitrogen ratios. Some ashes may contain large amounts of heavy metals that contaminate the mulch exceeding federal regulatory levels for safety. These mulch products will often turn a bleached grayish color in a few weeks after exposure to sunlight. These type products are very common in many areas.

Gardeners need to be careful as there are often more bad products than good, as most vendors just want your money and do not care if you get hurt or have bad results. As the old gardening proverb states:

I have no quarrel with a man whom has a lower price, whom better knows what his product is really worth.

Or in other words, one gets what they pay for.

John's Tip Of The Week:

I love butterfly gardening hence I grow a lot of Lantanas. For years I struggled with spider mites attacking the plants and causing many problems.

Many years ago I was driving thru San Antonio and listening to their garden show with Bob Webster and he was talking about controlling spider mites naturally by using seaweed extracts. So when I got home I purchased a product called "Super Seaweed" made by San Jacinto Environmental Supply here in Houston.

My lantanas had been badly damaged but I mixed it up anyway and sprayed my plants. Within a few days the damage had stopped and new growth was starting to show. So I sprayed them again and within 10 days they had all new leaves and were in full bloom.

Now every spring when it starts to warm up I spray my Lantanas with the Super Seaweed as a preventative measure and the spider-mite problem has not reoccurred. Seaweed extracts are full of trace minerals and plant growth hormones and works great as a foliar spray to help plants grow stronger and healthier. Note: Seaweed extracts that contain a little agricultural molasses work best.

## What to do in the Garden this Month.

By Brenda Beust Smith

### The Lazy Gardener

#### APRIL

This month, you really should . . .

- \* Move orchids outside in shady spots. Use in baskets, or hang from fences, limbs or walls.

- \* If necessary, prune spring-blooming shrubs, such as azaleas, quince, wisteria, forsythia and climbing roses after flowers fade. Don't plant wisteria near trees!

- \* Keep grafted roses well watered, but make sure none of your water runs off into the sewers.

(Fertilizers & other lawn chemicals are damaging our bayous & Galveston Bay).

- \* Feed all container plants. Feed hibiscus with hibiscus food or a low phosphorus fertilizer.

- \* Plant caladiums in slightly acidic soil with good drainage.

- \* Plant new shrubs before it gets any hotter and keep newly set-out plants well

watered.

- \* Cut flowers to extend blooming season.
- \* Pinch tips from coleus, copper plants to make them bushier.

If the spirit moves . . .

- \* Fertilize azaleas, magnolias, hydrangeas, irises with azalea food.
- \* Plant Easter lily bulbs in the garden after they finish blooming inside.
- \* Consider ornamental grasses in among your flowers. These add eye-interest by providing varied leaf textures and shapes. Nurseries carry many new varieties now.
- \* Water, mow often to make St. Augustine fill in dead areas more quickly.
- \* Plant bush beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, eggplants (plants), peas, peppers, pumpkins, squash, watermelon. Put in large, well-established tomatoes so they bear fruit quickly.
- \* Seed bare sunny areas with fast growers such as cosmos, tithonia and other sunflowers.

\* In the water garden, fertilize hardy lilies after they start to grow. If they aren't blooming as well as they used to, they may need dividing and repotting.

If you're really feeling energetic . . .

- \* Start an herb garden with basil, chamomile, mints, thyme, sage. Plant basil and chives

around plants susceptible to whitefly. Plant squash on small hills to discourage problems.

- \* For larger caladium leaves, remove the largest "eye" or bud.
- \* Give tomatoes a light feeding of nitrogen when fruits are golf-ball size.
- \* Mulch tomatoes, peppers, eggplants. Newspaper under mulch slows weeds.
- \* Try shredded sandpaper, crushed egg shells and/or seaweed at base of plants to discourage snails/slugs. (Better yet, get rid of plants eaten by snails/slugs.)
- \* Check with County Extension Agents about pecan grafting workshops this month.

Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- \* Don't panic over silky white webs on tree trunks. Bark lice - good bugs at work!
- \* Don't treat for problems before you see actual damage. (See Insect Removal, Page 29).
- \* Don't seed bluebonnets or most other wildflowers now. Put in plants. Plant seeds in fall.
- \* Don't remove spent foliage from amaryllis, daffodils, irises, lilies. Let it die naturally.
- \* Don't overfertilize. Leaf spots, dark areas on older plants may result.
- \* Don't overwater. Leaf drop can result. (Also is a sign of underwatering!)
- \* Don't plant larkspur, hollyhocks, stocks, delphiniums or snapdragons now. It's too hot.



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.

# GOT GARDENING QUESTIONS?

## GARDENING Q&A WITH MARK BOWEN

Here is the question I have heard the most this week:

Question: How can I control all the weeds that are popping up in my lawn this spring organically?

Answer: Here are some thoughts to consider:



Keep in mind that the best herbicide in a sense is actually healthy turfgrass. Robust grass will generally choke out and out-compete most weeds during the warm season. To get turf healthy enough to choke out weeds, try cutting your grass on the higher side and recycle your clippings (cutting high and letting it lie as they say). By letting your grass grow on the taller side, the ground will be shaded more leading to less weed seed germination. Also, most turfgrasses perform optimally when cut at their maximum height level. By recycling/mulching your clippings, you will be adding organic matter to the soil that will eventually break down into humus that will enrich your soil. This humus building process will minimize weed populations since they prefer low quality, so-called poverty soils.

It is also important to avoid using high nitrogen synthetic chemical fertilizers. Fertilizers with excessive nitrogen content tend to cause an explosion of weed growth due to the high amount of available nitrogen. Also, synthetic chemical fertilizers are salt based and damage the health of the soil. Damaged soils attract more weeds since part of the purpose of weeds in nature is to prevent them from eroding away. Instead, use slow release organic fertilizers with 5-6 percent nitrogen content, 1-2 percent phosphorous and 3-4 percent potassium. Additionally, finished compost applied as a topdressing 1/2-3/4 of an inch thick will work wonders by improving your soil's health and thereby reducing the chances of weeds gaining the upper hand.

Overwatering in particular also leads to weed problems. If you see dollar weed, Virginia buttonweed or sedges in your lawn in abundance, then you may either be overwatering or have a drainage problem. To avoid overwatering, water your lawn as deeply and infrequently as possible (roughly about 1" per week in the absence of adequate rain). It is also very important to let soils almost dry out (to the well squeezed sponge stage) in between waterings to maintain adequate soil oxygen levels. Soils without enough oxygen are more likely to attract weeds. For poorly drained areas that need to remain lawn, think about regrading areas that are more than 1" lower than the surrounding grade by removing the sod and adding enough screened, enriched loam to level the area and then re-sod. For areas needing to be raised less than 1", consider sprinkling 1/2-3/4" of enriched topsoil on those areas this spring and then again if needed in early fall to raise the grade adequately.

I don't recommend using weed and feed products or herbicides (even organic ones) in lawns since they all damage turfgrasses and lead to other problems.

Keep in mind that most winter and early spring weeds will burn off or get out-competed once your grass becomes healthier and is growing robustly. However, if you have some sections of lawn that always struggle consider using groundcovers or native grasses in those areas as long term alternatives. More and more gardeners these days are converting lawn areas with very limited sunlight or with very poor drainage to groundcover plantings.

Be sure to check out our new gardening blog at [www.lazygardenerandfriends.com](http://www.lazygardenerandfriends.com) to get more of your gardening questions answered and to interact with other gardeners. Send any non-gardening questions to me at [markbowenhoutx@gmail.com](mailto:markbowenhoutx@gmail.com).

Yours in gardening,

Mark Bowen

<http://natureswayresources.com/>

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

<http://wabashfeed.com/>

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!



**Save 20%: Redeem this coupon for a big discount on Nature's Way Resources Fresh Double Ground Mulch! Please note: this offer is for bulk purchases of mulch by retail customers only at Nature's Way Resources, located at 101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX.**

**Offer Expires: 4/1/13**

