



# LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

## Houston Garden Newsletter



July 6, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 17th issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. This a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith, John Ferguson and Mark Bowen (both John and Mark are with Nature's Way Resources). We also have a great supporting cast of contributing writers and technical specialists who will chime in and tweak away 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!



## A Snake Rebuttle, Hibiscus Hue Hijinks & a Color Conspectus

First I have to share this little ode that came in from well-known former Houston Chronicle writer/editor Beverly Harris. Here's her almost-immediate response to my most recent column on identifying these "ectothermic, amniote vertebrates" that might show up in your garden:

"In response to plague of rats, mice, frogs and toads"

A plague of rats and mice  
Are something nice  
A plague of frogs and toads  
I'll love 'em loads  
However...

A plague of snakes  
Give me the shakes.  
It matters not if they don't bite  
I'm already dead of ghastly fright.  
They eat roaches?  
I've a spray for that.  
They eat mice?  
So does the cat.  
A snake! Hand me the rake!  
Watch this, kids, it's for your sake!

By b.h. in memory of her fierce country grandmother who whacked snakes and hung them over the fence because (according to lore) they twitched until sundown.

Despite her disparaging take on my snake column, it's important to know that Beverly's latest book, "Tangle of Secrets," has just become available on Amazon.com. Beverly is, without exception, one of the best writers with whom I've ever had the privilege to work. Can't wait to read it.

NOW, BACK TO THOSE HIBISCUS . . .

Do different colors create different growing patterns in hibiscus?

Mary Moore's 12 thriving hibiscus plants have her puzzled: orange ones are blooming prolifically, pinks only sparingly and yellows not at all. What gives?

Pat Merritt, longtime [American Hibiscus Society](#) administration stalwart and co-author of the AHS's Handbook, who has umpteen hibiscus plants in her yard (above), says color's not the culprit.

Hibiscus are mostly of two types: exotics (fabulous often multi-colored fancy hybrids) and the GVs, common garden varieties. Pat assumes Mary has GVs and it's just coincidence about the color-bloom connection.

GVs bloom much more than the exotics if fed heavily. Pat's advice: Get a fertilizer specific to hibiscus.

She also foliar-feeds (leaves) once a month. Don't put this directly in the root zone, but on the leaves is fine. Fertilize with something at least every two weeks.

Hibiscus also appreciate water during the summer. Pat's are all in pots around the pool and are on an automatic watering system that gives them five minutes of water twice a day ("My water bill is routinely higher than my electric bill," she admits). If you'd like to take a slightly cheaper route with potted hibiscus, Pat suggested following the lead of current AHS President Damon Veach. He just sent Pat this picture of AHS member Todd Alvis's watering "system."



Yes, that's a kiddie pool. Fill with water, add a water soluble hibiscus fertilizer (follow directions carefully) and let the plants wick up the mixture.

Lazy view of hibiscus, just ignore them. I may not get as many flowers as Pat does, but the many I do get prove what wonderful plants hibiscus are for "lazy" gardens!

We have many active hibiscus societies in this area and their newsletters alone are worth the minimal membership fee. Check out the Houston group - [AHS/Lone Star Chapter](#) - for links to all the area groups and lots more hibiscus information.

One thing Pat taught me years ago, hibiscus don't mind being moved around, but expect a pout period (yellowed dropped leaves). Be patient, water them regularly at first to get the root system established.

Speaking of color . . .



Left, it's said it's hard to argue with someone wearing pink (like this crepe). The yellow of bush daisies, next, really draws the eye. Lavender and blue (as in this Louisiana iris and plumbago) have a soothing effect.



Back to those colors in the garden, the 2013 Color of the Year is Emerald Green, so all gardeners are pretty much right in style! It's said gemstone cutters kept an emerald nearby. When their eyes became too fatigued from the intense focusing, they stared at the emerald until their eye muscles relaxed. Who else would tell you these things? Want some more color trivia you can use? Here's an excerpt from "The Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD" (see below):

## Color in our gardens

- \* Red, yellow and hot pink make us more energetic.
- \* Reds makes us happy, and transmit a feeling of power and control. Think how you feel when a male cardinal lands on the birdfeeder. Red also can stimulate appetite. That's why restaurants use a lot of reds.)
- \* Yellows make us happy.
- \* Soft pinks, lavenders, blues and greens soothe, relax.
- \* Pink looks sweet and fragrant. It's said it is difficult to argue with someone in pink! People often stoop to smell a pink flower, even if it's one that never has a fragrance.
- \* Blues and lavenders are cooling. Use in the view line of your evening sitting area.
- \* To make a small yard look bigger, plant "hot" colors (red, orange, fuchsia) close in. In back of the yard, use pastels and white (they look farther away than they actually are).
- \* To make a too-large area look more intimate, do the reverse: "hot" colors in the back of the yard and pastels close in.
- \* For eye-popping front yard displays, use yellow, hot pink, fire engine red and white. These are easier to see from a passing car than lavender and muted red or pink.
- \* Use lower-growing yellow flowers around uneven pathways where folks might trip. Yellows and oranges draw the eye faster than any other color.
- \* Check the color of bricks before planting close to the house. Some colors do clash!
- \* If you don't like the combination of your bricks and existing colors, add white or gray flowers.
- \* White and/or gray flowers or foliage with colors help create harmony.
- \* White also intensifies colors of nearby flowers and plants.
- \* Use white flowers/foilage around areas used in evenings when white is all that will be seen.
- \* In areas of blasting hot sun (such as near water), pale pastels often become washed out.
- \* Variegated plants may look like they're dying if used all alone. Strong solid greens, reds, oranges, yellows, etc. may compete better.



\* To give your yard a professional look, repeat the same shade of the same color in different in-bloom flowers in different spots.

For example, see above, left to right, repeat the hot pink of a Moi hibiscus in pink bougainvillea. Or, repeat in the bright yellow of daylilies in a bright yellow esperanza (Tecoma stans/yellow bells) across the yard.

Color has a much greater impact when coupled with hardscapes (rocks, birdbaths, fences, benches, etc.).

Large rocks pull us back to nature by anchoring us to Mother Earth. Their strength offers sort of a metaphysical protection from the stresses of everyday life.

Locate at least one large interesting rock or other hardscape somewhere near the site where you sit outside at night.

ANTIQUES LOVE CROWDS!



In the meantime, how's this for a WOW garden color shot? This is Becky Smith's Peggy Martin rose and her companion plantings of poppies, shrimp plants, gaillardias (Indian blankets), coneflowers and *Verbena bonariensis*.

This verbena grows about 2 foot tall and will be one of the plants recommended during the big upcoming Texas Rose Rustlers <http://www.texasroserustlers.com/> Rookie Rustler Meeting.

If you're not familiar with the Rose Rustlers, and love antique roses, log on to their website to read about their absolutely delightful history and, even better, join this incredible group. (And I don't just say that because my sister is a former Chairman.)

The best place to start is at their annual free Rookie Rustler Meeting, July 13, 10am-2pm at [Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens](#), where the Rustlers help maintain a huge collection of antique roses. One big focus this year will be Elizabeth Barrow's presentation on "Tough Companions for Antique Roses."

Good read: [The Rose That Survived Katrina \(the Peggy Martin Rose\)](#)

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Have you any other tips for using color in the landscape. Email me [atlazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:atlazygardener@sbcglobal.net)

## ARCHIVES OF BRENDA'S COLUMNS

(Link to archives: <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs172/1112503958110/archive/1112822112421.html>

"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.

For correspondence that is specific to Brenda, feel free to email her directly at [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).

## WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

July 6th: Jerrys Jungle will be open to the public July 6th, Saturday, 9 to 5, for visitors to stroll the gardens and enjoy the vast array of new plants. Plants that were not available in April, are now. 712 Hill Rd, 77037, for info see [jerrysjungle.com](http://jerrysjungle.com) or call 832-978-5358.

July 8: 6:30 p.m., HUG (Houston Urban Gardeners), Ray Sher: How to Sell Your Produce  
Ray will share his extensive knowledge on how to make a little money selling produce. He'll explain the food regulatory permits that are required, how to set up your business, how to select crops that will sell, and how to run the business side of market gardening as well as the growing side. He'll also explain whether you can say your produce is "organic". [\[read more\]](#)

July 11 - Houston Rose Society "Annual Ice Cream Social and Organ-ic Roses," free, 7pm, Houston Garden Center, 1500 Hermann Dr. in Hermann Park. HRS will provide the ice cream, you bring your own favorite topping. Dr. Harold L. Wade will entertain with "rose music" on an electric "pipe" organ. Multiple "gardening" vendors including The Arbor Gate, "rose-y" Designs by Marie, Enchanted Gardens and Enchanted Forest, Nature's Way Resources, Nitro-Phos, RCW Nursery, Wabash Antiques and Feed and Tom Boy Tools. Free



admission. For more information: [www.houstonrose.org](http://www.houstonrose.org) or Like us on Facebook

July 12: 11a.m. Brazoria County Master Gardeners, Texas AgriLife Extension Office, 21017 County Road 171, Angleton, speaker: John Ferguson, topic: composting (back yard and small scale), for more information contact Dana Morisse-Arnold (979) 864-7713.

July 13: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Honey Extractor Day, Lecture by John Berry at Wabash Antiques & Feed Store, \$30. Looking for an efficient way to extract your honey? Sign up for a two-hour class to harvest your honey. Bring in your super and we will have uncapping and extracting equipment available. This is an economical solution for a small-scale beekeeper to harvest their honey without the expense of an extractor. Spectators are welcome. Space is limited, only 4 two-hour spots are available. Check out website to reserve your time slot. <http://www.wabashfeed.com/>

July 13: Water-wise Gardening Clinic, 10:15 a.m. at both Cornelius Nursery locations, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2233 S. Voss: <http://www.calloways.com/clinics>. Free.

July 15: The Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 Open Garden Day. 8:30 am - 11:00 am. Master Gardeners on hand to answer questions and present programs from 9:30 am - 10:30 am. Herbs and more available for sale in the Greenhouse. Programs on Herbs offered for children & adults. Where: Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, TX 77034. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>

July 17: 10 a.m. Master Gardener Lecture Series. On Wednesday, July 17, John Ferguson will be speaking on how the environment can effect our health. John is the Founder and Owner of Nature's Way Resources. He holds an MS degree in Physics and Geology and is a licensed Soil Scientist in Texas. FREE. Where: The Meeting Room at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX 77586, <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>, 281 855 5600

July 20th: 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. The Plumeria Society of America Plant Sale. There will be a Gorgeous Bloom display of the flowers available, an 'Ask the Experts' table plus door prizes throughout the day. Arrive early for best selection. For more information: [www.theplumeriasociety.org](http://www.theplumeriasociety.org). Location: Fort Bend County Fairgrounds 3350 Hwy 36S--Rosenberg, TX.

July 24 - "Snakes in the Neighborhood" by Mr. Clint "The Snake Man," 6:30-8 p.m., Heritage Colony Clubhouse (kids) and Aquatic Center (adults); \$20 per family; register at 281-634-9555.

July 27: 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. Annual Summer Color Conference and Plant Sale. Splash into summer with this one-day immersion into perfect solutions for creating a glorious garden that thrives in Houston's summer heat! Reservations required. Speakers: Ceil Dow, avid enthusiast and ginger expert will speak on the gingers she loves, Chuck Bybee from JJL Greenhouses (a wholesale nursery) will present Bedding Plants and Annuals that are good for Houston summers and Norm Arnold of Glorious Gardens will present Landscape Designs that bring out color. Visit <http://themerchersociety.org/events-programs-2/summer-color-symposium/> for more information. Fee.

August 17: The Texas Master Naturalist Fall 2013 Training Session begins on August 17, 2013, and runs through October 30, 2013. Classes are on Tuesday evenings and field trips are on Saturdays. For more details, email [training.officer@txgcmn.org](mailto:training.officer@txgcmn.org), or you can visit the website of local chapters:

- [Heartwood](#) (Conroe area)
- [Coastal Prairie](#) (Rosenberg)
- Cradle of Texas (Brazoria County): training to start early 2014
- [Galveston Bay Area](#): training to start Spring 2014
- [Gulf Coast](#) (Houston)

- [Mid Coast](#) (Matagorda County & south):

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).

## JUST FOR KIDS

### Fort Bend County Master Gardeners Earth-Kind® Kids' Kamp



The Fort Bend County Master Gardeners are hosting the fifth annual Earth-Kind® Kids' Kamp August 5 through 9, 2013 for youth entering 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. FBMG volunteers have helped to teach nearly 100 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students about gardening basics, where food comes from, and the wildlife often encountered in the garden. Each year a new curriculum is selected from the nationally acclaimed Junior Master Gardener program supported by 28 universities, including Texas A&M University which serves as JMG headquarters. This year's curriculum is Wildlife Gardener and includes lessons taught by Master Gardeners and other subject matter experts about birds, insects, amphibians, reptiles, vermicomposting and much more.



"Twenty to thirty years ago, nearly all kids were exposed to nature on a day to day basis. Times have changed and it gets harder and harder for youth to have the same experiences. This camp gives youth the opportunity to learn about and experience the best that nature brings, and get their hands dirty along the way" said Boone Holladay, Fort Bend County Extension Agent - Horticulture, who advises the Master Gardener volunteers.

Kids' Kamp will be held at the Fort Bend County Extension office at 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg from 9 am until 3 pm each day. A registration fee of \$50.00 includes all materials, snacks, and a T-shirt, and is limited to the first 25 paid registrants. Download and print a registration form at <http://www.fbmj.com/events/event/jmg-kids-kamp/> or call Margo "Mac" McDowell at 281-633-7033 for assistance or information. FBMJ is sponsored by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

## MULCH CORNER

BY JOHN FERGUSON



This past week driving around town I noticed several grass fires related to the hot weather and drought. With the 4th of July holiday weekend upon us with fireworks celebrations, bar-b-ques, etc. I felt it was appropriate to talk about the fire risk related to the combustibility of mulches. We often overlook this risk factor in choosing our mulches.

A number of years ago I was on vacation and driving along the Oregon coastline when I passed a landscaped intersection where the mulch was on fire. Black smoke was pouring off of the area and the fire trucks were pumping water on it and could not put it out. Being curious I stopped and asked what was going on. The fire fighters told me the highway department had used a mulch made from shredded tires and that it had gone into spontaneous combustion.

After this incident I decided to research this topic and read through hundreds of pages of test reports and the following is some of what I have learned.

The tests were done in hot dry areas that are regularly subject to wildfires and some used different species than what grows in our area (e.g. Western Red Cedar versus Eastern Red Cedar), but one can reasonably expect similar behavior. Mulches were tested for flame height, rate of fire spread, and maximum temperature.

Shredded rubber mulches ignited on every test, burned the hottest with the greatest flame heights reaching over 3 feet. The rubber mulches also gave off toxic fumes and could not be extinguished with water (water actually spread the flames faster).

Pine needles were second only to rubber tire mulches in terms of the cumulative dangerous fire behavior. Cedar mulches demonstrated the most rapid rate of fire spread traveling with a rate 47.9 feet per minute. One

test showed that pine straw and pine nuggets produced some of the highest flame temperatures.

Wood mulches made from pallets and other dry wood like construction wood waste (i.e. colored mulches) ignited and burned on every test and were one of the most dangerous.

Wood chips treated with fire retardant chemicals delayed the spread for 5-10 minutes then behavior was similar to untreated wood mulches.

With the ban on indoor smoking special attention should be given to commercial buildings. Smokers tend to gather near outdoor landscaped areas with mulch, hence they pose an additional risk if mulches of high flammability are used. It was recommended that colored mulch, rubber mulch, shredded pine or cypress mulch should not be used where cigarettes may be discarded.

Composted wood mulches (native mulches) demonstrated the least hazardous fire behavior. They never flamed and only smoldered even when exposed to a direct flame. During the composting phase of producing these mulches the piles get very hot for periods of months if done properly. The carbon contained in the branches and limbs is used up by the microbes as their food or energy source. When carbon is combined with oxygen, energy is released (burning wood in a fireplace for example). During the composting process some of the carbon is combined with oxygen from the air and released as carbon dioxide gas and some of the carbon is combined into long stable carbon chains that we call humus. As a result there is not a lot of carbon in the right form to burn. Hence, not only is composted native mulch the best from a horticulture point of view and one of the best looking mulches, it is also one of the safest!

Note: Spontaneous combustion of mulches used in landscaping did not occur due to the thin layer. However a large pile of mulch on ones property can go into spontaneous combustion if not managed properly.

This information came from reports published by the following and several others:

Ohio State University Cooperative Extension  
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension  
University of California Cooperative Extension  
University of Arizona, College of Agriculture

## GOT GARDENING QUESTIONS?

Be sure to check out our gardening blog at [www.lazygardenerandfriends.com](http://www.lazygardenerandfriends.com) to get your gardening questions answered and to interact with other gardeners.

## ABOUT US

## BRENDA BEUST SMITH

### WE KNOW HER BEST AS THE LAZY GARDENER . . .

. . . but Brenda Beust Smith is also:

- \* a national award-winning writer & editor
- \* a nationally-published writer & photographer
- \* a national horticultural speaker
- \* a former Houston Chronicle reporter

When the Chronicle discontinued Brenda's 45-year-old "Lazy Gardener" print column a couple of years ago, it ranked as the longest-running, continuously-published local newspaper column in the Greater Houston area.

Brenda's gradual sideways step from Chronicle reporter into gardening writing led first to an 18-year series of when-to-do-what Lazy Gardener Calendars, then to her *Lazy Gardener's Guide* book and now to her *Lazy Gardener's Guide* on CD (which retails for \$20. However, \$5 of every sale is returned to the sponsoring group at her speaking engagements).

A Harris County Master Gardener, Brenda has served on the boards of many Greater Houston area horticulture organizations and has hosted local radio and TV shows, most notably a 10+-year Lazy Gardener run on HoustonPBS (Ch. 8) and her call-in "EcoGardening" show on KPFT-FM.

In addition to her position as Production Editor on the Garden Club of America's magazine and her freelance writing career, Brenda's latest venture is "THE LAZY GARDENER'S & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER" with John Ferguson and Mark Bowen of Nature's Way Resources.

A native of New Orleans and graduate of St. Agnes Academy and the University of Houston, Brenda lives in Aldine and is married to the now retired Aldine High School Coach Bill Smith. They have one son, Blake.

### John Ferguson

John is a native Houstonian and has over 27 years of business experience. He owns Nature's Way Resources, a composting company that specializes in high quality compost, mulch, and soil mixes. He holds a MS degree in Physics and Geology and is a licensed Soil Scientist in Texas. John has won many awards in horticulture and environmental issues. He represents the composting industry on the Houston-Galveston Area Council for solid waste. His personal garden has been featured in several horticultural books and "Better Homes and Gardens" magazine. His business has been recognized in the Wall Street Journal for the quality and value of their products. He is a member of the Physics Honor Society and many other professional societies. John is the co-author of the book *Organic Management for the Professional*.

### Mark Bowen

Mark is a native Houstonian, a horticulturist and organic specialist with a background in garden design, habitat restoration and organic project management. He is currently the general manager of Nature's Way Resources. Mark is also the co-author of the book *Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas*, the author of the



book *Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast*, co-author of the *Bayou Planting Guide* and contributing landscape designer for the book *Landscaping Homes: Texas*.

Pablo Hernandez

Pablo Hernandez is the special projects coordinator for Nature's Way Resources. His realm of responsibilities include: serving as a webmaster, IT support, technical problem solving/troubleshooting, metrics management and quality control. Pablo helps this newsletter happen from a technical support standpoint.



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



<http://wabashfeed.com/>



<http://microlifefertilizer.com/>



<http://natureswayresources.com/>

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!



Save 20%: Redeem this coupon for a big discount on Nature's Way Resources Native Double Ground Mulch( <http://natureswayresources.com/products.htm> ). Please note: this offer is for bulk material (by the cubic yard) purchases by retail customers only at Nature's Way Resources, located at 101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX.

Offer Expires: 8/1/13

