



July 27, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 20th 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. Thanks so much for your interest.

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BOUGAINVILLEA? OR CREPE? . . . SHARON'S PLUMERIAS . . .

BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH



Marsha, a reader, sent in this picture wanting me to settle an argument.

Before that, however, here's a tip o' the trowel to every gardener whose plantings make our public streets a more colorful, delightful daily pathway.

And a special thanks to those of you who have street-/freeway-facing fences or walls with colorful flowers that flow over the top where they provide delightful uplifts for those of us driving by.

Now, back to Marsha's dilemma.

What is this beautiful pink-blooming plant?

Marsha's carpool friend insisted it's a crepe.

Marsha thinks it's a bougainvillea.

"No way!" said her friend. "Bougainvillea is a vine. You grow it in a basket."

They pass this every day heading home on the Hardy Toll Road.

To get this picture, Marsha obviously had to exit the toll road, u-turn, double back on the feeder, shoot this picture and then get back on the toll road to head home.

Now, that's one curious plant lover!

At least she'll have the satisfaction of knowing she's right.

I drove over there and took a look because, to be honest, it looked more like a bougainvillea to me too but these days . . . I couldn't be sure from the picture.

It is a bougainvillea but the confusion is understandable. The concept of growing such a huge version of this extremely colorful, heat-loving tropical is a pretty recent one for the Greater Houston area.

Today sprawling bougainvillea shrubs, many trained into "trees," can be found all over Houston thanks to our shorter, warmer winters.

Here's a similar view of a crepe:



Up close it's easy to see the difference in flowers and leaves, even the thorns that bougainvilleas have but crepes don't.

But from the toll road at high speed?

Now Marsha wants to know: Can she plant her bougainvillea in the ground?

If you like to gamble, sure. This is a true tropical. But many a huge bougainvillea around town has now survived many of our typical cold winter spells. The more winters they survive, the more cold they'll be able to survive.

Still . . . if we have a prolonged below-freezing period - say, over a week or so during the day - I wouldn't bet on survival.

But we usually don't have such prolonged below-freezing spells. Our soil doesn't freeze, and that's the true danger.

The only thing I can say for sure, these need to be in a spot that is EXTREMELY well drained. In winter, they should be heavily mulched.

Anyone out there have experience with bougainvillea in the ground?



Ernie & Sharon Sanchez's plumerias, top row l to r, Aztec Gold, Sally Moragne, Lemon Chiffon and Celandine. Bottom row, Slaughter Pink, and one they'd love to have identified!

STARTING PLUMERIAS FROM CUTTINGS

Speaking of tropical plants now thriving in Houston area gardens . . .

It's always such fun to see familiar flowers in totally different settings with totally different names.

In India, for example, our beautiful plumeria is called champa.

I never quite looked at plumerias the same way again after reading a piece on "champas" by Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. It begins:

SUPPOSING I became a champa flower, just for fun, and grew on a branch high up that tree, and shook in the wind with laughter and danced upon the newly budded leaves, would you know me, mother?

"The Champa Flower" by Rabindranath Tagore

We think of champas - plumerias to us - as Hawaiian lei flowers (frangapani) but they are also the national flower of Laos and Nicaragua.

Years ago I bought my Daddy a bare plumeria cutting stalk. I mailed it to him as a surprise. He called to thank me, then wanted to know how he should cook it.

I thought of that funny memory when my cousin Sharon Beust Sanchez - Daddy's brother George's daughter - sent me pictures of her and her husband Ernie's gorgeous plumerias, above.

Ernie and Sharon have been growing plumerias - first at their Texas City home, now at their League City home - for 35 years ago, first starting cuttings they brought home from Hawaii. Obviously they knew better than to cook them!

Sharon says they need little care, are beautiful to look at and are very fragrant. Then she adds that Ernie's the one who really takes care of them. My kind of gardener!

Ernie was generous enough to share some "getting started" tips for those new to these incredible flowers that so love our Gulf Coast heat and humidity.

Plumerias may be purchased as leafed-out plants in most nurseries. But if you buy at any of the Plumeria Society of America sales (your best bet!), they'll come as cuttings (translation: sticks), just like the ones Sharon and Ernie started with.

Ernie's tips if you go this route:

1. Put cutting in good potting soil in about 6 "pot. After few years be sure to repot in larger container or you will limit their size.
2. Feed them 2-3 times a year
3. Leave your plumeria in pots & sink them in a hole about 2/3 way down. This will keep roots cooler yet make it easier to get up if it freezes.
4. Bring them into enclosed space if outside temp gets to 32 or below
5. Water 2-3 times a week. Don't overwater. If the stem starts to get soft cut back on watering.
6. They develop a seed pod (looks like a large string bean). Put some masking tape around it to keep the seeds in & let it ripen on the plant.

This will keep the seeds from falling out. When the seed pod turns purple, the seeds are ready to plant. They usually germinate in a few weeks.

I'm hearing more and more from "lazy gardeners" who, over past few years have left plumerias to overwinter in gardens. This is risky, they are truly tropical. However, the longer a plant stays in the ground, the tougher its roots will become and the more likely

it is to sprout again in the spring after dying back in winter.

These will always be slower to bud out, however, than those that are protected during freezes.

Serious plumeria growers still will keep their more treasured varieties in pots so they can be moved inside.

The Plumeria Society of America is based in Houston. Log onto the PSA website (www.theplumeriasociety.org) for details. The website also contains a lot of growing and problem-solving advice.

P.S. Don't eat plumerias, although various parts have traditionally been employed (by those who know what they're doing) as a healing wrap for bruises and ulcers, as liniment for rheumatism, to treat indigestion and high blood pressure and as a magical ingredient in casting love spells, among numerous other medicinal uses. Delightful legends abound about plumerias in various cultures.

Here's a neat observation from Ernie: The dropping of leaves in late summer are a good indication the weather will soon change to fall. Last year, he noticed the change started in mid-July indicating a very early fall.

How's all this for giving you a broader view of one of our neatest flowers?

Any other plumeria-growing experiences you'd like to share?
Email me at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

Send your gardening questions to lazygardeners@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.

WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

August 3: Starting a Community/School Garden: Community Engagement & Planning #1

Class 1: Community Engagement & Planning - This class will explore goals, discuss organizing volunteers and funding, and help you set priorities for your garden. Sat, Aug 3. 9 - 11:15 am. \$24 members. \$36 nonmembers. Green Planet Sanctuary, 13424-B Briar Forest Drive, Houston, TX 77077. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

August 3: Saturday with the Master Gardeners - Garden Talk Topic "Shade Gardening". Join the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' in their 4 acres of demonstration gardens and talk to the MG volunteers who design and maintain them. Gardens will be open from 9:00-11:00 a.m. Attend an informal garden talk on Shade Gardening which starts at 9:30 in the Japanese Garden. 281-341-7068 or www.fbmj.com

August 5: The Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 Present a Children's Program - Growing Pineapples from tops, and a Program for Adults - Tool Sharpening, 9:30-10:30 a.m. Where: Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, TX 77034. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>. 281 855 5600

August 8: Propagate Your Own Plants, at Urban Harvest. Learn the various sexual and asexual ways to start plants from seeds, cuttings, divisions, and layering. Topics include the proper storage of seeds, seed dormancy, and methods of sprouting hard-to-sprout seeds. There will also be a hands-on workshop on propagation by cuttings. Thurs, Aug 8. 6:30 - 8:45 pm. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Urban Harvest Classroom, 2311 Canal Street, Houston, TX 77003. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

August 8; 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm. "Mini-Floras" will be the topic of the Houston Rose Society Meeting Note new meeting location: the Parish Hall of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 1819 Heights Blvd, Houston, Texas 77008. Our speaker is James Laperouse, who will discuss the newest of the rose types. Free admission. www.houstonrose.org or Like us on Facebook.

August 15, 2013 - "Heat & Drought Tough Roses for Texas Gardens" by Gaye Hammond, Master Rosarian. Texas summers can wreak havoc on the garden. The Houston Rose Society, in cooperation with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, has been collecting data on the effects of heat and drought on landscape roses. Gaye Hammond will share the preliminary results and identify the roses that gave superior landscape performance during recent periods of drought. The public is invited to this free program hosted by the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners at the Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Road in Rosenberg. Social at 6:30 pm; program from 7:00 - 8:00 pm. For more information call 281.633.7033 or visit www.fbmj.com. FBCMG is sponsored by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

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, 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):

August 17: Starting a Community/School Garden: Garden Design, Fruits & Vegetables #2 Class 2: Garden Design, Fruits & Vegetables. We will review and modify the garden design, set a schedule for ordering

materials and set a build date. . Sat, Aug 17. 9 - 11:15 am. \$24 members. \$36 nonmembers. Green Planet Sanctuary, 13424-B Briar Forest Drive, Houston, TX 77077. For more info: 713-880 5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

August 17 - Houston Urban Food Production Conference on small scale, local food production at 8:30am-4:30pm, United Way Building, 50 Waugh Drive. Also includes organic certification, fruit and nut, weed control, soil building, irrigation and poultry, goat, beekeeping and cut flower production, among other topics. Registration deadline: August 1 at \$35; \$50 day of event. Call Diana at 281-855-5614 to register for this program and for booth registration <https://www.facebook.com/HUFPC2013>

August 19: The Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 present a program for children - Garden Craft and a program for adults - Container Gardens, 9:30-10:30 a.m. Where: Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, TX 77034. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>. 281 855 5600

August 21: Master Gardener Lecture Series. Mary Karish will be speaking on "How to Grow and Care for Citrus for the home garden. Mary is a Harris County Master Gardener, a Citrus Specialist and Master Composter. She is a freelance writer and the owner of The Three Sisters - Your Backyard Gardener. 10:00 a.m., Where: The Meeting Room at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX 77586. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>. 281 855 5600.

August 23: 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. A Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group Event. We have our pear event and pear tasting with Dr. Ethan Natelson. George Mc Afee will do a hands on of multi-grafting and will have pictures of the many beautiful creations he has done. He and Ethan are both master Grafters. No fee. www.gcfsf.weebly.com/newsletter.

August 24: Irrigation For the Home Gardener (hands-on). A garden that conserves precious water resources is a rewarding investment. An irrigation system is a practical choice for most garden locations. Sat, Aug 24. 9 am - 12 pm. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Private residence in Highland, TX. Location to be provided to enrolled students. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

Sept. 6 - Registration deadline for 12-week Texas Gulf Coast Gardener Program at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Garden. Call 281-443-8731 or visit park at 223-6 Aldine-Westfield, Humble, to enroll. The two-tier program for both beginner and intermediate-level gardeners was developed with guidance from Dr. David Creech and Stephen F. Austin State University's Mast Arboretum staff in Nacogdoches. Classes, starting the third week in September, will meet Tuesdays (Tier 1) and Thursdays (Tier 2), 9am-3pm (fee: \$225).

September 7: Rainwater Harvesting and Cisterns. We will discuss very low-cost methods of absorbing water on your property, as well as more expensive methods such as rainwater cisterns. Sat, Sept 7. 9 - 11:15 am. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Westbury Community Garden, 12601 Fonmeadow, 77035. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

September 7: WILDSCAPES WORKSHOP & Native Plant Sale, Landscaping with Native Plants to Attract Wildlife, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. At the Houston Zoo's Brown Education Center in Hermann Park www.npsot.org/houston

September 15: Organic Container Gardening. Don't have enough space to grow your favorite herbs and vegetables? Container Gardening may be your answer. Sun, Sept 15. 2:30 - 4:30 pm. \$36 non-members. Wabash Feed, 5701 Washington Ave, Houston, TX 77007. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

September 17: Planting the Fall Vegetable Garden (hands-on). What better way to gain expert knowledge than to see how it is done firsthand through our fall gardening course. Tue, Sept 17. 6:00 - 8:30 pm. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Westbury Community Garden, 12601 Fonmeadow, 77035. For more info: 713-880-

5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

September 20: application deadline for The Fort Bend County Master Gardener Training class, a program offered by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service that begins on Wednesday, October 2, 2013. Classes are Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am - 3:30pm during the month of October. The cost of the class is \$200 (\$353 for couples). For more information visit www.fbmga.com (under Become a Master Gardener) or you can call 281-633-7033 or 281-342-3034.

Submit calendar items to lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com. Events must be submitted by the sponsoring organization. Please note: "garden calendar request" in the subject line. We list calendar items up to two months ahead of time.

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.

MULCH CORNER

BY JOHN FERGUSON



I will be on vacation this week so I thought I would share a humorous e-mail that someone sent me many years ago.

The Lawn (from the Internet, source unknown)

"Winterize your lawn," the big sign outside the garden store commanded. I've fed it, watered it, mowed it, raked it and watched a lot of it die anyway. Now I'm supposed to winterize it? I hope it's too late. Grass lawns have to be the stupidest thing we've come up with outside of thong swimsuits!

We constantly battle dandelions, Queen Anne's lace, thistle, violets, Chicory and clover that thrive naturally, so we can grow grass that must be nursed through an annual four-step chemical dependency.

Imagine the conversation The Creator might have with St. Francis about this:

"Frank you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there in the Midwest? What

happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracted butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles."

"It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers 'weeds' and went to great extent to kill them and replace them with grass."

"Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?"

"Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn."

"The spring rains and cool weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy."

"Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it - sometimes twice a week."

"They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?"

"Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags."

"They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?"

"No, sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away."

"Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?"

"Yes, sir."

"These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work."

"You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it."

"What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life."

"You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and have them hauled away."

"No! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and keep the soil moist and loose?"

"After throwing away your leaves, they go out and buy something they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves."

"And where do they get this mulch?"

"They cut down trees and grind them up."

"Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?"

"Dumb and Dumber, Lord. It's a real stupid movie about . . ."

"Never mind I think I just heard the whole story."

GARDENERS FORUM

HOSTED BY MARK BOWEN



Mark is on vacation. The Gardeners Forum will return next week. Feel free to share your gardening stories, ideas and photos anytime. A BIG THANKS to all those who contribute! Send them to lazygardenerandfriends@aol.com.

For correspondence that is specific to Mark, please feel free to email him directly at markbowenhoutx@gmail.com.

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, natural 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.



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