



August 16, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 23rd 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.

Please or sign yourself up to receive this newsletter by clicking the "Join Our Mailing List" link just below.

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WATERING BAG ADVICE FROM JANE LONG! and MOVE OVER, ST. FRANCES?

BY BRENDA SMITH

JANE LONG PAVILION

Bolivar
Peninsula



Those of us hoping to make Texans more aware of the incredible accomplishments of Jane Long (especially on Bolivar Peninsula) - you know, the Mother of Texas? - are smiling about how she's now passing along some great advice for helping trees survive our now-all-too-common drought periods.

Before we discuss these watering bags, tho, want to know more about Jane Long than you learned in that single paragraph in all Texas school history books?

Three opportunities:

1. Email me at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net and I'll send you the fascinating information packet on Jane's two incredible years spent on Bolivar Peninsula (including how she came to be named the "Mother of Texas") and her subsequent amazing role in the fight for Texas Independence.

2. Mark your calendar for Oct. 12, 2013 - date of the 11 a.m.-4 p.m. [4th Annual Jane Long Festival](#) on Bolivar Peninsula. Bring your own lawn chairs - this is an old fashioned family style festival.

(Also: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jane-Long-Festival-Bolivar-Peninsula/153763924635431>)

3. Tune in to [KPFT \(90.1 FM\)](#) at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 27, for an Open Journal discussion of this remarkable woman, Jane Wilkinson Long.

Now, back to those trees!

As you can see in the attached picture, water bags are the way the pros do it. These are available from multiple companies (google "watering bags for trees") and now at many nurseries.

Galveston County Road and Bridge Manager Lee Crowder oversaw the setting up of these slow-release watering bags at the Jane Long Pavilion (near the Bolivar Ferry landing and the entrance to Fort Travis Seashore Park - site of the Jane Long Festival).

The reason these are favored by professionals (despite their somewhat ungainly appearance) is that they encourage deep watering.

Shallow watering is so harmful to trees. Instead of growing downward and then out sideways as they should, the tree's roots - desperate for water during droughts - start growing upward into the soil levels most quickly dried out.

Not a situation you want to encourage. Not only do the tender roots overheat, you'll eventually encourage poor anchor root development. And, if you're using a overhead sprinkler, bet you're losing maybe as much as half the water you're applying to evaporation and runoff.

Experts recommend making sure any watering for tree roots goes at least 12 inches deep. All you have to do is dig down into the soil after leaving the sprinkler on for your typical period. Bet that water reaches only a couple of inches deep.

They also recommend for newly-planted trees that the rootball area be kept watered. The best way to do that: A slow, even application of a LOT of water in one application. This will force it to go down, which is what you want.

Generally speaking, the bags are refilled once a week; but this can vary greatly. If you can't, or don't want to, use a bag system, at least use a soaker hose, or lay the hose near the tree and let it drip for a long period.

A sprinkler is better than nothing. But it's definitely not the best route during our hot, dry summers when even night temperatures are high enough to trigger a LOT of evaporation.

Don't forget to tune in to [KPFT \(90.1 FM\)](#) Tuesday, Aug. 27, at 9:30 a.m. to learn more about "our Mother" Jane Long!



St. Fiacre statues photographed at the Dominican Sisters' garden on Alameda, left, and at a Brookwood Community store.

MOVE OVER, ST. FRANCES - ST. FIACRE THINKS MORE LIKE MOST GARDENERS DO

If you like to plan ahead for celebrations, Friday, Aug. 30, is the day to honor St. Fiacre who - in truth - is probably a much better patron saint for most gardeners than St. Frances.

Why?

One can't help but suspect St. Frances of Assisi would not like being the most popular statue in home

gardens.

It is said he didn't believe any land should be privately owned or that man should ever kill any of God's creatures (including aphids, fire ants and roaches).

That bird on St. Frances' shoulder ? It symbolizes the freedom he believed ALL animals should have the right to come or go at will.

St. Fiacre is actually the patron saint of gardeners. (Also the patron saint of cab drivers)

Legend says Fiacre was born in Ireland near the end of the 6th Century. (St. Frances was born about five centuries later)

An ordained priest, Fiacre sought solitude in France. He asked French Bishop St. Faro for land on which to grow the medicinal plants he loved.

Legend has it St. Faro told St. Fiacre he could have as much land as he could till from sunup to sundown in a forest near Breuil in the French province of Brie.

St. Fiacre pointed his staff at the ground and began walking.

Miraculously the soil turned by itself, clearing away all briars, boulders and trees in his path. It was the first of many miracles attributed to him.

St. Fiacre established culinary, medicinal, flower and herb gardens and a hospice to which many came for his famous cures.

They, in turn, brought him new seeds and plants, so that his gardens became famous throughout Europe and - some say - may have been the inspiration for Brother Cadfael's gardens.
(He is also considered the patron saint of herbalists and florists.)

It was also said by some that Fiacre refused to allow women in his chapel because a woman, who coveted the land given to him, claimed sorcery, not a miracle, caused the staff to furrow the soil.

The bishop became so angry with the woman, he banned all women from St. Fiacre's chapel.

(But, to be honest, women in those days were pretty well burked when it came to entering any monastery.)

Ah, but you're thinking: What was that about cab drivers?

In 17th Century Paris, there was a hostelry in the Rue St-Martin known as Hotel Saint-Facre.

The hotel's enterprising innkeeper came up with the idea of renting coaches. His coaches, or cabs, became known as fiacres, and still are so-called today.

St. Fiacre's feast day is celebrated on August 30 or September 1, depending on which source you believe.

I asked Sr. Heloise Cruzat, keeper of the Dominican Garden in which sits the St. Fiacre statue at left above, what he's holding in his hand? She says she's pondered that too, figures it's a small boulder.

Usually he's portrayed holding a shovel (in hopes it will "open" the soil for gardeners as it did for him?) Guess the boulder represents the boulders that flew out of the way when he was plowing.
Other statues have him holding a bunny which is really funny. Rabbits would probably eat everything he

planted. More likely he'd be throwing his shovel at them!

Before you throw out your statue of St. Francis, remember, Frances did urge gardeners to set aside space within their gardens for flowers and fragrance.

Who else would tell you these things?

BOUGAINVILLEA - ANOTHER "WILL WONDERS NEVER EASE?"

One last bougainvillea report from a colder-than-Houston area: Mari Hooper, Montgomery County, planted a one-gallon bougainvillea against a south-facing wall about six years ago. Within two years, it covered the whole wall and bloomed constantly. Then when we had that bad cold winter, she lost it . . . or so she thought. This spring, it returned and although it's not blooming as profusely as before, it is blooming and she has high hopes for more color next year. Montgomery County now!

* Tip o' the trowel to Nacogdoches which, by state decree, is now the Garden Capital of Texas. A well-deserved honor! If you've never been to the Pinewoods Native Plant Center there, you've missed a great treat. So many of the garden flowers we now take for granted were developed or nurtured in this Stephen F. Austin State University's center or at the campus' Mast Arboretum.

Here's a neat quote in the Texas Rose Rustler's current newsletter, where I learned about this honor: *"When Frederick Law Olmsted (designer of Central Park, the Biltmore estate landscape, etc.) came to Nacogdoches in 1853, he said of the town: "The houses along the road...stand in gardens, and are neatly painted--the first exterior sign of cultivation of mind since the Red River."*

Congratulations, guys!

Questions aimed at me can be emailed to lazygardener@sbcglobal.net (altho I'll get any you send to this newsletter as well).

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 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 18: 1:30-3:30 p.m., Veggie Cooking Class at Wabash Antiques & Feed Store, free.

A vegetable garden becomes successful when veggies land on your plate. There are simple ways to eat everything that is grown in your garden and even foragables that grow in your yard naturally. Think that you don't like beets? Think that you don't like chard? Maybe you just don't know how to prepare them. Joe Boswell will teach you several simple solutions for getting any edible to be tasty, whether you're a gourmet chef, a Mom-on-the-go, or an old time pioneer. For more information visit <http://www.wabashfeed.com/>

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.gcfsg.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

August 24, 2013 Woodlands Home & Garden Show. Come check out the following gardening and green programs: 10:30-11:30 a.m: Drought Tolerant Landscape! Get your Lawn, Garden and Trees ready for the Fall Months by Randy Lemmon. 11:30-12:30 p.m: Build Healthy Soils the Organic Way! Save Money and Live Better! by John Ferguson. 12:30-1:30 p.m: Give your Home Extraordinary Air Quality and Energy Efficiency that's 100% Food, Water & Renewable Energy Capable! by LaVerne Williams. 1:30-2:30 p.m: Your Landscape, Your Way, Naturally with Beautiful Native Plants that Serve as the Foundation Elements of Your Landscape by Mark Bowen. www.woodlandsshow.com

August 24: 9-11:30 a.m., Long time Galveston County Master Gardener Luke Stripling will present "Successful Fall Vegetable Gardening," a program on growing fall and winter season vegetables in Galveston County, at Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park, 4102 Main Street (FM 519), La Marque. Topics: soil preparation, drainage, the use of raised beds, the best seed planting dates, the best varieties, planting depth, fertilizer methods, water requirements, pest control and harvesting. For course reservations, call 281-534-3413, ext. 12 or email GALV3@wt.net.

August 25: 1:30-3:30 p.m., Rainwater Harvesting Class at Wabash Antiques & Feed Store, free, Give your plants the water they really want-rain water. Attend the Rainwater Harvesting class and learn what it will take to catch the rain from your roof for your garden needs. Come with your yard specifications and watering needs in mind, and as a class, we will find out what it will take for your home to catch the rain.. For more information visit <http://www.wabashfeed.com/>

August 26: 6:30 p.m., HUG Urban Farmers/HUFBC will meet at a new location, 1475 W. Gray, Houston 77007. Skip Richter with AgriLife will tell us his observations about the all day Houston Food Production Conference held Aug 17. www.houstonurbangardeners.org Free.

August 28: 7:30 p.m., Houston Cactus & Succulents Society Membership Meeting, Program: The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum by Mike Cracraft, Location: Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 W Gray St, Houston, <http://hcsstex.org/>

Aug. 31: "Orchids for Beginners" demonstration and workshop at Clown Alley Orchids, 3119 Lily St., Pasadena, TX; 281-991-6841;ClownAlley@sbcglobal.net. \$20 fee includes starter plant and all materials.

September 5 is the deadline for registering for Brazoria County Master Gardener Training. The session begins on September 12 through November 14, 2013 on every Thursday from 9:00 am to 3:30 p.m. The new fall class will be held at the Brazoria County Extension Office, 21017 CR 171, Angleton, TX 77515. Master Gardener Training program is 60 hours of classroom training that covers a wide range of gardening topics. Course cost is \$99. For more information contact the extension office at 979-864-1558 x110 or email <http://txmg.org/brazoria>.

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: WILDESCAPES 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 7: Saturday with the Master Gardeners, Garden Talk Topic "Water Gardening"

Join the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' in their 4 acres of demonstration gardens on Saturday, September 7th and talk to the MG volunteers who design and maintain them. It's a great way to learn about gardening and plants well-suited to Fort Bend County. Gardens will be open from 9:00-11:00 a.m. on September 7th. Attend an informal garden talk on Water Gardening which starts at 10:00 a.m. in the Water Garden. Call 281-341-7068 or visit www.fbmjg.com

Sept 9: HUG (Houston Urban Gardeners) Event: Cool Geeky New Ways to Grow Food; Seeking presenters I often have people come up to me with some wonderful new equipment, inspiring doo-dads or new (or old) ways of growing food that look very interesting. Our Sept. 9 meeting will focus on the theme of fun, new, geeky stuff and new/old methods of growing food. Even better if it's for growing in your apartment, balcony or vertically. We have 3 to five interested people involved so far. Is there something you heard about or saw that YOU want to share? Let me know at the next meeting or email me atlaurel@houstonurbangardeners.org.
org. <http://www.houstonurbangardeners.org/>

September 14: Nacogdoches/Arcadia: Naked Ladies and Oxbloods: SFA Gardens Arcadian Fall Bulb Bus Tour, September 14. Visit Texas Gardener columnist Greg Grant's Emanis House dogtrot in Shelby County's rural community of Arcadia. Depending on the weather, see red oxblood lilies (*Rhodophiala*), several different colors of spider lilies (*Lycoris*), or assorted rain lilies (*Cooperia*, *Zephyranthes*, and *Habranthus*). Unfortunately their display depends on the first fall rains so a grand naturalized bulb display isn't guaranteed. Visit Grant's old family home with an open breezeway running through it, along with his small cottage garden, chickens, and bluebird houses. Dress comfortably for potentially hot weather. The bus tour will be from 9 a.m. until noon. All participants will meet at the SFA Ag building, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, at 9 a.m. \$25 for Friends of SFA Gardens members, \$30 for non-members. For more information and reservations contact Elyce Rodwald at 936-468-1832 orodewald@sfasu.edu. Other SFA Gardens events and information can be found at sfagardens.sfasu.edu

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 17th: The Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens kicks off the Texas Gulf Coast Gardener classes this fall! Starting with the first gardening series: Tier-1: Basic Gardening- runs Sept. 17th-Dec. 10th, Designed for beginner to intermediate level gardeners. The curriculum will include topics such as site development, plant selection, propagation, mulching and composting, lawn care and many others. Meets on Tuesdays. For more information, call 281-443-8731 or emailmsociety@hcp4.net.

September 19th: December 12th: The Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens is offering Tier-2: Landscape and Garden Plants. Topics focus on plants that can be successfully cultivated and utilized in the Texas Gulf Coast climate. Participants will learn about new and exciting plants to add to their collection while improving their horticultural skills. Meets on Thursdays. For more information or to register, call 281-443-8731 or email msociety@hcp4.net.

September 19: Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening presented by a team of Fort Bend Master Gardeners Master Gardeners will provide helpful and timely information on growing methods and proven crops for Fort Bend County. 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. Call 281.633.7033 or visit www.fbmjg.com

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.fbmjg.com (under Become a Master Gardener) or you can call 281-633-7033 or 281-342-3034.

September 29: Houston: Sustainable Living Through Permaculture 1: SLTP 1. The design principles of Permaculture

(PC) are explained, observed and illustrated in a series of breakout sessions at a home and garden remodeled to reflect PC sustainability principles. Sunday, September 29. 2 - 6 p.m. \$50. NE Loop Residence. Location to be provided to enrolled students. For more information, call 713-880-5540 or visit

www.urbanharvest.org.

Oct. 4-5: Bulb & Plant Mart at Holly Hall Retirement Community, 2000 Holly Hall St. 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct. 4; 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. Oct. 5. New this year: a Garden Garage Sale of garden treasures. Sponsored by the Garden Club of Houston.

Details: www.gchouston.org

October 5: Nacogdoches: The SFA Gardens at Stephen F. Austin State University will host its annual Fabulous Fall Festival Plant Sale from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Saturday, October 5, at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, 2900 Raguet St. in historic Nacogdoches. A wide variety of hard-to-find, "Texas tough" plants will be available, including Texas natives, heirlooms, tropicals, perennials, shrubs, trees, and exclusive Greg Grant and SFA 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 more than 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 two weeks before the sale for a list of available plants.

October 5-6: Spring Branch African Violet Club, Annual Fall Sale, West Gray Multiservice Center 1475 West Gray Street, Houston, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. and Sunday, 10:00a.m. - 3:00p.m.,

Free Admission, Violets of all types such as standards, miniatures, semi-miniatures, and trailers will be available. Other Gesneriads such as Episcias and Streps and supplies such as potting soil, pots, and fertilizers will also be featured. Club members will be available to answer general questions on growing African Violets. For further information, contact Karla Ross, 281-748-8417, kjwross@yahoo.com.

Note: This is our fall sale and does NOT include a show.

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

PLASTIC MULCHES



Last week we looked at gravel and stone mulches. This week we are going to look at the second largest class of inorganic mulch, plastic.

Clear or black plastic can be used to warm the soil in spring but should be removed to prevent the growth of fungus and other pathogens in the soil. Methane and other gases produced by the anaerobic conditions can build up damaging plant roots. The better the soil (more fertile) or the higher the clay content, the greater the

problems become with plastic mulches.

There are many variations of plastic mulches, black plastic, clear plastic, colored plastic, micro pore plastic, Infrared Plastic (IRT), pelletized plastic, etc. Plastic mulches are generally applied as a one layer mulch. Plastic is available in different thicknesses, widths, and lengths. Some plastic mulches are produced with special properties like resistance to biodegradation from ultra violet light, or even to biodegrade faster (new research).

Black plastic is the most commonly used for many reasons. First let's look at the positive aspects of black plastic. It warms the soil in the spring encouraging many species of plants (primarily vegetables) to grow faster and earlier so they produce their crops before insect populations become a problem. Black plastic reduces weeds, some plants will have higher yields than with clear plastic. It reduces fertilizer leaching preventing contamination of runoff (however it also leaves the salts behind). Results in cleaner crop (less dirt and dust splashed onto leaves). Lends itself to mechanized application which is economical for large scale operations. Most effective in specialized applications.

The negative effects of black plastic include:

- 1) An increase of the heat index around plants that leads to insect and disease problems.
- 2) Pathogens growing better when black plastic is used since air flow is reduced, often the cause of root dieback and other fungal disease.
- 3) It breaks down (becomes brittle) when exposed to ultra violet radiation in sunlight.
- 4) The plastic fragments can create a mess when it starts to break down.
- 5) It is difficult and expensive to dispose of and generally unsightly.
- 6) Shallow root systems are often created by plastic and during drought periods the plants may not survive the stress.
- 7) It lowers crop yields on some species compared to other types of mulch and crops often require more water.
- 8) Solid plastic films prevent CO₂ from escaping the soil (and oxygen from entering), reducing the benefit from localized concentration of CO₂ to plants.
- 9) Requires frequent monitoring for best performance and requires the use of a costly drip irrigation system for best performance.
- 10) It increases soil erosion in areas between the plastic covered rows.

Best success with plastic mulches requires chemical fumigation (costly and dangerous) to keep pathogens in check. This practice is reported to increase the bad or problem nematode populations. It kills earthworms by preventing them from reaching the surface to feed. Since plant parts often stick to the plastic, reuse of the plastic tends to spread plant diseases unless the plastic is cleaned and sterilized. Plastic films tend to breakdown in the second and subsequent years allowing cracks to form that weeds can grow through. To be economical, specialized tractor drawn equipment is required to apply mulch. For effective weed control, smoother seedbed is required than with organic mulches, which requires additional labor (i.e. costs). Plastic mulches often heat the soil too much for some cool season crops like lettuce, thus reducing yields. Over time leftover salts from synthetic fertilizer build up creating hardpan and stunted growth.

If used in early spring, plastic mulches should be removed after air temperatures warm up to prevent many of the above problems.

Black plastic is most effective with toxic chemical programs on poor abused soil that is chemically and biologically out of balance.

GARDENERS FORUM & NEWS

HOSTED BY MARK BOWEN

This week we are happy to share the following article by guest columnist Donna Fay Hilliard:



Attracting Mason Bees

Native American Mason Bees are found throughout most of the United States. They are solitary and nest in hollow stems, woodpecker drillings and insect holes in trees. They are common near woodlands, in towns, and suburbs and are excellent pollinators of many plants. Since they are solitary; they work for themselves and live independently. This makes them far less susceptible to disease and pest problems. And second, because they don't live in hives, they can't be enslaved for commercial agriculture, which increases their exposure to toxins. Native bees such as the Mason Bee don't make honey. They are very effective pollinators and will work in the cool or rainy weather when honeybees take the day off.

Mason bees (genus *Osmia*) are usually a little smaller than a honeybee, and typically metallic blue or a blue-black in color. They get their name from their habit of nest-building, which is to seal off the cells where they lay their eggs, with a mortar-like application of mud. The males do not have a stinger, and the females only sting if they are trapped or squeezed. This makes them an ideal neighbor for the home garden, since they pose little to no threat of stinging.

In the wild, mason bees lay their eggs in small natural cavities such as woodpecker holes, insect holes, and hollow stems, but they seem to be just as happy to lay their eggs in artificial nesting cavities such as wooden blocks with holes drilled in them, cardboard tubes and paper straws, since they cannot excavate their own nesting cavities. They rarely reuse them so carefully clean or dispose of after two seasons.

Female mason bees emerge in early spring and immediately begin to forage for pollen and nectar, which they collect from fruit trees, berries, flowers and vegetables. They pack this food into the far end of their nesting cavity until they decide there is enough to feed a young bee. Then the female mason bee backs up and lays an egg and seals up the cell. This process continues for four to six weeks, after which she will die.

Mason bee larva hatch after a few days after the eggs are laid. They munch on the food that has been stored in their cell, which takes about 10 days. Then the larva spins a cocoon and pupates. By autumn, the insects look like an adult bee, but will remain inside their cocoon throughout the winter. When the weather warms up in the spring, the male chews his way out first; the female emerges several days later. And the cycle starts over.

Donna Fay Hilliard is a Texas Certified Nursery Professional, an Organic Horticulturist and is the owner of the garden center Sweet Organic Solutions, located at 2710 S Main St, Pearland, TX 7758.

(281) 997-1900. Check out their facebook site at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sweet-Organic-Solutions/146810748681926>

IN THE NEWS:

Donate now to save Deer Park Prairie:

<http://www.bayoulandconservancy.org/#!/save-deer-park-prairie/c19cm>

[Bee die-offs: New tests find bee-killing pesticides in 'bee-friendly' plants from garden centers nationwide - See more at:](#)

<http://www.foe.org/news/news-releases/2013-08-bee-die-offs-new-tests-find-bee-killing-pesticides>

If you have a gardening story you would like to share, please send it to us at lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.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.

Regarding this newsletter, Brenda is the lead writer, originator of it and the daily inspiration for it. We so appreciate the way she has made gardening such a fun way to celebrate life together for such a long time.

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*.

For this newsletter, John contributes articles regularly and is responsible for publishing it.

MARK BOWEN

Mark is a native Houstonian, a horticulturist and organic specialist with a background in garden design, land 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*.

With respect to this newsletter, Mark serves as the editor.

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, quality control, and he is a certified compost facility operator.

Pablo helps this newsletter happen from a technical support standpoint.



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