



November 9, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 35th 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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Enjoy!

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Blooming at Mercer in early November were these usual spring beauties: l to r, bluebonnets (in a tall rock "container" for excellent drainage) and camellias by Storey Lake. Azaleas, of course, now bloom spring and fall but it's still awesome to see them on the Azalea Trail. Right above, fall-blooming Japanese anemone 'Alice Staub, named for one of Houston's best known horticulturists. *So glad Alice came into my life.*



Fall gardens should be a'glow with natives vital to butterflies, hummingbirds and other birds, especially migrating species: l to r, American beautyberry, cassia, purple coneflowers, Spathoglottis x 'Groovy Grape' and Salvia leucantha (not a Texas Native but designated by A&M as a Texas SuperStar)

MERCER: WHAT COULD BE BLOOMING IN YOUR GARDEN NOW? and THE 7 DEADLY SPRINKLER SYSTEM SINS

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

Last week we touched on plants blooming out of season - probably due to alternating droughts, blistering heat and monsoon rains. Suzanne Chapman at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens mentioned their normally-spring-blooming pink magnolias were flowering, certainly an out-of-season surprise.

Cool temperatures, sunny skies, fall's in the air, off-season for the tourist crowd . . . this a perfect time to visit Mercer in North Harris County!

True, some of the gardens are in transitional mode, many awaiting their next planting round.

But if you're looking for great color ideas for this time of year, go see what's blooming at Mercer. Most plantings are wonderfully labeled. Even if they aren't, Mercer folks are usually never far way, so you can ask.

Or, take pictures. I'll get them identified for you. Maybe these pictures below will help identify some you'd like to try. Thanks to Suzanne and Mercer Director Darrin Duling for helping correctly identify all these plants!



Exciting surprises at Mercer: I'd never seen a white Philippine violet (Berleria—which is proving super winter hardy!) or, a yellow cape honeysuckle. And certainly I have never seen such lush plantings of the shade loving purple Persian Shield and the exotic toadlilies



Take the kiddos along when you go. Not only is the walk a healthy-but-easily manageable one, they'll be as delighted as you are when they get to, l to r, see exotic banana tree flowers, smell the incredible fragrant butterfly gingers, and delight in fun wildlife like turtles and lizards.



Delights ranged from orange and red/white Mexican zinnias to this Flamingo Feather celosia, right. Below left is a gigantic crinum, and next to it, a red *Aechmea blanchetiana* (bromeliad) bloom. More than 150 succulent species (cacti, euphorbias, yuccas, agave, aloes, etc.) thrive at Mercer, along with shade-lovers including yellow ligularia and, far right, red firespike (Did my heart good. Mercer's aren't blooming any better this year than mine are!)



A thousand years ago (it seems) our son was on a therapy program that required us to "walk hills."

In Houston? We couldn't make those Philadelphia folks realize our only "hills" are freeway overpasses.

Then we discovered the then-little known, almost-totally-unused Harris County park that eventually became Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens. Back then, it was nothing but woods, with a small house that was once the home of Charles and Thelma Mercer. A path led down the steep bank of Cypress Creek to a sandy beach below.

Voila!

A hill!

I remember Thelma Mercer's camellias more than anything else - HUGE shrubs that, in winter, were always covered with the most beautiful flowers - an incentive to "get going" on those days when it would have been a lot more comfortable to stay at home.

I liked to think Thelma was smiling down on us, so happy that her camellias were helping someone in a most unexpected way.

Thelma's statue at Mercer will be re-dedicated Jan.8, 2014, at 10 a.m. as part of Mercer's 40th anniversary. The bronze will be moved so she can greet visitors entering the park. <http://www.hcp4.net/mercer/>



TOP 7 BIGGEST SPRINKLER SYSTEM MISTAKES MADE BY HOME GARDENERS

"Water is the driving force in nature."

Leonardo de Vinci

Boy, if there's anyone who knows about water being a driving force, it's a Gulf Coast gardener!

It's been my experience, over the past 45+ years of writing for and about gardeners, that most of our plants that die are killed by overwatering due to:

- * poor drainage during our (usual) spring and fall monsoons.
- * setting the sprinkler to water low water/zeriscape/drought-tolerant plants every other day.

Roots become so weakened by sitting too long in too-wet soil, they are no longer able to withstand rising or falling temperatures or drought. Watered properly, they probably would have easily survived.

Harris County Extension horticulturists Robert (Skip) Richter and Paul Wiski are planning a free program on evaluating a home sprinkler system (along with "Home Lawn Care"). Skip cheerfully drew up these Top Ten Mistakes Homeowners Make With Home Sprinkler Systems.

How guilty are you?

NOTE: Some of these apply equally as well to sprinklers used with hoses. Now is the best time to do this testing!

1. Poor Design - Uneven distribution of water - too many heads in a zone for the water supply and pressure, or wrong type of heads, or heads too far apart for proper overlap, etc.
2. No Rain Switch - Stops system from running in the rain and for a few days afterward. This may save millions

of gallons of water.

3. Improper Pressure - Too high - mist drifts off target. Too low - poor coverage.

4. Irrigation Head Problems - Misaligned heads, leaky, broken, mismatched, clogged heads or heads that can't pop up/spray properly due to grass or other vegetation.

5. Overapplication - To get one half to one inch of irrigation in the ground, break up watering cycles with soaking time between each watering.

6. Watering Too Little, Too Often - Frequent, shallow wetting promotes a shallow root system and more disease problems.

7. Scheduling Irrigation Controller by Calendar Rather Than Plant Needs. Ignore that ol' saw: "Water an inch a week." Turfgrass needs more water in summer than in winter. Use the evapotranspiration data (texaset.tamu.edu).

May through August our turf needs about 1" per week if it is totally unstressed from other factors. A typical Houston area lawn can survive with a half inch of water a week.

More questions? Drop by one of Skip & Paul's two free (no reservations needed) talks: Mon., Nov. 11, 1 p.m., & Thurs., Nov. 21, 10 a.m., at the Glazier Education Center, 16600 Pine Forest Lane (one intersection south of Clay and Hwy. 6). Additional information: richter@ag.tamu.edu or 281-855-5600

GOLDENROD: WILDFLOWER - NOT A WEED!

Last week's column bemoaned the sad (and totally erroneous) reputation poor goldenrod has.

After reading it, our cousin Penny Brown called to report goldenrod she planted along her fenceline long ago, which had never bloomed, was suddenly in full color this fall.

It was such a delight. Until, that is, the day she came home and found her North Shore neighbor had cut it all down!

He had, she said sadly, "generously" cleared their shared fenceline of "all those weeds."

Ragweed strikes again.



* * *

NEED WHEN TO DO WHAT GARDENING HELP IN THE GREATER HOUSTON AREA? Brenda's "Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD" gives month-by-month reminders of when to plant what, fertilize, prune, etc. \$20. Make checks payable to Brenda Beust Smith and mail to "Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD," 14011

Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039. PDF file.

* * *

Need a gardening/environmental speaker for your group or school program? Brenda has list of dozens of great horticulture/ecology Upper Texas Gulf Coast area speakers, many of whom are free. Email her for a free copy or for criteria to have your name added as a speaker: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

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>

For correspondence that is specific to Brenda, feel free to email her directly at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

JOHN'S CORNER

SOIL AMENDMENTS- ROCK DUSTS



Rock dusts are composed of various rocks that have been ground up to sand size particles or smaller. Depending on the type of rock used, they contain different minerals (plant nutrients) and properties. They are generally used to increase the fertility and sometimes the physical properties of any soil.

The first group of rock dusts come from igneous rocks that were once molten rock we call lava. The most common types are granite and basalt which have different minerals in them.

Granite Sand: Granite sand is typically produced from weathered granite by crushing it or just screening it to the desired size. Granites are mainly feldspar and quartz minerals and light in color and often pinkish. It is a good source of slow release potassium (K) and small amounts of phosphorus (P), iron (Fe), magnesium (Mg), and manganese (Mn).

Basalt Sand: Basalt sand comes from a dark colored fine grained igneous rock called basalt. It is produced the same as granite by crushing or screening it. Basalt has more iron (Fe) and magnesium (Mg) than granite with small amounts of manganese (Mn), potassium (K) and phosphorus (P).

Both granite and basalt sand release their minerals slowly over time and help loosen the soil as any type of sand.

Most igneous rocks like granites and basalt have a property known as Paramagnetism. After studying soils from around the world it was found that the healthiest soils with best plant growth and highest crop yields have high paramagnetic values while poor soils with lots of disease and insect pressure have low values. How these low level energy fields affect plant growth is not fully understood, but the direct correlation with plant growth has been confirmed. Volcanic rocks (lava, granite, basalts, etc.) generally have high paramagnetic values hence mineral dusts from these rocks have an additional value (Paramagnetism - Rediscovering Nature's Secret Force of Growth, by Philip Callahan, Ph.D., 1995).

Research has identified that this physical property is associated with good soil and is sometimes incorrectly called the Paramagnetic force. For those that are interested, in electricity we have materials (matter) that are conductors and insulators; similarly in magnetism, we have materials (matter) that are paramagnetic or

diamagnetic.

Paramagnetism is just a natural property of certain types of matter. It is a form of magnetism that occurs only in the presence of an externally applied magnetic field (like the earth's magnetic field). A paramagnetic material will move towards (weakly attracted to) the source of the magnetic field. A diamagnetic material is repelled or will move away from the source of the magnetic field.

The bottom line is that these type of mineral dusts help the soil become more fertile which leads to stronger plants with more productivity and with less disease and insect problems.

IN THE NEWS

Coastal Prairie Partnership Grant. Coastal Prairie Partnership is offering a small (\$250) grant to assist a school/teacher in furthering pollinator education at their school. If you know of a school or teacher who might be a good fit for this grant, please pass the information on. The grant deadline is December 1, 2013. Download <http://www.cechouston.org/CEC/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/CPP-Pollinator-Grant-2013.pdf>

Stretching Your Dollars With Natives: <http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/video?id=9288588>

Mosaiculture: <http://myvirtualgarden2.blogspot.com/2013/09/mosaiculture-exhibition.html>

WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

Sat., Nov. 9: Free Christmas display trends demonstrations at Cornelius Nurseries both days, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2333 S. Voss Rd. Free programs: 10 am-Festive Wreath Making; 2 pm-Make the Famous Cornelius Bow; 4 pm-Create Christmas Centerpieces, Swags, Accents. Saturday only at Voss store: 11 am-1pm-Meeti Randy Lemon, KTRH GardenLine host. Details: www.corneliusnurseries.com.

Sat., Nov. 9: Native Prairie Plant-a-thon. Volunteers are needed to plant 2,500 native coastal prairie grasses and forbs. This event will help the park continue the restoration of 400 acres from farmland to native prairie habitat and reestablish the diverse wildlife that it once had. Located in northeast Harris County, Sheldon Lake Environmental Learning Center is visited by thousands of children and adults each year who take guided nature walks, study ecosystems, go fishing, experience pond ecology, and see alternative energy in action. Restoring this prairie will enhance the educational programs at the Learning Center. Come out and volunteer for the Native Prairie Plant-a-thon on November 9, 2013, from 8am-noon. Contact

laura.babcock@tpwd.texas.gov or visit <http://www.cechouston.org/>

Sat. - Sun., Nov. 9 - 10: Peckerwood Garden in Hempstead, TX, Fall Open Days. Plant sales are from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm. Guided garden tours are at 1:00 & 3:00 pm. Tours are \$10.00. The garden is not wheelchair accessible and please, no young children. The Garden is only available through the guided tours. Peckerwood Garden is located at 20571 Hwy. 359 in Hempstead, TX. The phone number is 979-826-3232 and e-mail isinfo@peckerwoodgarden.org.

Mon., Nov. 11: The next meeting of HUG (Houston Urban Gardeners) will be Monday, Nov 11, 6:30 PM at Houston's Multi-Service Center, 1475 W. Gray. Marcella Murff will speak on: What to Plant and Do Now in your home garden. If you want to learn more about Veriditas, they are having an Open House Nov. 2., <http://www.houstonurbangardeners.org/>

Mon., Nov. 11 & Thurs., Nov. 21: Fall Lawn Care and How to Evaluate a Home Sprinkler System by Robert (Skip) Richter and Paul Winski, free, at the Glazier Education Center, 16600 Pine Forest Lane (one intersection south of Clay and Hwy. 6). Two identical one hour demonstrations: Nov. 11 at 1 p.m. and Nov. 21 at 10 a.m. Additional information: 281-855-5600, rrichter@ag.tamu.edu

Wed., Nov. 13: Humble: Brenda Beust will present "The 10 Commandments of Lazy Gardening" noon-2 p.m., Wednesday, November 13, at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic, located one mile north of FM 1960 at 22306 Aldine Westfield Road, Humble. Learn how to enjoy the garden with less effort. For more information, call 281-443-8731 or visit <http://www.hcp4.net/mercer/>

Thur., Nov. 14: 7:30 p.m. "Patsy's Fool-proof method for Growing Roses from Cuttings" 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. Entrance to parking lot is on W 19th Street near Yale St. Our speaker is Patsy Williams, Master Rosarian and Horticulture Judge who will share her time tested technique for rooting rose cuttings. Free admission. www.houstonrose.org or Like us on Facebook.

Sat., Nov. 16: 8:30 a.m. - 12 p.m: Home Landscape Series Water Conservation Workshop. The public is invited to a workshop that will cover many practical steps that homeowners can take to reduce water use in the landscape and maintain a healthy landscape with plenty of curb appeal. Location: Katy High School at 6331 Highway Blvd. Participants will have hands-on learning opportunities involving irrigation system components, including converting to a drip system and understanding the controller, and assistance in assembling their own take-home rainwater collection barrel. Workshop topics include landscaping to conserve water, irrigation efficiency, managing water supplies, and rainwater harvesting methods. \$25 fee. www.fbmg.com or call Brandy Rader at 281-633-7029.

Sat., Nov. 16: Great Galveston Tree Giveaway - for Galvestonians only - at 2601 Ball St. (behind City Hall). 1,500 shade trees will be given away from 8 a.m.-noon (or when all are gone). Included will be oak trees, the #1 survivor of Ike's poisonous surge. Residents must bring a utility or water bill to verify island address. Details on this and a Nov. 10 luncheon at Moody Mansion to help celebrate the Nov. 10-26 Arbor Week In Galveston can be found at www.galvestonislandtreeconservancy.org or by emailing Karla Levy at karlalevy@aol.com, or Priscilla Files at TreesForGalveston@yahoo.com.

Mon., Nov. 18: Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 will host Open Garden Day on Monday, Nov. 18 at their Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, TX 77034. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your gardening questions. Hours are 8:30 am - 11:00 am with a program on dividing Overwintering Tropicals at 9:30 am. Free and open to the public. Children invited! <http://hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/>, 281 855 5600

Wed., Nov. 20: "Flora of Ecuador" presented by Houston Cactus & Succulent Society members Dick & Phyllis McEuen. 7:30 pm at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 W. Gray St. Houston, TX 77019.

Free.

Thur., Nov. 21: Forest Fungi Walk, 1-3 p.m., Jesse Jones Park and Nature Center, 20634 Kenswick Drive, Humble: <http://www.hcp4.net/jones/> or 281-446-8588.

Sat., Dec. 7: Saturday with the Master Gardeners - Garden Talk Topic "Edible Landscape." 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. It's a great way to learn about gardening and plants well-suited to Fort Bend County. Park in front of the Agriculture Center located at 1402 Band Road, Rosenberg, 77471. Gardens will be open from 9:00-11:00 a.m. on December 7th. Attend an informal garden talk on Edible Landscape which starts at 10:00 a.m. in the E Garden. Call 281-341-7068 or visit www.fbmj.com for more information.

Wed., Dec. 11: Humble: Casey Scribner and Brooke Judice of Trees for Houston will present "Trees in Urban Areas" noon-2 p.m., Wednesday, December 11, at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic, located one mile north of FM 1960 at 22306 Aldine Westfield Road, Humble. Scribner and Judice will offer information about the importance of trees in an urban environment, recommended trees for our area, plus tips for how to plant and take care of them. For more information, call 281-443-8731 or visit <http://www.hcp4.net/mercer/>

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.

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.

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



<http://wabashfeed.com/>



<http://microlifefertilizer.com/>



<http://natureswayresources.com/>



Save 20%: Redeem this coupon for a big discount on Nature's Way Resources "Color Mix" (<http://natureswayresources.com/products.htm>). Please note: this offer is for bagged or bulk material purchases by retail customers only at Nature's Way Resources, located at 101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX.

Offer Expires: 11/17/13

