



November 29, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 38th 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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ON THE PROPOSED HOUSTON BOTANIC GARDEN and TIPS FOR PLANTING UNDER TREES

by BRENDA BEUST SMITH

Recently the Houston Chronicle very graciously gave me a tout in an editorial that voted NO on the proposed new Houston Botanic Garden site.*

Details: <http://www.chron.com/opinion/editorials/article/Gus-Wortham-is-made-for-golf-Period-4986373.php>

It was nice to have been mentioned. There certainly two sides to the site selection to be considered. And no one argues with the premise that combining a Houston Botanic Garden with Harris County's Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Garden would give the Bayou City a world-class horticultural, environmental, conservation voice.

However, I have to take issue with the implication in the editorial that the Houston Botanic Garden's site proposal was a too-quickly-made, too-little-forethought decision.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Houston Botanic Garden group has spent decades researching every in-city site option. They've met with horticulturists, botanic garden professionals, property owners and construction experts, not to mention the multiple levels of government agencies that would be involved in any such undertaking.

Houston is the fourth largest city in the nation. The eight-county wide Greater Houston area can and should support not only county-funded gardens such as the outstanding botanical center Mercer has become, but also a centralized city program that can focus on the major horticultural, environmental and ecological issues that other internationally recognized U.S. botanical gardens do.

The benefits of these gardens today go FAR beyond pretty places to go and potential tourist dollars - both highly desirable, profitable benefits for any city. At the very least, botanical gardens across the nation are now prime movers behind conservation, ecology and environmental educational efforts.

We spend fortunes on our landscapes, often wasting equal amounts through bad choices or the wrong planting/maintenance techniques. But even more is at stake here.

Greater Houston area homeowners are a major source of growing problems in bayous and Galveston Bay. Too many tax dollars are being spent to remedy damage done by organic and chemical lawn and garden products washing into bayous and beyond to Galveston Bay.* We need the kind of comprehensive, public-reaching efforts that will come from botanic garden research and education.

Particularly impressive is the broad range of very active Houstonians serving on this Houston Garden Center Board of Directors/Advisory Board: HBG President & CEO Jeff E. Ross, Nancy O'Connor Abendshein, Robert A. Rowland III, Peter R. McStravick, Jr. , Peggy Bailey, Nancy S. Thomas, John W. Craddock, Jr., M.D., Drucie Chase, Melbern G. Glasscock, Margarette L. Jones, Odette McMurray Mace, Richard W. McDugald, Bob Nicholas, James A. Reeder, Jr., Bass C. Wallace, Jr., Emily Tuttle Wilde, Sadie Gwin Blackburn, Pauline Bolton, Peter G. Doyle, Susan Garwood, Hester T. Hawkins, Terry Hershey, Kathy Huber, Rebecca Hutcheson, Ann W. Jones, Arthur E. Jones, Wendy Kelsey, John Kirksey, Christopher L. Knapp, Ann Lents, Janiece M. Longoria, Merrill P. O'Neal, Betty J. Schoolar, Cassie B. Stinson, M. S. Stude, Judy S. Tate, Kingslea Thomas, Janice Van Dyke Walden, Peter M. Way, William Welch, Ph.D. , Andrea White, Ed Wulfe, and Rosie Zamora. (I am also on the Advisory Board.)

I have known some of these folks for over 30 years. I am awed by their commitment to civic improvement and generosity of time donated to keeping our environment as healthy and beautiful as possible.

I have signed the Houston Botanic Garden petition and want to share the link with you. I hope you will at least read the Houston Botanic Garden petition and, if you agree, consider passing it on to friends.

Petition link: <http://www.houstonbotanicgarden.org/>

* For more information:

* Chronicle's editorial: <http://www.chron.com/opinion/editorials/article/Gus-Wortham-is-made-for-golf-Period-4986373.php>

* An article on Houston Botanic Garden: <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/life/columnists/huber/article/Group-proposes-construction-of-botanic-garden-4907298.php>

* Texas A&M on the damage homeowners re doing to Houston's bayous and Galveston Bay: http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/your_yard_&_galveston_bay.htm

PLANTING DEAD AREAS UNDER TREES

I know what I'm buying myself for Christmas.
A clay chimney flue liner. (Thanks, Suzanne!)

For years I've been a huge proponent of planting in cylinders, just like the Harris County Master Gardeners and other groups do in their elementary school gardens all over this area.

Check out: Cylinder Gardening:
<http://harris.agrilife.org/hort/cylindergardening/>.

Last week's column on reducing lawn size promised tips this week on planting under trees where grass won't grow. Cylinders play a major part in this.

Rule No. 1: never compromise your trees. They take too long to grow, they're too valuable and they're too hard to replace. They're also bullies who will consume all the nutrients and moisture in the soil under the tree canopy.

But many beautiful foliage and flowers will grow easily under trees. Just think like a plant for a change!

1. Border the dead area under trees with a hose. It will look more natural and "professionally planned" than it will with straight lines.

2. Get out the lawnmower. Mow around the border and make any necessary adjustments to make mowing as easy as possible. Don't create problems for yourself!

3. Border the area with rocks, bricks, plants, landscape timbers, anything that will keep grass from growing in there.

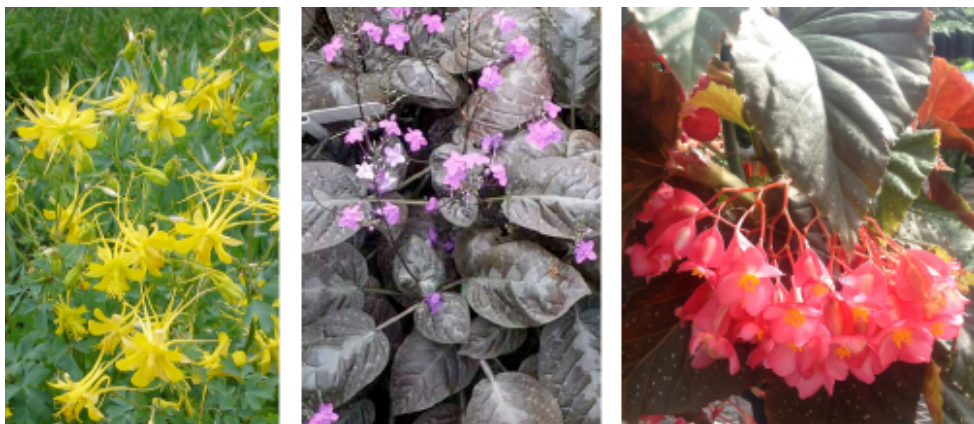
4. Fill the enclosed area with the tree's own leaves. These are its very best fertilizer. This is how Nature fertilizes trees. Throw those leaves away and you're throwing away the best possible fertilizer for your trees. Dumb.

5. Set a cylinder (not a pot with a small hole) in the enclosed area right on top the leaves. Fill it with good



potting soil. Size will depend on what you want to plant. But it should be at least six to eight inches deep and around 12 inches wide.

6. It will probably be better now to do this planting in spring. But, now's a good time to pile in those leaves and start planning ahead.



7. Whenever you choose to plant, select a wide variety of shade-lovers like, left to right, columbines, chocolate plants or cane begonias. That way you can see which you like and - more important - which like you. Houseplant departments are great for shade plants. Many do just fine year-round in our gardens. Pile leaves up around the plants, cylinder and all. The mulch will help them survive winter better.

8. Water and fertilize right in this cylinder (saving time/energy/money).

9. Plant roots will grow in this healthy environment. By the time they reach the soil below the cylinder, the leaves will be composting adding more nutrients. The roots will be strong enough to easily penetrate and co-mingle with the tree roots without damaging either one. Gradually plants will spill over and, on their own, should begin growing in the soil beneath the tree

10. When we have our monsoons in spring and fall, the plant roots will have a dry zone in which to maintain healthy growth - as long as they have this safety zone of soil as a foundation.



In my long search for attractive cylinders to use in the garden, I've tried, aluminum air conditioning flues (pictured above), old tires, and other equally yukko possibilities. Mother helped with the ceramic cylinder (left, above), which my sister helped her make as a Christmas present one year. Those are my now deceased mother's handprints on that pot. So this one I'll treasure forever.

What we need are more well-marketed attractive cylinders. I've begged folks for some over the years with no luck. They just can't grasp why I would want them.



Now, a new option! I pitched my plea anew while speaking to the Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens Lunch Bunch. Mercer's Suzanne Chapman, obviously a woman of brilliant foresight, knew exactly what I wanted and why. They are using attractive clay chimney flue liners (above) from [Acme Brick](#) as planting cylinders at Mercer for plants like agaves that need the extra drainage. They're rectangular with rounded edges and come in a variety of sizes. I'd choose lower ones for under-tree planting and fill some with trailing plants.

If you'd like a list of shade-loving plants that are hardy here, email me at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net. Ask for: "Favorite Plants of the Lazy Gardener" (it includes my sun favorites too)

JOHN'S CORNER

Soil Amendments - Vermiculite



I was starting to think about writing this article on vermiculite and remembered that I have not used vermiculite in many years due to issues with asbestos. Hence I thought I was going to have to write a very negative article on the subject. However after reviewing all the recent literature, going through my textbooks and journals plus reading reports published on the internet, I have good news. Vermiculite today is much safer to use!

Vermiculite is a natural clay mineral that has a layered structure with water molecules in between the layers (a hydrous silicate mineral often classified as a phyllosilicate). It developed a very bad reputation back in the 1980's when the major source of vermiculite in the USA was found to contain dangerous forms of asbestos.

For many decades almost all vermiculite sold in the USA and 80% of the world's supply came from the Libby mine in Montana that is owned by the W. R. Grace company. It was found to contain a very dangerous form of asbestos known to cause cancer and other health problems. According to numerous reports, the Grace company actively covered up the dangers of their product for years. As a result of all the investigations, lawsuits and governmental sanctions, the mine was shut down in the early 1990's.

Today most vermiculite comes from Africa and with several mines in South Carolina and Virginia, and a few others around the world that ALL have tested asbestos free.

Vermiculite ore or rock is formed by the weathering of minerals known as biotite or phlogopite for you geologists out there. The name comes from the Latin vermiculare, to breed worms describing the way it expands (exfoliates) when heated. The ore is crushed to various sizes and then heated which causes the water to evaporate and expanding the mineral layers. When rapidly heated to

high temperatures 1,600 degrees Fahrenheit (870 degrees Celsius) the vermiculite expands 8-30 times its original volume creating a lightweight product that has accordion-shaped particles composed of many layers. The color of vermiculite is often brown or tan but can be bronze-yellow or even green depending on the source of the ore. The pH is normally near neutral but can be very alkaline depending on the source of the ore and the other minerals in it like limestone. Vermiculite has a very high CEC (cation exchange capacity) hence it can hold plant nutrients very well and prevents them from leaching into the environment causing pollution.

Vermiculite is used in dozens of commercial and industrial applications from brake linings, to swimming pools, insulation, and fire resistant products to name a few. In horticulture it is used as a component in growing media, a packing material to store bulbs, a substrate to grow fungi and in hydroponics.

Coarse ground vermiculite:



Fine ground vermiculite:



Positives:

It is relatively permanent, clean, odorless, non-toxic, sterile, does not rot away, holds plant nutrients well, lightweight, easy to handle and mix. Cuttings root easily in it and seedlings can be removed for transplant without danger of them breaking up as they are removed. Due to its high water holding capacity it makes a great material to store bulbs (or root crops) as it absorbs any moisture and prevent the bulbs from rotting (finely ground vermiculite can hold up to 500 times its weight in water).

Negatives:

In low pH (acid) environments it may release aluminum (Al) into the soil and be toxic to plants. The structure of expanded vermiculite collapses easily therefore it is not suitable for long term applications. It can be dusty and as with any dust regardless of the type it is best not to breath it.

It is a semi-sustainable product requiring mainly the energy to make and transport it, and the Earth has billions of tons of it.

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>

WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

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.fbmjg.com for more information.

Mon., Dec. 9: Next HUG: Heidi Sheesley: Fruit and Citrus Trees in Houston? Absolutely!
The next meeting of HUG (Houston Urban Gardeners) will be Monday, Dec 9, 6:30 PM at Houston's Multi-Service Center, 1475 W. Gray, Houston. ([click here](#)) for map. We gather, socialize, and munch on snacks from 6:30 until 6:45 when the program begins. Heidi Sheesley will present a PowerPoint presentation on a variety of fruit and citrus trees, as well as berries, that all produce well in the Houston area. ([read more](#))

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/>

Fri., Jan. 17: 12:00 p.m. - 4:30 pm. 2014 Water Management Seminar For Landowners + Property Managers + Land Planners, presented by OHBA (Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance). Learn How To Make Every Drop Count. By attending you will receive beneficial information on how to:

- How to Save Water Use
- Reduce Operating Costs
- Protect Your Investment
- Reduce Liabilities
- Have Beautiful & Sustainable Landscapes

The world is changing, Houston is getting much bigger, and we are running short of water. What to do? Organic Landscape Management is the answer. Come join us for an exciting fast-paced afternoon where we learn 'How Easy', 'How Inexpensive' and 'How rational Water Efficient Landscape Management really is'. Location: The United Way Building, 50 Waugh Drive. Register today at www.eventbrite.com.

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 "Container 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: 12/08/13

