



December 6, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 39th 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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## A GARDEN OF GOOD CHEER and SPEAKING OF GIVING THANKS

. . .

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**



Above, plantings with harvests to inspire the true spirit of Christmas: Curtis Lovett, program director, Holy Ground Ministries, with Jenny Sommer, one of the Holy Ground Garden organizers.

*The kiss of the sun for pardon,  
The song of the birds for mirth,  
One is nearer God's heart in a garden  
Than anywhere else on earth.*

~Dorothy Frances Gurney, "Garden Thoughts"

And any gardener will understand what is meant by "other wonderful harvests."

Dorothy Frances Gurney would certainly agree with the name Main Street Ministries chose for its across-the-street garden project: a "Holy Ground Garden."

Once a weed-strewn, eyesore corner lot sporting a dilapidated house that hosted squatters and worse, the property drew the attention of a supporter of Main Street Ministries. This successful coalition of programs is dedicated to helping the homeless and those who need referrals to Houston's many helping resources.

But this wasn't just any corner property. This one sits across the street from the Main Street Ministries' Travis at Portland Streets office, in Houston's desirable Museum District. Similar lots might sell for \$1 million. The lot was purchased by the MSM supporter and loaned to the group. Volunteers cleared, cleaned, planted and now are reaping the harvests - all in under six months, mostly through the hot summer.

The garden is named after one of the Main Street Ministries programs, Holy Ground, which provides evening meals and spiritual sustenance to over 200 homeless or near-homeless guests each week.

Soon some guests will help provide vegetables for those meals as well as for donations, and

harvesting a lot more wonderful intangibles in the process - the trust, relationships and openness developing between the Main Street Ministries clients, volunteers and even community neighbors.

"We hear their stories and they hear ours," said Jenny Sommer who, with Lynne King, helped start the garden which even includes a delightful triangular labyrinth.



The volunteers and clients all say their mission is about "Planting Seeds for Change." Already the garden has touched the hearts of its community. Thompson & Hanson donated seven large bamboo plants. If you're looking for a Christmas gift project, they'd really like to add two Meiwa seedless kumquat trees, a Dorsett apple, a Rio Red grapefruit tree and a Meyer lemon.

The supply shed could use small hand shovels, hand clippers, 25-gallon galvanized trash cans with lids (for composting) or gift cards to Wabash, Lowe's or Home Depot. For more information about Holy Ground Garden, email Jenny Sommer at [jenny.sommer2@gmail.com](mailto:jenny.sommer2@gmail.com).

The garden is open to the public when folks are working there and at special Garden Church worship services, 4-6 p.m. each Sunday.

Another program of Main Street Ministries is helping folks with disadvantages and challenges obtain the Texas IDs now being required in an increasing number of situations. For more information about Main Street Ministries, visit their website at [www.msmhouston.org](http://www.msmhouston.org).



SPEAKING OF GIVING THANKS . . . This second serious cold spell might "spell" doom for many of the plants now blooming totally out of season. But, don't give up on them entirely. We often have flowers that should have gone cold dormant blooming cheerfully into January in our unique little subtropical pocket.

Penny Brown is one gardener who will be closely watching her beautiful angel trumpet, above, in rare full December bloom in the North Shore area. Normally these gorgeous flowers enchant us from late spring through early fall. Not often we see them this late in the year.

Usually this is a treat, but I'm rather irritated with my firespikes.

Normally my firespikes, right, (along with porterweed) are the best hummer-attractors in this yard. Sometimes they bloom all summer long, sometimes just in fall. (Not our fall. Fall by the rest of the nation's definition - starting in September.)

This year, September came and went, then October, then November arrived and FINALLY! A few puny flowers started to appear.

We do have hummers that stay year-round in our area. But not in this yard. This is a spring and fall stopover point. This year we had more than ever ironically but no firespikes to greet them in this yard.

Now that the hummers have departed, the firespikes are gorgeous. Go figure. They survived the first cold spell. Hope they last a little while longer.



#### POTPOURRI:

\* Congratulations to the newly-organized Sandy Hands Garden Club. Based in Surfside Beach in Brazoria County, the club welcomes members in areas from Sabine Pass to Aransas Pass and beyond. Details: President Georgia Pavey, [gpavey321@gmail.com](mailto:gpavey321@gmail.com)

## READERS RESPOND

Reader Chris Fitzgerald shared this blog, <http://www.penick.net/digging> as a great one for anyone interested in eliminating or reducing lawn grass areas. It is a neat blog, based in Austin. If you live in the Greater Houston/Upper Texas Gulf Coast area, just be sure you doublecheck any specific plant recommendations against a local source. Austin's soil and drainage situations are very different, so plants may have different planting needs.

We heard from Kris Bitner in response to a previous article about alternatives to grass under existing trees: *It is NOT a good idea to encourage gardeners to put Any containers weighing more than a few ounces under trees as the weight of large planters such as the chimney flue tiles used as planters, is so great it will*



*compress the soil and result in local oxygen deprivation and local soil compaction. Its not even a good idea to suggest bordering the trees with stones, rocks etc, without giving some guidance on how the weight of a newly added border can confine the roots of recently planted trees, or effect on trees which have been in the ground a long time without any borders.. I advise people to move heavy containers from the critical root zone every week. Often, they are advised to remove or significantly reduce the amount of stones in the borders, as well. I cannot see that design tips should compromise the trees, when there are ways to have both .*

**We love to hear from our readers. Thanks so much!**

## JOHN'S CORNER

### A BOOK GIFT LIST FOR GARDENERS



**The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World**, Michael Pollan, Random House 2001, hardcover: ISBN 0-375-50129-0, 2002 paperback: ISBN 0-375-76039-3  
This book is about how human desires affect our relationship with plants. Wikipedia has the following information: This work explores the nature of domesticated plants from the dual perspective of humans and the plants themselves. Pollan presents case studies that mirror four types of human desires that are reflected in the way that we selectively grow, breed, and genetically engineer our plants. The apple reflects the desire of sweetness, the tulip beauty, marijuana pleasure and the potato sustenance. Pollan narrates his own experience with each of the plants, which he then intertwines with an exploration into their social history. Each section presents an element of human domestication, or the "human bumblebee" as Pollan calls us. The stories range from the true story of Johnny Appleseed to Pollan's first-hand research with sophisticated marijuana hybrids in Amsterdam to the paradigm-shifting possibilities of genetically engineered potatoes. Pollan also discusses the limitations of monoculture agriculture: specifically, the adoption in Ireland of a single breed of potato (the Lumper) made the Irish vulnerable to a fungus to which it had no resistance, resulting in the Irish Potato Famine. The Peruvians from whom the Irish had gotten the potato grew hundreds of varieties, so their exposure to any given pest was slight.

**Seeds of Change: Six Plants That Transformed Mankind**, Henry Hobhouse, Counterpoint Press, 2005, ISBN 0-333-73628-1-9 (paperback). Seeds of Change is about the history of six plants we grow commercially and how they changed the world. It talks about how sugar, tea, cotton, the potato, quinine, and the cocoa plant have shaped our past. Henry Hobhouse explains the consequences of these plants with attention-grabbing historical moments. While most records of history focus on human influence, Hobhouse emphasizes how plants too are a central and influential factor in the historical process. I found this book a very interesting tool to aid my understanding of modern gardening and agricultural practices.

**Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation**, Andrea Wulf, Knopf, 2011 ISBN 978-0-307-26990-4. A fascinating look at the founding fathers from the unique and intimate perspective of their lives as gardeners, plantmen, and farmers. For the founding fathers, gardening, agriculture, and botany were elemental passions, as deeply ingrained in their characters as their belief in liberty for the nation they were creating. Andrea Wulf reveals for the first time this aspect of the revolutionary generation. She describes how, even as British ships gathered off Staten Island, George Washington wrote his estate manager about the garden at Mount Vernon; how a tour of English gardens renewed Thomas Jefferson's and John Adams's faith in their fledgling nation; how a trip to the great botanist

John Bartram's garden helped the delegates of the Constitutional Congress break their deadlock; and why James Madison is the forgotten father of American environmentalism. These and other stories reveal a guiding but previously overlooked ideology of the American Revolution. Founding Gardeners adds depth and nuance to our understanding of the American experiment and provides us with a portrait of the founding fathers as they've never before been seen.

**"Year Round Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Metro Houston,"** by Bob Randall, PhD., Retired Executive Director Urban Harvest. A resource guide on how to grow plants in the Houston area organically and where to get the supplies you may need. It is sold at many area gardening centers. One of the very best resources for Houston and Gulf Coast. Highly Recommended

**Teaming with Microbes. Revised edition, A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web,** by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis, Timber Press, 2010, ISBN 13:978-0-88192-777-1, 978-1-60460-113-3

This is the most complete book on the market about biological or organic methods in horticulture. It is written in a very easy to understand, non technical format with lots of pictures illustrating the latest research in soil science. It is written for the average gardener and landscaper as an introduction that explains why organic methods work so well and how they help a person save time and money. The book is written in two parts. The first part is a easy to understand very basic presentation on the science of soil biology. The second part takes the ideas and concepts on the Soil Food Web that were introduced in part one and applies them to solving problems in our yards and gardens. Subjects covered range from taking care of our soil, to compost and mulch choices. Also included is information on compost teas to natural weed control. Each plant group from lawns and turf grass, to annuals and vegetables, to shrubs perennials and trees are covered. This book is Highly Recommended for all gardeners, landscapers or anyone taking care of a lawn or garden.

**A Garden Book for Houston and The Texas Gulf Coast, River Oaks Garden Club, 5th edition,** 2013, edited by Lynn Herbert, ISBN 978-0-578-09149-6 Highly Recommended

This is the most complete book on how to garden in Houston. It explains the most modern methods in horticulture in a very easy to read manner with lots of pictures, charts and tables. The focus is on using the best methods based on sustainability to make your garden beautiful and safe for you, your family and pets, while saving one a lot of time and money in the process. The editor has done a fabulous job of compiling it with input from experts in each area discussed and based on proven results. For anyone that wants a beautiful lawn or garden.

**Mycelium Running, How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World,** by Paul Stamets, Ten Speed Press, ISBN 978-1-58008-579-3 This book is a deeper look at fungus and how it affects the world around us from plants to humans. The second edition was recently released.

**The Complete Compost Gardening Guide,** Barbara Pleasant and Deborah Martin, Storey Publishing, Copyright 2008, ISBN 978-1-58017-702-3 (Very Good)

**We would love to know what your favorite gardening books are for this area. Drop us a line at [lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com)**

## GARDENERS FORUM

**MORE FRUIT THAN YOU CAN EAT OR PICK? SHARE!**

Many thanks to Bob White who shared information about a new organization "FRUIT SHARE HOUSTON." These volunteers will work with homeowners who have more fruit on their citrus trees than they need or can harvest. Volunteers will pick up the extra fruit to share with those in need. Contact them at 713-468-0088 or [fruitsharehouston@gmail.com](mailto:fruitsharehouston@gmail.com).

## 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.fbmg.com](http://www.fbmg.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/>

Wed., Dec. 14: Brazoria County Master Gardeners are sponsoring the annual seminar on berries, citrus, pomes, and stone fruits. Topics include how-to's, selecting, planting, and harvesting Brazoria County-friendly fruit plants. Gil Livanec will be the speaker for the seminar and afterwards, participants can enjoy a tasting session of the varieties the BCMGA has grown. The seminar and tasting are free on Saturday, December 14, from 9:00 - 12:00 at the Brazoria County Environmental Education Station (BEES). 585 CR 443, Angleton, TX 77515. For more info call 979-864-1558 x 110 or online at [Brazoria.agrilife.org](http://Brazoria.agrilife.org).

Dec. 15-17: Fruit Tree Planting Foundation (FTPF) three-day visit to Houston's East End to encourage school garden initiatives.

- \* Dec. 15: Dora B. Lantrip Elementary Environmental Magnet School, 100 Telephone Rd, noon-3 pm, to meet with community residents and partnering agencies to lay groundwork for primary planting event on Tuesday.

- \* Dec. 16: Stephen F. Austin High School, 1700 Dumble St, 8:30-11:30am. FTFP's guided planting event to Austin High students: pre-planting site preparation, care/maintenance of fruit trees, a discussion of health benefits.

- \* Dec. 17: FTFP returns to Lantrip Elementary, 100 Telephone Rd, for an official planting event. 9-11am: educational programs and activities with Lantrip students and teachers with community members and partners.

All events are open free to the public. For more information, contact FTFP's Rico Montenegro, 530-515-7657 or [ricosplants@hotmail.com](mailto:ricosplants@hotmail.com), or the U.S. Forest Services' Tamberly Conway, 337-304-5872 or [tkconway@fs.fed.us](mailto:tkconway@fs.fed.us)

Wed., Jan. 8: Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Garden's 40th Anniversary Celebration. Starts at 11 a.m. Join The Mercer Society (TMS) and Commissioner R. Jack Cagle to celebrate Mercer's 40th birthday during an open house. This kickoff event will mark the beginning of festivities scheduled throughout 2014 to commemorate this special year in Mercer's history, and the statue of Thelma Mercer will be rededicated at its new location near the entrance of the park. For more information or to confirm your attendance, please call 281-443-8731.

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-pace 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](http://www.eventbrite.com).

March 1-2: Spring Branch African Violet Club's 33rd Annual Show and Spring Sale at Judson Robinson, Jr., Community Center, 2020 Hermann Park Drive. Mar. 1, 10am-4pm; Mar. 2, 10am-3pm. Violets of all types, including standards, miniatures and trailers, Gesneriads such as Episcias and Streps along with supplies. Club members on hand to answer questions. Details: Karla Ross, 281-748-8417; [kjwross@yahoo.com](mailto:kjwross@yahoo.com).

**Submit calendar items to [lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com). Events must be submitted by the sponsoring organization. Please note: "garden calendar request" in the subject line. 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](mailto: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.



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