



June 18, 2014

Dear Friends,

Here is the 61st 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. We will never sell or share our mailing list to protect the privacy of our subscribers.

Enjoy!

[JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!](#)



My dove wallow, left, makes me think of buffaloes. Center: another happy thought: Bryan Treadway sure was smiling when, during our recent heavy rains, he caught this lizard using a purple coneflower as an umbrella. Right: Mike Lowrey of Another Place in Time grows gorgeous staghorn ferns.

DOES YOUR GARDEN MAKE YOU SMILE? MINE DOES . . . KUDOS TO U.S. 59

LANDSCAPERS

by Brenda Beust Smith

Husband and I are arguing over my dove wallow.

He wants grass to grow there. I say a wallow is an important historical element of nature and should be treasured as such. Leave it alone!

Of course, historically wallows are made by buffaloes - low, shallow, rounded depressions where they rolled around on their backs using the dust to . . . well, do what ever buffaloes wanted it to do.

My wallow is under a bird feeder engineered to thwart squirrels trying to get at the seed. The perch rods collapse if something too heavy (i.e., a squirrel) sits on them. Unfortunately this also eliminates doves.

Not to worry, however. We have a plethora of cardinals and small birds who, obviously taking pity, continually drop great volumes of seeds to squirrels and doves in the "wallow" below.

Nothing grows in a wallow because all the oxygen has been forced out of the soil by constant pounding. True, the weight of squirrels, doves and other birds doesn't compare to the weight of buffalo. But the end result is the same. No grass will ever grow there.



*Lesson to be learned: try not to step on your garden soil. Every step **smushed** out oxygen. Plant roots need oxygen. If gardens have to be more than arm-reaching-across width, use stepping stones. At least that way your weight is dispersed a bit and the constant pressure is confined to those specific spots.*

Stepping stones are ideal in gardens for other reasons too. They:

- * Give the area a more professional touch.
- * Help eliminate open areas where weeds will sprout
- * Help stop cats and dogs repeated digging in the same spot, usually for something buried and/or decaying below.

STEPPING STONES TIPS

To make stepping stones really personal, consider creating your own embedded with children's handprints, souvenirs from treasured trips, broken pottery/china of loved ones. It's easy. The internet is loaded with instructions. Google "Making Stepping Stones." Be sure to read through all the personal responses. They

contain tons of tips.

PLAN AHEAD ON PLACEMENT

1. Measure your own footsteps so you can easily step from one to another.
2. Make sure the ground beneath the stones is level so they don't sink unevenly or tilt when stepped on.
3. Don't create uneven pathways that might trip you. Avoid stones (as at far right in the picture above) that are not flat enough to safely stand on.
4. If concrete's too heavy, consider decorative rubber mats .



Maggie O'Neal wrote asking about the purple and yellow flowers planted along Hwy. 59 in the Missouri City-Stafford area. Ironically I was heading to Corpus Christi. By golly, she's right. A tip o' the trowel to whoever is responsible for those plantings. If you know, let me know and I'll share so we can send thanks.

Maggie wanted to know, "Will they grow in my yard?" Absolutely! The purple vitex and yellow esperanza are highly recommended, especially in light of water shortages expected this summer. Both love hot sun and an extremely-well-drained site, hate being overwatered (stop blooming) and attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Both are beneficial for bees and are root-hardy (lose leaves in winter, come out strong in spring).

1. ESPERANZA (yellow bells, *Tecoma stans*.) Blooms all summer and fall with a pleasant, albeit subtle, fragrance. It's been used to treat diabetes, as a diuretic, to protect against syphilis and to make beer. It's been voted a Texas SuperStar plant.

2. VITEX . Also called a chaste tree because in monasteries of old, it's said, Abbots used these as a saltpeter-type tea. Summer bloomer, like esperanza will lose its leaves in winter and return in spring. Grape Koolaid fragrance. Grows easily from seed.

Both make either tree or shrub. For a tree, select 3-5 good strong stalks. As they grow upward, strip off the lower branches. Eventually that wood will harden off and not produce (well, at least as many) new stalks. For shrub, prune from top and sides. Normally tho, these need no pruning at all.

* * *

Thanks to Patrick Hudnall of the Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society for the wonderful Society Spotlight below.

For more information about the Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society, visit <http://www.tgcfersoc.org>. This is THE place to go to learn more about in the enormous array of ferns that love our shady gardens.

* * *

*Note: If you haven't seen your specialty plant group in our "Society Spotlight," it could be we do not have valid email address for you. To make sure your group is contacted, email us at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

* * *

Please read, and consider signing, the petition to establish a Houston Botanical Garden:
<http://www.houstonbotanicgarden.org>



Magnificent ferns for the Greater Houston area from Patrick Hudnall's collection, l to r, autumn fern, bracken fern and maidenhair fern.

Spotlighting Our Plant Societies

Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society

10 Biggest Mistakes to Avoid When Growing Ferns in the Houston Metro Area*

by PATRICK HUDNALL
Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society

* **Picking the wrong fern to plant in the ground.** Some ferns grow better in the ground than in pots. Hardy "clumping" ferns are best for planting in the ground. Consider hardiness. A tropical fern without plenty of protection from frost will die. Examples of hardy, clumping ferns are: Japanese Holly Fern (*Cyatium flactum*), most Lady Ferns (*Athyrium filix-femina*) and Dixie Wood Fern (*Dryopteris x australis*).

* **Not providing adequate drainage.** Few ferns will grow in soil with poor drainage. Raise beds in clay-based soils. Pots must have unblocked drainage holes.

* **Not providing adequate water.** Nearly all ferns require good drainage, but constantly moist soil or potting mix. High humidity ferns don't require as much water as in dry climates, so be careful to only keep the soil moist not wet.

* **Not providing adequate shade.** Nearly all ferns require some degree of shade. But too deep shade can be fatal for ferns that

need at least bright shade or partial shade. Check cultural requirements for your ferns. One caution about shade is that it often comes with a lack of air circulation. Air circulation is important for insect control.

* **Letting bugs get the upper hand.** Keep an eye out for snails, caterpillars, mealy bugs and scale. When treating for pests read the instructions or seek the guidance of experts.

* **Not providing protection from the "Elements" dogs, kids or traffic.** Though some ferns will handle a bit of neglect, none handle abuse

* **Limiting purchases to national plant department inventories.** Local/regional nurseries, especially Another-Place-in-Time or Cornelius Nursery, offer much broader selections. Fern Society sales and events like Tropical Treasures are great sources of ferns. If you search online for ferns your selection becomes vast. Do your homework before buying online. Some ferns have very specific cultural requirements.

* **Not trying semi-tropical plants.** Usually all semi-tropical ferns need is protection from our winter frosts. From mid-May to mid-September our climate is very much like tropical lowlands. Staghorn Ferns (*Platycerium*) are a good example of Tropical to Subtropical ferns that are easily adapted to our area.

* **Not getting assistance from experts, books or on-line.** The [Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society](#) members offer a wealth of knowledge on grow all kinds of ferns. One of the most authoritative books available on growing ferns is the [Fern Grower's Manual by Barbara Joe Hoshizaki and Robbin C. Moran](#)

* **Using too strong a fertilizer.** Most ferns do not grow in especially fertile soil. If ferns are forced to grow fast they tend to become more susceptible to damage by fungus, insects, cold, sun and drought. In general ferns are somewhat fragile. I recommend using natural fertilizers such as "fish emulsion."

The Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society's meetings are at Judson Robinson Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Dr. Visitors are welcome. July 18 Meeting: "Making Moss Balls" presented by Darla Harris and Cherie Lee. Sept 21 Meeting: Annual Plant Exchange. Details: www.tgcfernsoc.org/fern.html or 713-284-1994.

John's Corner

Organic Fertilizers and Nutrients - 3



This week I want to look at pre-blended organic fertilizers. The reason the better organic fertilizers blend ingredients together is to balance the nutrients going into the soil. Historically, conventional agricultural science tells us that a plant only needs 16 elements to live and grow. However, numerous research reports show that plants will absorb whatever is in the soil. A couple examples are:

Alpine pennycress, a small perennial herb, has been found to be a hyper- accumulator of cadmium and zinc, holding 30,000 ppm of zinc in its leaves without loss of growth compared to 500 ppm for most plants. The plant can be harvested, dried and then burned for electrical power generation with the resulting ash being recycled (smelted) and marketed commercially. USDA-ARS, Environmental Chemistry Laboratory, Beltsville, Maryland, Dr. Rufus Chaney.

A team of researchers at the University of Guelph in Ontario has discovered that lemon-scented geraniums are capable of absorbing and accumulating large amounts of heavy metals from soil. Laboratory tests found the plants were able to absorb 3,200 mg cadmium, 18,700 mg of lead, 6,400 mg of nickel, and 650 mg of copper in 1 kilogram of dry plant tissue in only two weeks. The plants could also tolerate nearly 29,000 ppm of hydrocarbon contaminants, which were present in test soils. American Nurseryman, March 15, 1998.

As you can see plants have the ability to absorb all types of elements even ones hazardous to human health. The human body has over 90 elements in it and to be healthy we need to get these nutrients from our food. Hundreds of our common health problems are caused by nutrient deficient food found in conventionally grown agricultural products. A very good lecture on the subject that is funny and easy to listen to is:

"Dead Doctors Don't Lie", By Joel Wallach, DVM, N.D., - Excellent lecture available on CD, on nutrition, trace minerals and health and the link between soil and health. It is available at many health food stores or online. Note: This lecture was recorded a number of years ago but over 90% of the information provided by Doctor Wallach has been confirmed by other researchers.

So what does this have to do with organic fertilizers? For example if one applies an iron oxide product, all one gets is iron. If one applies gypsum all one gets is calcium and sulfur. Artificial fertilizers focus on N-P-K (nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium) and maybe a few minor nutrients hence they are very incomplete. When food is grown with these artificial fertilizers then the food is also nutritionally incomplete. A basic organic fertilizer will have the major nutrients and a few others and no toxic chemicals. A good organic fertilizer has the major nutrients, minor nutrients and trace elements in it. A extremely good organic fertilizer will have the above and also have beneficial microbes for plant health and species of microbes that serve as bio-fertilizers.

As a business owner and soil scientist I have had the opportunity to use and test many brands of organic fertilizers. My favorite is a local brand called Microlife (6-2-4) made by San Jacinto Environmental Supplies. I use it on everything; house plants, turf grass, hanging baskets and pots as well as fruit trees and vegetables. The reason why is that it is a complete organic fertilizer. It has the following ingredients:

Alfalfa, Fish meal, Kelp meal, Soy meal, Wheat middling's, Rock phosphate, Bat guano, Potassium sulfate, Iron sulfate, Sulfate of Potash magnesia, Humates, Molasses, Corn meal, Cottonseed meal, Beneficial microbes (dozens of strains including Endo and Ecto mycorrhizal fungi, and Bio-fertilizers (8 strains)).

We will look at each of these ingredients and what they provide in future articles. I have asked Mike Serant owner of San Jacinto Environmental Supplies to write an article on the history of Microlife and how it came to be. We will share it with you in future newsletters.

SUMMARY:

Organic fertilizers, compost, mulch, soils, etc. are just like automobiles where there is a huge range of quality,

value and price. One can buy a Yugo very cheaply as compared to a Lexus or Mercedes. They are all cars but a huge difference in quality, safety and value.

QUESTION: For a coupon for a free bag of "Leaf Mold compost" to the first five respondents:

"Which nutrient or element does a plant require the most of?"

Hint - It is not water (H₂O).

WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

(Events in Houston unless otherwise noted. No events picked up from other newsletters or media releases. Submit written in the format below, specifically earmarked for publication in the Lazy Gardener & Friends Newsletter.)

Tues., June 17: Herbs - Garden to Table, 6:30-8:30pm, Recipe for Success, 4400 Yupon St. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Free but space limited. Reservations: 281-855-5600 <http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners>.

Wed., June 18: Fairy Gardens and Terrariums by Judy Jones of Enchanted Gardens, 10am, Clear Lake Park Meeting Room, 5001 Nasa Parkway, Seabrook. Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 event. Free. Details: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/pubP2.aspx>

Thurs., June 19: Wetland Plants for the Home Garden by Mary Carol Edwards, Wetland Biologist at Texas Coastal Watershed Program/Texas Sea Grant: 7:30-9 pm, Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway. Free. Native Plant Society of Texas/Houston chapter event. Details: www.npsot.org/houston.

Thurs., June 19: Herbs - Garden to Table, 6:30pm, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter, Houston. Harris County Master Gardener event. Free. Details: 281-855-5600, <http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners>.

Sat., June 21: 4th Annual Tomato & Vegetable Contest, Kingwood Garden Center, 1216 Stonehollow Drive, Kingwood. Details: 281-358-1805 or www.Kingwoodgardencenter.com

Sat., June 21: Herbs - Garden to Table, 10am, Maude Marks Library, 1815 Westgreen Blvd., Katy. Harris County Master Gardener event. Free. Details: 281-855-5600, <http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners>.

Sat., June 21: National Pollinator Week Plant Identification by Mike Warriner, 10am, Jesse H. Jones Park and Nature Center, 20634 Kenswick Dr., Humble

Sat., June 21: Tomato Contest judged by Bill Adams, Jeremy Kollaus, Chef Chris Crowder, Randy Lemmon. 11am, The Arbor Gate, 15635 FM 2920 Rd, Tomball. Free. 281-351-8851, www.arborgate.com

Sat., June 21: Summer Lawncare, 10:15 a.m. at both Cornelius Nursery locations, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2233 S. Voss. Free. <http://www.corneliusnurseries/clinics>

Mon., June 23: Plant Hunters: A World of Exploration (4th-5th graders), 9am-noon, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$80. Details: 281-443-8731

Tues., June 24: Open Garden Day - Herbs, 9am, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension demonstration gardens, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. Harris County Master Gardener event. Free. Details: 281-855-5600,
www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners

Sat., June 28: Heat-Thriving and Colorful Plants, 10:15 a.m. at both Cornelius Nursery locations, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2233 S. Voss. Free. www.corneliusnurseries/clinics

Sat., June 28: Backyard Basics - "Aquaponics" by Fort Bend Master Gardeners and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, 8:30-11 am, Fort Bend County Extension Office at 1402 Band Rd., Rosenberg. \$15 (\$25 couples). Details: brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu, 281-342-3034, <http://fortbend.agrilife.org/>, www.fbmjg.com

Sat., July 19: Texas Rose Rustlers Meeting, 10am-3pm, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free, open to public. Details: www.texasroserustlers.com or 281-443-8731. **(Note date change from previously published)**

Mon., July 21: Plant Hunters: A World of Exploration (4th-5th graders), 9am-noon, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$80. Details: 281-443-8731

Wed., July 16: Foods from the Americas by Sally Luna, 7 pm, Metropolitan Multi Service Center, 1475 West Gray. South Texas Unit Herb Society of America event. Free. Details: herbsociety-stu.org

Sat, July 26 : The Plumeria Society of America Show & Plant Sale, 9 to 3pm, Ft. Bend County Fairgrounds, 4310 1st Street, Rosenberg. Details: www.theplumeriasociety.org

Sat., July 26: Mercer Botanic Gardens' Summer Color Plant Sale and Conference, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Conference, 8am-3pm. \$65. 11am-Plant Sale opens to public. Conference registration: 281-443-8731. Details: www.hcp4.net/mercer

Thurs., Oct. 2: Garden Club of Houston Bulb and Plant Mart Early Bird Shopping and Party, 4:30-7:30, St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, 2450 River Oaks Blvd. \$20. Details: www.gchouston.org/BulbPlantMart.aspx. **(Note new site)**

Fri., Oct. 3: Garden Club of Houston Bulb and Plant Mart, 9am-5pm; St. John the Divine Episcopal Church 2450 River Oaks Blvd. Free. Details: www.gchouston.org/BulbPlantMart.aspx. **(Note new site)**

Sat., Oct. 4: Garden Club of Houston Bulb and Plant Mart, 9am- 2pm, St. John the Divine Episcopal Church 2450 River Oaks Blvd. Free. www.gchouston.org/BulbPlantMart.aspx. **(Note new site)**

WANT YOUR EVENT IN THE LG&F CALENDAR? YOU HAVE TO SEND IT TO US!

EVENTS WILL NOT BE PICKED UP FROM OTHER NEWSLETTERS OR GENERAL MEDIA RELEASES.

To ensure rapid publication, submit events in the exact **STRAIGHT LINE** format used above so they can be copied and pasted right in. Events **NOT** submitted in our format will take longer to get published as someone has to reformat and retype them. Email to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

*Need speakers for your group? Or tips on getting more publicity for events?
Brenda's free booklets that might help: "Lazy Gardener's Speakers List"
of area horticultural/environmental experts, and "Lazy Gardener's Publicity Booklet"
(based on her 40+ years of her Houston Chronicle "Lazy Gardener" coverage of area events) Email specific requests
to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.
Please help us grow by informing all your membership of this weekly newsletter!*



<http://microlifefertilizer.com/>



Complete Organic Solutions

<http://www.fslandscaping.net/>



www.grandifloraservices.com



<http://natureswayresources.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.

Brenda recently ended her decades-long stint as Production Manager of the Garden Club of America's **BULLETIN** magazine. Although still an active horticulture lecturer and broad-based freelance writer, Brenda's main focus now is **THE LAZY GARDENER & 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 a co-editor and occasional article contributor.

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.



COUPON: Buy three antique roses and get one free at Nature's Way Resources www.natureswayresources.com .

Offer Expires: 06/31/14