



December 13, 2014

Dear Friends,

Here is the 86th issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. This is 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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Nat'l Poinsettia day & Why won't my plant bloom?

By Brenda Beust Smith



How's your poinsettia IQ? Left to right:

#1. Are there really blue poinsettias? #2. Is this a poinsettia or a rose? #3. A Texas native - true or false?

HAPPY POINSETTIA DAY!

Many legends surround the poinsettia, but almost all center around a very poor child in Mexico so sad because he had no money to buy a gift to lay by the Christ Child in his church's Nativity scene on Christmas Day. Weeds on the side of the road were all he could find, so he filled his cloak with them.

As he laid the cloak down beside the manger, he opened it to find all the weed leaves had turned a brilliant, beautiful red. Regardless of the various detail changes, it's a touching tale that truly underlies our love of poinsettias during this season.

December 12 is National Poinsettia Day - officially so declared by an Act of Congress to honor our first Ambassador to Mexico, Joel Roberts Poinsett, who died on Dec. 12, 1851. Poinsett brought this colorful plant back to his Greenville, SC, plantation.

Who else would tell you these things?

Speaking of poinsettias, Virginia in Willis sent me this picture of a blue one and wanted to know if it's for real? No, Virginia, there is no blue poinsettia.

It's dyed or a white poinsettia painted with blue watercolors. You can't just spray paint poinsettias. Takes a special colorant not toxic to plants.

That takes care of the answer to #1 in the picture quiz above. How did you do on the other two?

#2. This is a poinsettia, 'Valentine,' a rose-shaped variety.

#3. True, this is a Texas native, a Painted or Mexican Poinsettia (*Euphorbia cyathophora*), a low-growing shrubby plant that - as friends Josanna Brattis Smith and Rita Mossley can testify - loves the sunny, hot, dry, sandy soils of Bolivar Peninsula.

Mexican poinsettias are easy to grow, and make nice shrubby groundcovers, in Greater Houston area gardens. Don't overwater, or they won't produce the colorful bracts!

Next week we'll discuss how to get those lovely red leaves to reappear on standard poinsettias (which also do well outside here) and what to do with other typical Christmas gift plants.



Unfortunately there are many reasons why no flowers/fruit appear on plants such as, left to right, angel trumpet, bougainvillea and Meyer lemons.

SPEAKING OF PLANTS THAT WON'T FLOWERS OR FRUIT . . .

Wish I had had a quick poinsettia-style miracle answer for Patty McFall, who wants to know why her angel trumpet and bougainvillea haven't bloomed and why she's had no fruit on her two Meyer lemon shrubs?

Flowering and fruiting are evidence of happy, healthy plants. No flowers or fruits are symptoms of "something wrong."

Unfortunately, the "something" options are many:

1. **Overwatering or underwatering.** (Too few flowers/fruit are usually the first sign.)
2. **Plant's too young, not yet acclimated and/or needs to recover from being forced to bloom by growers.** Bougainvillea is notorious for taking years to bloom again after it has been forced into bloom so you will buy it.
3. **Immature Root system.** (Top growth does not always reflect root growth)
4. **Poor drainage.** (This often results in roots staying too damp and eventually dying.) The three plants Patty mentioned are EXTREMELY drought tolerant. This means they need to be in extremely well drained areas and not on, for example, a daily or even 2-3 times weekly watering system.
5. **Nutrient-deficient soil.**
6. **Improper fertilizing.**
 - * Lawn fertilizers, for example, are very high in nitrogen which (being simplistic about a very complex process) promotes lots of green growth - often at the expense of fruiting or flowering. If you've used a lawn fertilizer near blooming plants, it might stop them from blooming.
 - * Over-feeding with high phosphorus artificial fertilizers (high middle number, like Miracle-gro, Rapid Gro, etc.) can cause buildups in the soils that can create nutrient imbalances.

7. Pruned at the wrong time. Plants that bloom in spring generally bloom on old growth should be pruned AFTER they bloom so you don't cut off all the potential buds. Plants that bloom in summer generally bloom on new growth. Prune summer-bloomers in the spring.

Angel trumpets can bloom on old growth but usually bloom on new growth. However they're a little trickier to prune, so I recommend you google "pruning angel trumpet" and look at the pictures for correct shaping.

8. Too much or two little sun. All three plants Patty mentioned like a LOT of sun. Not enough will stop them from blooming. Look up. Tree canopies tend to spread over the years so that gardens once in sun all day may be getting a lot less than they did before.

9. Overcrowding roots or foliage. Foliage needs good air circulation and light. Roots may be stressed by roots of nearby large trees. These usually extend far beyond the tree canopy. They'll use up a lot of nutrients and moisture.

10. Planting at the wrong depth. This is especially vital with trees, but almost all plants (especially bulbs) have a preferred planting depth.

11. Wrong season/variety? Plants are genetically programmed to bloom/fruit under specific conditions - including the right ratios of daylight, darkness, cold, heat, rain/watering, drought, etc. Within a plant group, different varieties may have different demands. That's why one variety of a the same plant might fruit or flower well in Kansas, say, but won't fruit or flower here. That's probably not Patty's problem with these plants. But it often is the problem when you try to grow the wrong varieties of fruits and vegetables here.

12. Slow sap movement. Okay, this is going to sound crazy, but here's a tried-'n'-true method of getting plants to fruit 'n' flower. Patty, this is what I recommend for you on the angel trumpet and Meyers.

Go out at night and beat those suckers with the straw end of a broom.

Never heard of okra switching? Neither had I until I wrote about the advice a great rose grower gave me for an antique rose that refused for years to bloom. It worked. Readers began responding with lots of switchin' & beatin' tales.

What this actually does is to force the sap to move.

Why do it at night?

So the neighbors won't see you, of course!

POTPOURRI

* **Thanks to reader Steve Gorman** who, responding to Jim Murillo's concern over mealy bugs on his hibiscus. Steve says he's had success eliminating mealy bugs by soaking a paper towel with rubbing alcohol and rubbing every inch of the infected plant's surface, especially tops and undersides of leaves. May need repeating.

Steve adds, and I agree, it's easier to just buy new plants. But some folks do get emotionally attached, don't you know? Still, hibiscus are so easy to grow here, they grow so quickly and bloom so beautifully . . . well, it's your call.

* **If I may be allowed a personal moment . . .** As a student of Dominican Sisters almost my whole elementary-through-high school years, I'd like to congratulate the Dominican Sisters of Houston on being awarded the United Against Human Trafficking (UAHT)'s North Star Award. UAHT (formerly Houston Rescue and Restore Coalition) noted that, decades ago, the Dominican Sisters were one of the very first groups in Houston to raise awareness about human trafficking

* *Brenda's group lectures include: "How to Reduce the Size of Your Front Lawn to Save Water Without Infuriating Your Neighbors," "Landscaping for Security," "10 Commandments of Lazy Gardening," and "What's Blooming in the Lazy Gardener's Garden." Details: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net. Brenda's "Lazy Gardener's Guide" - a when-to-do-what in Greater Houston area gardens - is now available on CD only (pdf file). \$20. Checks payable to Brenda B. Smith and mailed to: Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD, 14011 Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039-2103.*

JOHN'S CORNER



Organic Fertilizers and Nutrients - 20

BLOOD MEAL

This week I want to take a look at another common organic fertilizer called Blood Meal. Blood meal is a dry inert powder made from animal blood and used as a high nitrogen organic fertilizer. It is also used as a high protein animal feed from dogs and cats to fish. It is a slaughterhouse by-product of our meat industry and the most common source is from cattle, however in some areas it is made from hogs.

Blood meal is primarily considered a nitrogen source however it may contain small amounts of other nutrients and trace minerals. A analysis can be as high as (N-P-K) of 13-1-0.06 but most sources just list blood meal as a 12-0-0.

Some types of blood meal are fortified with iron (Fe) and can lead to iron toxicity in the garden. The iron naturally found in blood meal is in what is known as the Ferric oxidation state or form and is the type of iron that binds to organic matter and that plants prefer. Best to avoid brands with added iron.

When microbes breakdown the blood meal, the nitrogen (N) is released in the ammonia form (NH_4^+) which is preferred by perennial plants. Note: The nitrate form of nitrogen (NO_3^-) is what weeds prefer.

Many myths persist that blood meal and bone meal contain mad cow disease (BSE) bovine spongiform encephalopathy. According to research, the prion protein is not found in blood, bone, or milk, hence it has never been found in blood meal or bone meal.

Usage varies from 7 pounds per 1,000 square feet to 25 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The blood meal can also be dissolved in water and used in this way to quickly add nitrogen to the soil.

In warm moist weather one needs to be careful as the blood meal can breakdown so quickly that it can burn plants. Blood meal encourages fast leafy growth and too much at one time can make plants more susceptible to attack by insects and disease. It is always better for the soil, the microbes and plants to have several light applications of fertilizers spread out over a large period of time rather than one heavy application.

Many animals (carnivores) naturally eat blood as part of their diet hence are attracted to blood meal. This includes pets (dogs and cats) to raccoons and other animals. One website for pets indicated that it can make pets sick. My dogs over the years never had any problems and just thought it was a tasty treat.

SUMMARY:

Blood meal is another tool in a gardeners toolbox and is a great way to quickly correct nitrogen deficiencies or help out in a compost pile.

PROS:

- good source of nitrogen
- relatively inexpensive
- good availability
- available in bags or bulk
- reported to repel rabbits and sometimes deer
- fast acting
- easy to use
- often used in compost piles as a nitrogen source
- can be applied dry or as a liquid
- low salt

CONS:

- may burn plants
- may attract carnivores like dogs, cats and raccoons
- short lived in the environment
- may be dusty
- not a complete fertilizer
- too much can cause nutrient tie-up problems

WEEKLY GARDENING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALENDAR

Gardening events only. Events listed are in Houston unless otherwise noted. Events must be written in the format used below, specifically earmarked for publication in the "Lazy Gardener & Friends Newsletter." Email to lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

Sat.-Sun., Dec 13-14: Winter Native Plant Sale, 9am-4pm, Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, 4501 Woodway Drive. Details: www.houstonarboretum.org

Mon., Dec. 15: Open Garden Day with Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2, 8:30-11am, Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Q&A. Free. Details: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu>

Sat., Dec. 20: Edible Wild Plants, 9am-1pm, Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, 4501 Woodway Drive, Houston. \$65. Details: www.houstonarboretum.org

Wed., Jan. 7: The Hardest Landscape Roses by John Jons, 9:30am, University Baptist Church, 16106 Middlebrook Dr. Free. Gardeners by the Bay event. Details: <http://gbtb.org> or Marjorie, 281-474-5051

Thurs., Jan. 8: Spring Vegetable Gardening in Small Spaces by Peg Turrentine and Jennifer Plihal, 9:30am, Municipal Utility Building, 805 Hidden Canyon Drive, Katy. Free. Nottingham Country Garden Club Program. Details: nottinghamgardenclub.org or 713-870-5915 or 979-885-6199

Sat., Jan. 17: Preview of Fort Bend County Master Gardener Jan. 24 Fruit and Citrus Tree Sale, 9-11am, Bud O'Shields Community Center, 1330 Band Road, Rosenberg. Free. Details: www.fbmga.com or 281-341-7068

Mon., Jan. 19: Open Garden Day, 8:30-11am, Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. Free. Q & A with Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2. Details: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu>

Tues., Jan. 20: Garden Design Spring 2015 by Billy Marberry, 10am, Knights of Columbus Hall, 702 Burney Road, Sugar Land. Sugar Land Garden Club event. Details: <http://sugarlandgardenclub.org/>

Wed., Jan. 21: Citrus and Fruit Trees for the Houston Area by Heidi Sheesley (preview of Feb. 14 Master Gardener Sale trees), 10am, Clear Lake Park Meeting Room, 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook. Details:

Sat., Jan. 24: Fort Bend Master Gardeners Fruit and Citrus Tree Sale, 9am-1pm or sell-out, Fort Bend County Fairgrounds, Barn H, 4310 Highway 36 S, Rosenberg. Details: www.fbmga.org or 281-341-7068.

Sat., Jan. 24: Montgomery County Fruit and Nut Tree Sale, 9am-noon. 8-9am: Educational presentation. Details: www.mcmga.com

Tues., Jan. 27: Harris County Master Gardeners Open Garden Day, Soil & Composting: 9am- noon (10 am-adult workshop, children's activities). Free. AgriLife Extension Office, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. Details: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu>

Sat., Jan. 31: Harris County Master Gardeners Fruit Tree Sale and Symposia. 9am-1pm, County Extension Office, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. Preview at 8am. Details: hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/pubSales.aspx

Sat., Feb. 14: Harris County Master Gardener Fruit Tree Sale, 9am-1pm, Campbell Hall, Pasadena Fairgrounds, 7600 Red Bluff Rd., Pasadena. Details: hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/pubSales.aspx

Tues., Feb. 17: Plant a Diverse Garden by Chris LaChance, 10am, Knights of Columbus Hall, 702 Burney Road, Sugar Land. Sugar Land Garden Club event. Details: <http://sugarlandgardenclub.org/>

Sat., Feb. 21: Brazoria County Master Gardeners Fruit and Citrus Tree Sale. Details: brazoria.agrilife.org

Tues., Feb. 24: Harris County Master Gardeners Open Garden Day, Spring Vegetable Gardening: 9am- noon: 10am adult workshop, children's activities. Free. AgriLife Extension Office, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. Details: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu>

Thurs., Feb. 26: Preview of Fort Bend County Master Gardeners Feb. 28 Vegetable-Herb Plant Sale, 9-11am, Bud O'Shields Community Center, 1330 Band Road, Rosenberg. Free. Details: www.fbmga.com or 281-341-7068

Sat., Feb. 28: Harris County Master Gardener Tomato & Pepper Sale & Symposia. AgriLife Extension office, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. Details: <http://hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/pubSales.aspx>

Sat., Feb. 28: Fort Bend Master Gardeners Vegetable-Herb Plant Sale, 9am-noon or sell-out, Agricultural Center Greenhouse, 1402 Band Road, Rosenberg. Details: www.fbmga.org or 281-341-7068.

Mar. 6-8: 2015 80th Annual Azalea Trail. River Oaks Garden Club event. Details: <http://www.riveroaksgardenclub.org>

Tues., March 17: Hummingbirds! "Allen or Rufous, it's all *Selasphorus* to me!", <http://sugarlandgardenclub.org/>

Mon., April 21 2015: **What's Blooming in the Lazy Gardener's Garden** by **Brenda Beust Smith**, 10am, Walden on Lake Houston Club House. Lake Houston Ladies Club event. Non-member reservations required: Carol Dandeneau. #832-671-4475

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.

Events submitted in the exact format used above will receive priority in inclusion in the calendar. Events NOT submitted in our format 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!

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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, certified permaculturist 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 article contributor.

MARY BOWEN

Mary is a Realtor with Coldwell Banker United and an avid volunteer with the Montgomery County Animal Shelter.

With respect to the newsletter, Mary came up with the idea for the Garden Tails column and co-writes it. Mary is the newest addition to our group of contributors. We will expand her bio as we go.

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.

GARDEN TAILS

Hope One Of Our Readers Can Dig Our Adoptable Dog Of The Week

As part of our in kind sponsorship of the Montgomery County Animal Shelter,
we promote adoptions and donate mulch for their dog park from time to
time.



Pistol ID 222660

Pistol is a wonderful adult dog estimated to be about 2 years old. Pistol is a brindle beauty. She is a mellow girl, very sweet and always smiling. She loves it when you talk to her, and is very attentive. She is happy to go to the dog park, socialize with the other dogs, but mostly she loves to be loved. A favorite among the shelter volunteers. She is full of personality and is guaranteed to melt your heart. As you can see in from her glamour shot, she is happy to play dress up. She only ask you give her a more fitting name. She said she is a Princess not a Pistol. She was adopted as a puppy and recently returned. Bad owners, great dog.

Pistol's Likes Include: Being a Diva, Wearing Pink Boas, Being Pampered, People who Opt to Adopt, Tennis Balls, Playing in the Dog Park, Long Walks in the Woods, Playing Fetch, Running, Squeaky Toys, Being a Couch Potato, Sharing Your Dinner, McNuggets, Hanging with her Doggie Friends, Splashing in Mud Puddles after it Rains, Car Rides home, and most of all having a Forever Home!

Pistol's Pet Peeves Include: Being Named Pistol, Going to the Vet, Mean Dogs, People Who Don't Spay and Neuter their Pets, Fleas, Baths, Spinach, Living at the Shelter. People who don't realize that dogs are family, too.

Pistol's Goals in Life: To have her very own human family to love and protect.
To have her very own home where she can feel safe.
To make it out of the Shelter.
To get a New Name!!

*Please Take Me Out To The Dog Park and See How Very Special I am.
I might pull you on the way out but I'm just so excited to play with
you. I calm down once we make it to the park.*

Paws Honor,

Miss Pistol

For more information about Pistol or other adoptable animals, please
visit <http://www.mcaspets.org/25-dogs-in-shelter-for-60-days.html>



**COUPON: BUY ONE OLD GARDEN ROSES & GET A SECOND
FREE At Nature's Way Resources**

www.natureswayresources.com . (Offer good for retail purchases at Nature's Way Resources (101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX).

Offer Expires: 12/31/14