



November 28, 2015

Dear Friends,

Here is the 134th issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. We really appreciate all of our readers hanging in there with us, sharing stories and inspiring us in so many ways.

Thanks so much!

This newsletter is a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith, John Ferguson and Mark Bowen. (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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SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY GARDENS . . . PLANT NOW FOR WINTER BEAUTY

BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH

"It's a beautiful day in the agri hood . . . "

"Farms are the new golf courses . . . "

— Bob Strassman, ["HomeGrown," CBS Sunday Morning \(11/22/2015\)](#)

Hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving!

On CBS's most recent *Sunday Morning* show, Bob Strassman's ["HomeGrown"](#) cover story included the two great lines above as he profiled the growing trend toward "AGRI HOODS," spotlighting an upscale Atlanta

neighborhood that, quite literally, is built around a farm from which residents can readily harvest fresh produce.

The program flashed me back to a conversation - several decades ago back in the '70s - with a then young Dr. Bob Randall, before Houston had even one community garden. Bob's dream was to turn vacant, unused lots across Houston into vegetable gardens, manned and harvested by nearby neighbors. It was an idea that looked great on paper, but was new to this area.

Let's be clear, however. Bob's focus was on helping residents in low-income area overcome their lack of decent grocery stores to grow their own healthy food on unused, vacant lots.

But the idea quickly expanded into middle income neighborhoods, where an increasing number of folks wanted healthier food. And then into upper end 'hoods.

The "agri hoods" popping up across the nation (including "[Harvest Green](#)" in Fort Bend County usually feature higher end homes built around a professionally-maintained, resident-harvest-accessible organic farm - in much the same fashion so many high end neighborhoods have been built around golf courses.

Hence the quote: "*Farms are the new golf courses.*"

Thanks to Bob's vision, and the literally thousands of folks now who are following his lead, the Greater Houston Area easily boasts 200+ community gardens in neighborhoods - including many individual-started/run gardens to the 100+ that are directly connected to [Urban Harvest](#).

Unlike the "agri hoods," these community gardens are started, maintained and shared by residents. Or they are organizational gardens, such as the [Dominican Community Garden](#), above center, overseen by Sr. Heloise Cruzat.

And best of all? And, thanks to the usually diverse ethnic make-up of most community garden volunteers, the edibles grown almost always reflect a global view of healthy living and an incredible introduction of vegetables, fruits & nuts reflecting planting delights from their own countries.



Dec. 1 is the start of the best seed planting time for, l to r, lettuce, mache, chervil, red radish and spinach (. . . to name just a few) -- [Urban Harvest Winter Planting Guide](#)

Want a glimpse of what community gardens are planting? Just check out [Year Round Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Metro-Houston: A Natural Organic Approach Using Ecology](#) - a great Christmas gift for any Houston gardener but especially for new -or new-to-Houston gardeners).

The fascinating aspect today is that now community gardens and "agri hoods," when combined with the phenomenal increase in farmers markets, reflect an across-the-board increase in the number of folks throughout the economic spectrum interested in eating healthy food grown organically and close to home.

Thanks to Bob's vision, and the literally thousands of folks now who are following his lead, the Greater Houston Area easily boasts 200+ community gardens in neighborhoods ranging from extremely low income to mansion-filled.

Unlike the commercial "agri hoods," community gardens are usually started, maintained and shared by residents, churches, schools, organizations, etc. - and may range from a simple shared corner space with individual plantings to organized, landscaped plots.

Want to know more about these? Visit these links to the [Map of Urban Harvest-Connected Community Gardens](#), [Urban Harvest's Farmers Markets](#), and other [Farmers Markets across the area](#).

Bob Randall was one of the prime movers behind [Urban Harvest](#), one of the best friends we gardeners, and community gardens in particular, have today.

* * *



*For winter color, l to r, cyclamens, primroses, ornamental kale and pansies.
Note: ornamental kale is edible but usually not as tasty as those labeled "EDIBLE kale."*

NOT THAT I EXPECT ANYONE WILL THINK ABOUT GARDENING IN THE HECTIC DAYS AHEAD . .

But should you need to escape the hassle and breathe some oxygen (plants can provide a real fix), here are some thoughts from the *Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD* (see end of column).

We Lazy Gardeners divide monthly chores by our energy levels:

This month, you really should . . .

- * Keep poinsettias and other holiday plants out of heating drafts; set on cool floor at night.
- * Water plants if a freeze is forecast. Rinse frost off in the morning. The average first freeze occurs the first week of December. Remove protective covers off plants in the morning.
- * Check the water level on Christmas trees every day so they won't become a fire hazard.
- * Cut branches of magnolia, holly, ligustrum, juniper and yew for indoor holiday decorations. The plants will benefit from the slight pruning.
- * Check out your neighborhood nursery for great Christmas gifts: plants, pH kits, trowels, decorative pots, etc., and local gardening books

If the spirit moves . . .

- * Plant cyclamens, primroses, ornamental kale and pansies for instant color.
- * Plant green onions, leeks, mustard greens, turnips.
- * Feed shrubs which bloom in spring. (Except azaleas, camellias. Feed after they bloom.)
- * Water bulbs during dry periods. Plant agapanthus, allium, crinum, iris and montbretia.
- * Weeping yaupon will provide fall and winter beauty and is an excellent December If you're really feeling energetic . . .
- * Cover dormant beds with compost or other organic matter (dried manure, seaweed, etc.)
- * Check the pH of beds where plants have problems. Kits are available at nurseries.
- * It's okay to move azaleas if necessary. It shouldn't affect blooms.
- * Feed established trees. Louisiana irises will appreciate a serving of cottonseed meal.
- * Plant hollies, yaupons and other berry-bearing shrubs to attract birds in winter.

NEXT WEEK: MY MOST FAVORITE TO-DO CATEGORY!

* * *

IF YOU'RE TRYING TO GET A HANDLE ON GARDENING . . .

...in our somewhat unique subtropical area (so different even from the rest of Texas!), [Mercer Botanic Garden](#) / [The Mercer Society's Texas Gulf Coast Gardener course](#) might help. It's divided into Tiers, but each one is a separate complete focus, and you don't need to attend them in order. Jan. 15 is registration (\$155) deadline for Tier III, with classes set for 9am-3pm, Mondays Jan. 25-Feb. 29. Details: www.themercersociety.org.

* * *

Brenda's "book" -- LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD (a pdf book based on her 40+-years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener) -- is available wholesale as a fundraising item. Details: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net. Individual books: \$20. Make checks payable to LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD and mail to LGG on CD, 14011 Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039.

JOHN'S CORNER

"What Is A Healthy Soil"



(Part 5)



Continuing our discussion of what is a healthy soil we are going to discuss item #4 below.

- 1) Organic matter from almost fresh to totally decomposed in the form of humus (humins, humic and fulvic acids)
- 2) Minerals (nutrients, sand, silt, and clay)
- 3) Soil life (microbes and macrobes)
- 4) Air & water
- 5) Plant choices
- 6) Care for and do not destroy the health of the soil one has

4) Air & water - this is the 4th components of a healthy soil. Plant roots and soil life forms; require air (oxygen and nitrogen) and water. For the soil to breathe, which healthy soil does, there has to be pore spaces for the air and channels that air can flow, sort of like air conditioning ducts in our house, a characteristic we call permeability. Additionally, the carbon dioxide (CO₂) produced by the respiration of microbes and other soil life and the breakdown of the carbon stored in the organic matter has to escape the soil and let oxygen back in or the good life dies.

How do we get air into the soil? We have a few options:

Tilling - a temporary solution at best, destroys long term soil structure, creates a hardpan layer, and kills soil animal life and the beneficial fungus that makes soil healthy. Accelerates the breakdown of organic matter causing the soil to lose its ability to hold and store water and nutrients, greatly accelerates erosion. The only time one should till is to mix ingredients together when forming a new bed.

Core Aeration - another temporary solution which can provide short term benefits especially if fine screened compost is applied to the area and allowed to fill into the holes created by the cores. The compost keeps the holes open and allows the exchange of air and water to enter the soil. The microbes in the compost will break apart the clay particles over time creating a more loamy soil. Best usage is on new sod grown in a clay soil. The coring breaks holes in the clay and helps water and air enter the soil. Note: Healthy soil never needs core aeration as the microbes, earthworms and other soil life does it for you.

Dead roots - most plants have some of their roots die every year as the soil around the root is depleted in nutrients and new roots grow into fresh areas. As the old roots decompose they leave tunnels that air and water can use (Note: they require oxygen to decompose), this is common in mature forest systems. Also many of our annual weeds provide the role of improving aeration in soils. For example, Dandelions that have large deep taproots provide this benefit. When they die their roots decay leaving a tunnel that air and water can use. Nature uses this plant to correct soil problems as they grow best on tight compacted soils.

Burrowing animals - the largest amount of aeration is caused by the insects, earthworms, and burrowing mammals. Earthworm tunnels are like the ductwork in our houses and along with the microbes; they produce chemicals that glue soil particles together forming a friable crumb structure, honeycombed with voids for air and water.

Water is stored in the soil in several ways. First it is bound chemically by the clay and humus in the soil, next it is stored as a film or coating on soil particles and last it is stored in the void or interstitial spaces between grains of soil (too much and we call it a water logged soil as the air is displaced). There is a 4th way that we are beginning to understand and that is in the life forms in the soil. As these life forms eat each other the water and nutrients stored in their bodies is released into the soil.

Our largest storage vessel for water is the soil. A soil with only 3% organic matter by weight will have a 60% porosity. If 35% of this pore space is air and 25% is water then the soil will hold over 120,000 gallons of water per acre in the top 18 inches of soil. A real healthy soil will have over 8% organic matter and go down several feet!

I remember as a boy growing up my Grandmother would listen on the radio to our first gardening guy Dewey Compton. He had a saying that has stuck with me: "It is far, far, far, far cheaper to put a one dollar plant into a ten dollar hole than a ten dollar plant into a one dollar hole. If one does not get the soil correct it does not matter how much one spends on the plant material.

Even today, a colleague of mine, Randy Lemon of the Gardenline radio show is still constantly stressing the importance of getting the soil healthy.

This issue is the single biggest mistake that gardeners make! When one uses low quality soils, mulch, fertilizers, etc.; they will get insects, diseases, weeds and eventually plant death. Then they often say, "I have a Brown Thumb".

TIP OF THE WEEK - Bulbs

I love the fragrance of old-fashioned Hyacinths. As an experiment several years ago I ordered some species Hyacinths from a mail order company and I planted them in a clay pot (non-glazed) in a gravelly potting mix. They have returned for the 8th straight year. They get morning sun and afternoon shade which prevents the soil from heating up. The porous nature of the clay pot allows for evaporative cooling of the soil and the above ground position of the pot allows for the soil to get much cooler during cold weather providing extra chill hours. The gravelly nature of the potting mix ensures excellent drainage. I suspect this approach will work for other bulbs that are marginal in our area.

* * *

WEEKLY GARDENING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

TO SUBMIT EVENTS - PLEASE - USE OUR FORMAT!

Find a similar event in our calendar below and copy the format EXACTLY.

Then you can add additional information. Email to lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

Not using our format will result in a delay in publication! Events will not be picked up from other newsletters.

If we inspire you to attend any of these events, please let them know you heard about it in

THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!

TUE., DEC. 1: Film Screening - Symphony of the Soil. 6pm. OHBA Event hosted by The Houston Museum of Natural Science, <https://store.hmns.org>

WED. DEC. 2: Our Garden and Our Health, John Ferguson, 9-11am, Gardeners By The Bay Garden Club, University Baptist Church, 16106 Middlebrook Drive, Houston, Texas 77059, Roemehl Dewey, 281-352-7149.

SAT., DEC. 5: GROWING CITRUS IN HOUSTON, 9-11am. University of St. Thomas, 3918 Yoakum Blvd. \$45. Urban Harvest event. 713-880-5540; urbanharvest.org

SAT., DEC. 5: HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE, 10am-4pm, Buchanan's Native Plants, 611 East 11th Street, free, buchanansplants.com/calendar/events

SAT., DEC. 5: BACKYARD BASICS: FRUIT AND NUTS, 9-11am, Extension Office, 1402 Band Rd., Rosenberg. \$15. Fort Bend AgriLife Extension Service/Master Gardener event. Register: 281-342-3034, fortbend.agrilife.org/backyard-basics

MON., DEC. 7: PAM DUBE, SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF FLORAL DESIGN, 10am-noon, Amegy Bank Community Room, 28201 SH 249, Tomball. Free. Tomball Garden Club event, tomballgardenclub@gmail.com

WED., DEC. 9: CHRISTMAS CRAFTS USING NATURAL PLANT MATERIALS, noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. 713-274-4160.

FRI., DEC. 11: A WARM GARDENING WELCOME BY BARBARA BAKER, 10:15 am, White Oak Conference Center, 7603 Antoine Drive. Tickets required. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

SAT., DEC. 12: GROWING TOMATOES FROM SEED (PART 1 OF 3) BY GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9-11:30am, AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4102 Main, La Marque. Free. Reservation: galv@wt.net. 281-534-3413; aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

SAT., DEC. 19: CHRISTMAS GARDENS BIRD COUNT, 8am, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

MON., DEC. 21: OPEN GARDEN DAY & PLANT SALE, 8:30-11am, Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Free. Harris County Master Gardeners Precinct 2 event. hcmga.tamu.edu

MON., JAN. 4: GROWING CITRUS BY BETH HOUSE, 10am-noon, Amegy Bank Community Room, 28201 SH 249, Tomball. Free. Tomball Garden Club event, tomballgardenclub@gmail.com

THURS., JAN. 7: IS YOUR STYLE IN YOUR GARDEN? BY MARGARET SINCLAIR, 9:30am, Municipal Utility Building #81, 805 Hidden Canyon Dr., Katy. Free. Nottingham Country Garden Club Program. nottinghamgardenclub.org

FRI., JAN. 8: PERSONALIZING YOUR GARDEN FOCAL POINTS BY DARNELL SCHREIBER, 10:15am, White Oak Conference Center, 7603 Antoine Drive. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

TUE., JAN. 12: FOREST ECOLOGY / TREE CARE BY JOHN ROSS. 9 am. South County Community Center, 2235 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands. Free. Woodlands Garden Club event. www.thewoodlandsgardenclub.org

WED., JAN. 13: TOP BAR BEEHIVES BY DEAN COOK. Noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. 713-274-4160.

THUR., JAN. 14: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS PREVIEW OF THE FRUIT & CITRUS TREE SALE, 6:30-

8:30pm, Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg. Free. 281-341-7068; www.fbm.org

SAT., JAN. 16: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS ANNUAL FRUIT & CITRUS TREE SALE, 9am-1pm or sold out, Fort Bend County Fairground Barn-H, 4310 Highway 36S, Rosenberg. 281-341-7068; www.fbm.org

THURS., JAN. 21: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENER 2016 INTERN TRAINING PROGRAM BEGINS. Registration (\$160; Jan. 11 deadline). www.txmg.org/walleimg.

MONDAYS., JAN. 25-FEB. 29: TEXAS GULF COAST GARDENER, TIER III: THE ART OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN. 9am-3pm. Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. 713-274-4160

SAT., JAN. 30: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ANNUAL FRUIT & NUTTREE SALE (and presale pickup), 10am-2pm, 850 Bus 290 N. Hempstead. txmg.org/walleimg

TUE., FEB 9: SHADE BARDENING BY GUDRUM OPPERMAN. 9 am. South County Community Center, 2235 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands. Free. Woodlands Garden Club event. www.thewoodlandsgardenclub.org

WED., FEB. 10: SPRING INTO YOUR LAWN - ORGANIC LAWN CARE & SPRINGTIME PREP BY BOB DAILEY. noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. 713-274-4160.

FRI., FEB. 12: THE HOLISTIC GARDEN, BY DR. JOE NOVAK, 10:15am, White Oak Conference Center, 7603 Antoine Drive. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

SAT., FEB. 20: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS PREVIEW FOR THE VEGETABLE- HERB PLANT SALE, 9-11am, Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg. Free. 281 341-7068, www.fbm.org

SAT. FEB. 27: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS ANNUAL VEGETABLE-HERB PLANT SALE, 9am-noon, Fort Bend County Extension Office, 1402 Band Rd., Rosenberg. 281 341-7068, www.fbm.org

TUES., MAR. 8: EASTER FLORAL DESIGN CONCEPTS BY TONY HUFFMAN. 9 am. South County Community Center, 2235 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands. Free. Woodlands Garden Club event. www.thewoodlandsgardenclub.org

WED. MAR. 9: MARCH MART VOLUNTEER TRAINING, 10:30-11:30am, MARCH MART PREVIEW OF SALE PLANTS, noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. 713-274-4160.

FRI., MAR. 11: BULLET PROOF VIBURNUMS FOR THE GULF SOUTH BY DR. DAVID CREECH, 10:15am, White Oak Conference Center, 7603 Antoine Dr. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

WED. MAR. 12: MARCH MART VOLUNTEER TRAINING, 9:30-10:30am, and MARCH MART PREVIEW OF SALE PLANTS, noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. 713-274-4160.

FRI.-SAT., MAR. 18-19: MARCH MART, 8am-4pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 2206 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. 713-274-4160.

TUE., APR. 12: PLANT PROPAGATION TECHNIQUES. 9 am. South County Community Center, 2235 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands. Free. Woodlands Garden Club event. www.thewoodlandsgardenclub.org

FRI., APR. 9: XPLORING CREATIVITY BY LILLIAN RICO, 10:15am, White Oak Conference Center, 7603 Antoine Drive. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

FRI., MAY 13: NIGHT SOUNDS - TWILIGHT WALK THROUGH THE GARDEN BY DEBBIE BANFIELD, 10:15am, White Oak Conference Center, 7603 Antoine Dr. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs; houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

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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 periodic 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: Nature's Way Resources. 20% off our: Garden Mix Light Plus. <http://natureswayresources.com/products.html>

(Offer good for retail purchases of this product by the cubic yard at Nature's Way Resources (101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX). Expires 12/05/15.

COUPON: Nature's Way Resources. 30% off all trees & shrubs including fruit trees, shade trees, antique roses and much

more. (Offer good for retail purchases of this product by the cubic yard at Nature's Way Resources (101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX). Expires 12/31/15.