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December 17, 2016

Dear Friends,

Here is the 185th 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. . . E mail 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!

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A TALE OF TWO YULE TREATS . . . SAVING TEXAS' ECOLOGICAL TREASURES

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

Wed., Dec. 21, is the Winter Solstice, shortest day and longest night of the year. Thursday marks the beginning of longer days and shorter nights. "Boughs of holly" probably decorate most of our homes, which truly celebrates our flora. Yaupon holly is not only one of our most colorful winter plants, it is ubiquitous ... as anyone who has tried to clear the stuff out can testify!

Druids believed holly's evergreen nature made it sacred and that it remained green throughout winter to keep the earth beautiful at a time when deciduous trees shed their leaves.



Left, above, is one of my most favorite yaupons ever. This is the now-gone weeping version, Yaupon 'Will Fleming,' that once graced the front of Mercer Botanic Garden's Visitor Center. Branches cascade over so the brilliant red berries hang down.

Yaupon has been used literally for centuries as a medicinal, actually "magical" plant. It stayed green and had beautiful color even through winter. That wonderful image above was discovered at Oklahoma's Spiro Mounds prehistoric archeological site. It was engraved on a shell yaupon tea drinking cup .

Next to the tea cup's design are yaupon's unfortunately insignificant flowers. And at right is the way we usually see yaupon in the wild. It's rangy growth can be a turn-off to some gardeners, but certainly not to wildlife! The good news is that yaupon is easily pruned into trees or manicured or even relaxed growth hedges in home landscapes. Whack away. It doesn't mind one bit.

One caution, if you buy or transplant a yaupon, make sure it has berries on it. Only females have berries, but males are necessary for pollination. Both have the flowers. These are so prolific in our area that chances are you won't have a pollination problem unless you live in a totally cleared area with virtually no native plants around.



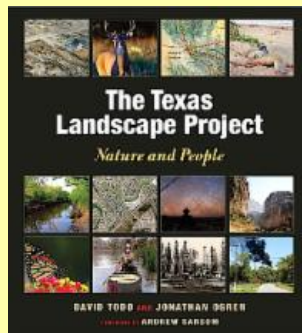
MISTLETOE: While the center bouquet above is the way most of us see mistletoe these days, the idea that this parasite's pearl-like berries are actually a Goddess' tears is kinda neat. Mistletoe was also considered magical by ancients. Because it held its leaves and green color while hanging onto winter-dormant trees, it was believed that it was actually "holding" the tree's life-power until spring returned.

Mistletoe is another "mixed blessing" solstice celebration staple, both a parasite that can kill trees and a Druid sacred plant. One ancient Norse tale is about Frigga, a beloved goddess made everything living on or in the Earth promise not to harm her son Baldr. Ah, but she didn't realize the mistletoe never took the oath.

Loki, a jealous & mischievous god, used mistletoe to make a weapon with which – long story short – killed Baldr. Instead of punishing the mistletoe, Frigga decreed it would forever become the symbol of peace and friendship. Her tears became the pearl-like mistletoe berries.

Many other myths abound about this plant. Christmas card to the WWI front soldiers often included mistletoe, the symbol of peace. Who else would tell you these things?

* * *



L to r: "The Texas Landscape Project: Nature and People" by David Todd and Jonathan Ogren and three Texas native grasses now being targeted for restoration

THE TEXAS LANDSCAPE PROJECT A great Christmas gift book for those who love our great Lone Star environment is "The Texas Landscape Project: Nature and People" by David Todd and Jonathan Ogren (Texas A&M University Press). This atlas of environmental events and conservation efforts is designed to help all of us better understand the natural history of the state. The book chronicles changes over time, detailing protection and restoration efforts.

Of particular interest to advocates of habitat gardens would be Todd and Ogren's reports on native prairies, especially on the gradual loss and recent restoration of the stunning big bluestem, indiangrass, eastern gamagrass and other iconic grasses, forbs and sedges that early explorers and settlers saw in Texas. Grasses not only give life, movement and color to our winter gardens when other plants are dormant, they are essential for the wildlife habitat gardeners want to attract.



No friends to native habitat or native wildlife: Chinese tallow, ligustrum, chinaberries

Another area that should be of great interest to home gardeners is the fascinating story of the century-long effort to protect the Big Thicket of east Texas, sometimes called the American Ark, or the biological crossroads of the country. Intricate color maps and clear narratives follow the area's history of timbering, upstream dams, road and home construction, park creation, and most recently, its struggle with extremely invasive Chinese tallow, ligustrum, chinaberries and other non-natives that are wiping out native habitat so essential to both year-round and migrating wildlife.

Details: www.texaslandscape.org.

PROTECT YOUR PLANTS & ESPECIALLY YOUR TREES!

Dry roots freeze FAR faster than well hydrated ones. Before temperatures drop, get out there and water everything well.

Water trees at the dripline (where rain water falls off the tree canopy). If you can mulch well. Or just rake/blow all your leaves into the gardens. Better yet go get all those already raked-&-bagged leaves off your neighbor's curb and use them. Tell the Lazy Gardener said they're too valuable as mulch to throw away.

* * *

Brenda's column in the free, emailed LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER is based on her 45+ years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener. To sign up: [CLICK HERE](#)

LG&F GARDEN CALENDAR EVENTS submitted in our EXACT format will be copied & added to calendar right away.

Any necessary re-typing/reformatting may take couple of weeks. See calendar for format.

Always check the LG&F Newsletter* Calendar to make sure your submitted event is listed! If not, let me know!

* * *

JOHN'S CORNER

MINERALS - The Elements and What They Do

Part 7



14) Silicon (Si) - Silicon is the second most abundant element in the earth's crust (28% by mass) and most abundant element in soils 43-63%. Silica is found in igneous rocks at 281,500 ppm, in shale at 73,000 ppm, sandstone at 368,000 ppm, limestone at 24,000 ppm, in fresh water at 6.5 ppm, and seawater at 3 ppm. Silicone is found in marine plants at 1,500-20,000 ppm, some marine animals at 70,000 ppm, and land animals 120-6,000 ppm. In our soils, we find silicon at 330,000 ppm in the form of silicon oxide (SiO_2) in silicate minerals from sand to clay.

Silicon, chemically speaking is a very stable element with a primary oxidation state of +4. The element carbon has an oxidation state of -4. When we combine silicon (Si) with carbon (C) we get silicon carbide (SiC) that we call carborundum and it is one of the hardest minerals known (second only to diamond) and used in many industrial applications. Silicon is also similar to carbon in its ability to form complex molecular chains.

When we combine silicone with oxygen in a crystal form, we get the very common mineral called silicone dioxide (SiO₂) which we know as quartz. However, if we combine silicone and oxygen in a non-crystalline form it then occurs as the gemstone, which we know as Opal and is believed to be of biological origins. Silicon is used in timing devices like quartz watches, it is a major ingredient in common glass and when silicon is combined with oxygen, it is used in many lubricants. Silicon is required in producing the semiconducting crystals used in many types of electronics (computers, radios, television) to solar cells. If we combine silicone polymers with boric acid, we get the children's toy called "silly putty". Note: Silicon is not silicone, which is a rubber or plastic like polymer. In rare cases (mining operations), too much silicon dust can result in silicosis caused by breathing very fine particles of silicon dust.

Silicon is the third most abundant trace element in the human body and present in all bodily tissues. The highest levels are in bone, connective tissues, skin, hair, arteries, and nails. Silicon supplementation can increase collagen in growing bones by 100%.

Silicon promotes the absorption and metabolism of calcium and significantly reduces the absorption of aluminum. In areas of the world that have higher silicone levels in their food they also have the lowest prevalence of hip fractures. Ovarian cancer is linked to a broken gene, silicon has been found to protect and keep this gene functioning properly. Silicon gel applied to badly burned skin rapidly increases healing. Silicon deficiencies are linked to brittle hair, brittle finger and toenails, poor skin quality, poor calcium utilization, and arterial disease. It is believed that silicon is an essential trace element in a number of areas of human physiology and metabolism, especially bone and connective tissue.

The best sources of silicon for humans is from plants such as cereal grains as they have higher silicon contents or beer made from barley malt which is also a good source of bioavailable silicon.

Gardening and Landscaping Problems Associated with Silicon (Si)

Silicon is a component of all earthy materials; rock, sand, silt, or clay (e.g. soil). Silicon is more available in alkaline soils. A common component of plants that is absorbed from the soil or growth media as dissolved silicon in the form of (H₄SiO₄) silicic acid. Silicon definitely influences plant growth but all the effects due to silicon are not fully understood.

We now know that silicone is necessary for the growth and development of plants. It helps plants resistance to withstand exposure to toxic chemicals. It increases a plants resistance to diseases especially those caused by pathogenic fungi and it strengthens plants cells and walls which reduces water lost in tissues. Silicon is found in grasses 0.3-1.2%, in leguminous species at .05-0.2%. Some plants have silicon content of over 10% such as sedges, nettles, horsetails, sponges and diatoms. N eedles made of silicon cause nettle stings.

Rice plants accumulate up to 10% silica in their hulls and 4% in the grains and it strengthens the rice stalk. Note: The high levels of silicon in rice hulls make it slow to decompose hence the hulls are often used as a planting media as it does not shrink as quickly as other type media. R esearchers at the University of Florida have found that silicon boosts the disease resistance of rice crops to fungal diseases. However, a lack of phytoavailable silica will cause rice crops to fail.

A lack of silicon in most plants will cause young leaves and fruit to look lumpy or otherwise deformed since silicon is required in the cells skeleton (structural element).

Sources: diatomaceous earth, algae and bacteria, sand, clay, granite or basalt sand and other mineral silicates, chicken skin has high levels of silicon

* * *

WEEKLY GARDENING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

PLEASE READ BEFORE SUBMITTING AN EVENT TO THIS CALENDAR.

Events **NOT** submitted in the **EXACT** written format below may take two weeks or longer to be reformatted/retyped. After that point, if your event does not appear, please email us. Sorry, no children's programs. - Submit to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

**IF WE INSPIRE YOU TO ATTEND ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE TELL SPONSORS YOU HEARD ABOUT IT IN
THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER**

SAT., DEC 17: PECKERWOOD GARDEN OPEN DAY, 10am-2pm tours, 20559 FM 359 Road, Hempstead. \$10. Garden Conservancy event. peckerwoodgarden.org , 979-826-3232; info@peckerwoodgarden.org

MON., DEC. 19: STORYTIME IN THE GARDEN, 10:30 am- 11:30 am, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

MON., DEC. 19: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENER TRAINING REGISTRATION DEADLINE. 9am-4pm Saturday classes starting Jan. 14. \$160. Waller County Extension Office. txmg.org/wallermg; wallermgardener2013@gmail.com; 979-826-7651

MON., JAN. 4: PLANTS FOR SHADY SPACES by TRICIA BRADBURY, 9:30am, United Methodist Church at 16335 El Camino Real. Free. Gardeners by the Bay event. 281-474-5051.

THURS., JAN. 5: SOILS, FERTILIZERS & OTHER ORGANIC LANDSCAPE SOLUTIONS by LOUIS BENNETT, 10am, MUD Building, 805 Hidden Canyon Dr, Katy. Free, Nottingham Country Garden Club event. nottinghamgardenclub.org

THUR, JAN 5: DORMANT PEACH & PLUM GRAFT WOOD by SUE JEFFCO & HERMAN AUER; 9-10am, Research & Demonstration Garden, Carbide Park, 4102 Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free, but pre-register: galvcountrymgs@gmail.com, 281-534-3413, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

SAT, JAN 7: WEDGE GRAFTING by SUE JEFFCO; 9-11am, & PROPAGATION OF PLANTS BY CUTTINGS by BILL CUMMINS, 1-2:30pm, AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener events. Free, but pre-register: galvcountrymgs@gmail.com, 281-534-3413, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

TUES., JAN. 10: #TXPLANTS TWITTER TUESDAY EVENT - NATIVE AND PRAIRIE PLANTS FOR THE HOME GARDENER, 7-8 pm, Twitter.com follow hashtag #TXplants. Free. Native Plant Society of Texas-Houston Chapter npsot.org/wp/houston/2016/12/09/join-us-txplants-twitter-tuesday-native-prairie-plants-home-gardener.

WED., JAN. 11: EXPLORING THE PRIMEVAL FLORA OF NEW CALEDONIA, noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-

Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

THURS., JAN. 12: BACKYARD ROSE HYBRIDIZING by JOHN JONS 7:30pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Houston Rose Society event. houstonrose.org

THURS., JAN. 12: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS FRUIT & CITRUS PREVIEW PROGRAM, 6:30pm-8:30pm, Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd. Rosenberg. fbmg.org; 281-633-7070; FortBendmg@ag.tamu.edu

FRI., JAN. 13: PENNY WISE / POUND FOOLISH: WHEN & WHY TO HIRE A LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL by RITA HODGE, 10am, White Oak Convention Center, 7603 Antoine. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

TUE, JAN 17: GARDENING BY THE SQUARE FOOT by JOHN JONS, 6:30-8:30pm, AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener events. Free, but pre-register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-534-3413, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

TUE., JAN. 17: CRYPTANTHUS by CAROLE RICHTMYER, 7:30pm, West Gray Mutli-Service Center, 1475 W Gray. Free. Bromeliad Society/Houston event. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

THU, JAN 19: FIG TREE PRUNING & PROPAGATION by TERRY CUCLIS, 9-10am, AgriLife GCMG Research & Demonstration Garden, 4102 Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener events. Free, but pre-register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-534-3413, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

MON., JAN 23-FEB. 27: TEXAS GULF COAST GARDENER TIER III: THE ART OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN, 9am-3pm. Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. \$250. Register: 713-274-4160.

SAT. JAN. 28: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FRUIT & NUT TREE SALE, 8 am presentation, 9am-noon sale, AgriLife Extension Office, 9020 Airport Rd, Conroe. 936-539-7824; mcmga.com

SAT, JAN 28: GROWING PEACHES IN GALVESTON COUNTY by HERMAN AUER, 9-11am & KITCHEN GARDENING by MARY DEMENY, 1-3pm, AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener events. Free, but pre-register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-534-3413, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

SAT., JAN. 28: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FRUIT TREE SALE, Bear Creek Garden, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. 281-855-5600

TUE, JAN 31: ANYONE CAN GROW ROSES by JOHN JONS, 6:30-8:30 pm; AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener events. Free, but pre-register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-534-3413, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston

THURS., FEB. 2: ATTRACTING BIRDS AND BUTTERFLIES TO YOUR BACKYARD BY KATHY ADAMS CLARK, 10am, MUD Building, 805 Hidden Canyon Dr, Katy. Free, Nottingham Country Garden Club event. nottinghamgardenclub.org

WED., FEB. 8: MICROGREENS, noon - 2pm, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

FRI., FEB.10: FLORAL DESIGN INSPIRED BY ART by HOUSTON DESIGNING WOMEN, 10am, White Oak Convention Center, 7603 Antoine. Free. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

SAT., FEB 18: GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS SPRING 2017 PLANT SALE, 9 am-1 pm with pre-sale seminar 8-8:50 am, Jack Brooks Park Rodeo Arena, 10 Jack Brooks Rd and Hwy 6, Hitchcock, TX 77563 (Galveston County Fairgrounds)

FEB. 18: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FRUIT TREE SALE, Genoa Friendship Garden, Campbell Hall, Pasadena Fairgrounds. 281-855-5600

MON., FEB. 20: STORYTIME IN THE GARDEN, 10:30-11:30 am, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

MAR. 4: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER TOMATO-PEPPER SALE, Bear Creek Garden, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. 281-855-5600

SAT., SUN., MAR. 4-5: SPRING BRANCH AFRICAN VIOLET CLUB 37TH ANNUAL SHOW & SPRING SALE, Sat. Show 1-5pm, Sale 9am-5pm; Sun. Show & Sale, 10am-3pm; workshop Sat. & Sun. 1pm, Judson Robinson Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Park Dr. Free. 281-748-8417, kjwross@yahoo.com

MAR. 18: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER SPRING PLANT SALE, Genoa Friendship Garden, Campbell Hall, Pasadena Fairgrounds. 281-855-5600

APR. 22: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER SPRING PERENNIAL SALE, Bear Creek Garden, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. 281-855-5600

OCT. 7: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FALL PLANT SALE, Bear Creek Garden, 3033 Bear Creek Dr. 281-855-5600

If we inspire you to attend any of these events, please let them know you heard about it in . . .
THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!

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**THIS NEWSLETTER IS MADE
POSSIBLE BY THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS**



<http://natureswayresources.com/>

ADOPTABLE DOG OF THE MONTH

DIESEL

Diesel was abandoned by his owners when they moved, and he ended up at Montgomery County Animal Shelter.

Diesel is a American Blue Pittbull Mix and is thought to be about 10 years old.

He knows basic commands- is housebroken and crate trained- loves everyone he meets... Loves bones, treats and squeaky toys- even likes a nice jog. He has a good amount of life to live and would love to have somewhere to spend it. If he has siblings- they have to be female.

Diesel loves to play and socialize and is so much fun to have around.

He is fixed and has all of his shots.

If interested in adopting Diesel, please reply to this newsletter and type "Diesel" in the subject line. Diesel is not at the shelter currently. He is in foster care.



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. 50% OFF Pomegranates & Pears at Nature's Way Resources (expires 12/23/16)

Confirm that you like this.

Click the "Like" button.