



Dear Friends,

Here is the sixth issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. This a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith and John Ferguson and Mark Bowen of Nature's Way Resources. We also have a great cast of contributors writers who will chime in regularly. We would love to keep receiving your input on this newsletter . . . comments . . . suggestions . . . questions . . Email your thoughts to: [lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com). Thanks so much for your interest.

Please .

Enjoy!

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH



## AMARYLLIS, PEGGY'S THORNLESS ROSE & VARMINTS IN THE GARDEN

Happy Earth Day on Sunday!

Celebrate by doing something outdoors, something that reminds you what a beautiful world we actually live in.

In that spirit, here's a tip o' the trowel to the gardeners at Woodbridge Ave. and Southdown Dr. in Pearland. Your amaryllis are spectacular!

Mine are too, tho I haven't this many. But the ones I do have immediately bring to mind my wonderful grandmother, Mathilde (Mimi) Gracida.

I'd always give her one of those boxed amaryllis kits for indoor blooms sold at nurseries and plant departments at Christmastime. She'd watch it grow and flower, then hand the bulb back to me to plant in my yard. The dozens of amaryllis bulbs I have blooming now are the same ones that delighted her for all these years.

If you're from "up nawth," know that down here we don't have to take up our amaryllis bulbs after they bloom. In fact, we don't have to do anything to them.

Just don't cut the foliage off after they bloom. The bulb uses that dying foliage to replenish itself for future blooms. Each bulbs stores up enough for two bloom seasons. Then they go dormant until fall when the foliage will perk back up.

They don't want to be watered in the summer (music to a lazy gardener's ears!). So best not to plant them near, say, azaleas or picky roses or other plants that can't take our droughts.

If they stop blooming, it could be they've sunk too low. That neck needs to be out of the ground. Just dig them up and plant so that the soil level hits right where the bulb starts to swell.



Peggy Martin Rose

Every year my Peggy Martin rose gets prettier and prettier. This thornless rose may only be a once-bloomer (in the spring) but, boy, does its display make an incredible show.

Not only that, her story is one close to my heart, as a native of New Orleans. After Katrina, antique rose whiz Dr. Bill Welch became fascinated with a rose belonging to one Peggy Martin, who lived near New Orleans.

Despite the incredible damage her property suffered during the hurricane, this one rose continued to grow and bloom as tho nothing had happened.

She had no idea the name of this rose that had been in her family for generations. But she did know cuttings would root easily.

Bill spearheaded a successful campaign with the help of the Antique Rose Emporium's Mike Shoup, the Garden Club of America and numerous dedicated growers to get the "Peggy Martin" rose into the marketplace where proceeds help restore gardens throughout the South devastated by Katrina and other forces of nature.

For more on the story, including links to purchase sites, log onto:

<http://blog.chron.com/lazygardener/2010/07/must-have-a-peggy-martin-rose/>

Many Houston area nurseries also carry this thornless rose. It is a rambler, sending out long flexible

branches. It needs a strong trellis or fence for support.

\* \* \*

I hate to be blatantly malapert, but it's really hard for me to sympathize with folks who complain about damage from deer and rabbits in their gardens.

I'd give anything to look out my window and see a deer! And we do have rabbits (along with a lot of dogs) so I can tell you dogs aren't (always) an answer.

But, I do understand losing prized plants. I have a flyer "NO DEER PLANTS!" that I'll be glad to email free to anyone who requests a copy at [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).

In the meantime, to save yourself a charge of "mens rea," you can try these remedies I've collected over the years for any kind of varmints, including neighbors' cats and dogs, that are invading your gardens.

Probably the most effective are the swivel head sprinklers that are motion triggered. Google "sprinkler swivel head motion triggered." I know they have them on Amazon and at [www.gardeners.com](http://www.gardeners.com).

*Or, try these in the garden around affected plants: bloodmeal, poultry manure, fencing, rose stem="2"> cuttings with thorns intact, grated soap shavings, human urine, plastic owls or rubber snakes, garlic powder, human-cat-dog hair, kitty litter, dryer fabric softener sheets, baby powder.*

*Repulsing plantings often recommended: habanero peppers, garlic, marigolds, cucumbers, onions.*

*Two that sound strange, but folks swear they work:*

*\* large clear jars filled with water*

*\* pie plates full of water*

*Any other (printable!) suggestions?*

STOP BY AND SAY HI!

\* Friday, April 19: "I LOVE Oleanders!" by Brenda Beust Smith at the big Oleander Luncheon in the Moody Gardens Hotel, kickoff event for the 2013 Oleander Festival, April 20-21 at Moody Gardens Visitor Center. Luncheon reservation (and festival) details at <http://www.oleander.org/festival.html>

"THE LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD" - Specifically for Houston Area gardens - WHAT TO DO EACH MONTH - when to fertilize, prune, plant what where, best plants for sun, shade, butterflies, hummingbirds, etc. Based on Brenda's quirky 40+ year Houston Chronicle Lazy Gardener column. PDF format, print out only the month you need. \$20 total, checks payable to Brenda B. Smith. Mail to: Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD, 14011 Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039-2103.

## Weekly Events & Announcements Calendar:

April 19: Oleander Festival Kick-off luncheon, Silent Auction, Door Prizes; 11:00 am, Viewfinders Terrance, Moody Gardens Hotel. April 20-21 - Festival featuring Plant Societies, Tropical Plant Vendors and Children Activities; 10 am - 4 pm each day. <http://www.oleander.org/festival.html>

April 20: 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Eco-Fest 2013 at Shangri La, 2111 West Park Avenue Orange, TX 77630, 409-670-9113, <http://starkculturalvenues.org/shangrilagardens/events/2013/04/eco-fest-2013-at-shangri-la>

April 20: SFA Gardens to host Spring Plant Sale. NACOGDOCHES, Texas - The SFA Gardens at Stephen F. Austin State University will host its annual Garden Gala Day Spring Plant Sale from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Saturday, April 20, 2013 at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, 2900 Raguet St. in historic Nacogdoches, Texas. A wide variety of hard-to-find, "Texas tough" plants will be available, including Texas natives, heirlooms, tropicals, perennials, shrubs, trees, and exclusive SFA and Greg Grant introductions. Most of the plants are extensively trialed in the gardens before being offered to the public and most are produced by the SFA Gardens staff and volunteers. This popular event benefits the SFA Mast Arboretum, Pineywoods Native Plant Center, Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, Gayla Mize Garden, and educational programs hosted at the gardens. The educational programs at SFA Gardens reach over 15,000 students ages 1 to 100 on a yearly basis. The public is encouraged to arrive early and bring a wagon. For more information, call (936) 468-4404, or visit [www.sfagardens.sfasu.edu](http://www.sfagardens.sfasu.edu) and click on "garden events" for a list of available plants.

April 20: Clinic: Using Groundcovers in the Landscape.

Need an alternative to turfgrass? Looking to fill a void in your garden? Groundcovers offer many benefits in providing texture, color and variety. Discover the many varieties of groundcovers useful in hard to grow areas under trees, on slopes, and in rocky terrain. Use them as design elements, living mulch, traffic barriers or even visual guides in high traffic areas. Learn about tried and true groundcovers that perform well in Texas sun or shade. Join us at 10:15 a.m. for the clinics, Using Groundcovers in the Landscape. <http://www.calloways.com/garden-events>

April 21: 1 - 4 pm. Hibiscus Show & Plant Sale, E. Harris Co. Activity Center  
7340 Spencer Highway, off Kyle Chapman Rd. Pasadena, TX

April 22: 6:30 pm. HUG's Houston Urban Farmers will meet Monday, April 22, at 6:30 p.m. in the Rose Room at the Houston Garden Center, 1500 Hermann Park, Houston. Kassy Rodriguez will talk about Plant it Forward, a program for refugees to make a living growing and selling food in Houston. Free and open to the public. For more information, visit [www.houstonurbangardeners.org](http://www.houstonurbangardeners.org) or call 713-528-1104.

April 24: 7:30 pm. The Origins of Epiphytic Cacti: A Historical Perspective, Dr. Ernst Dorsch, Houston Garden Center, 1500 Hermann Drive, [www.hcsstex.org](http://www.hcsstex.org)

April 24: 6:30 pm. Thomas Adams, Botanist at San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Brazoria County and one of the best speakers on native plants, will speak about many of the native plants on the Official 9 Natives Spreadsheet. For those interested in participating in the 9 Natives Challenge, Thomas' talk will help you choose your 9 natives! Thomas, a gardener himself, has grown many native plants in his own garden from either seeds collected or plants rescued, so he will be giving invaluable tips from personal experience with these plants. Wednesday, April 24, 6:30 p.m. for refreshments; 7 p.m. meeting starts at Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet, Houston. Free and open to the public. For additional information, visit <http://prairiepartner.org/group/hnpat/page/upcoming-meetings/edit>.

April 27-28: BROMELIAD SHOW AND SALE The Bromeliad Society/Houston, Inc. will hold their annual plant show "Bromeliads: Spectacular Beauties" and sale on April 26, 27, and 28 at Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens (22306 Aldine-Westfield Road). Bromeliad growers will be on hand during sale hours to answer questions. SHOW HOURS: Saturday, April 27, 2-4 p.m. Sunday, April 28, 11 am - 3 p.m. SALE HOURS Friday, April 26, Noon - 4 p.m. Saturday, April 27, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday, April 28, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. Free Admission Website: [www.bromeliadsocietyhouston.org](http://www.bromeliadsocietyhouston.org). Charlien Rose (713)-686-9969

April 27 & 28: Saturday-Sunday, April 27 12-4 pm., April 28 1-5 pm. Heritage Gardeners of Friendswood 21st Garden Tour, "Through the Garden Gate", 112 W. Spreading Oaks, Friendswood, TX. \$10, children 10 and under free. (281) 992-4438, [www.heritagegardener.org](http://www.heritagegardener.org)

April 27: Identifying the Perfect Plant for your Space Garden Clinic, 10:15 a.m. at both Cornelius Nursery locations, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2233 S. Voss; <http://www.calloways.com/garden-events> Free.

April 27: 8:30 am - 4:30 pm, Montgomery County Master Gardeners in conjunction with Texas AgriLife Extension Service will be hosting the Aquaponics System Design and Operation Workshop. The workshop features both classroom time and "hands on" construction of a single family Aquaponics system. Your registration fee includes lunch and also enters you into a drawing to win the aquaponics home system. Classroom topics will include: history of Aquaponics, various system designs and terminology, planting and harvest techniques, fish health and water quality, pump selection and flow rates. Location: TomLeRoy Education Center 9020 Airport Road, Conroe, TX 77303, 936-539-7824, [www.mcmga.com](http://www.mcmga.com) Registration (by April 19, 2013).

April 27: 9 am - 3 pm, 31st annual Herb Day - "A Bloomin' Seminar" presented by The South Texas Unit of The Herb Society of America. Registration deadline is April 19th. Event is held Saturday, April 27th at the Houston Civic Garden Center, 1500 Hermann Park Drive. Speakers: Lynn Herbert, "A Garden Book for Houston and the Gulf Coast"; Marian Buchanan, "Edible Flowers"; Jay White, "Herbal Bouquets". Includes box lunch, booklet, gift bag, door prizes, refreshments. Must register in advance for \$45, see website for details: [herbsociety-stu.org](http://herbsociety-stu.org)

April 28: 1 4 pm., Hibiscus Show & Plant Sale, Knights of Columbus Hall, 702 Burney Rd. SugarLand, TX

May 4-5: 2013 Water Garden and Pond Tour sponsored by the Houston Pond Society and Lone

Star Koi Club. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. both days, members open around 20 private water gardens and ponds of all sizes, with owners on hand to answer questions. \$10 for both days; tickets available at any participating garden. Details at sites [www.houstonpondsociety.org](http://www.houstonpondsociety.org) or [www.lonestarkoi.com](http://www.lonestarkoi.com). Advance tickets available at Nelson Water Gardens, Katy.

May 11 & 12: Nursery Open 12-5 pm, Peckerwood Garden Foundation Open Days, Guided garden tours at 1:00 & 3:00 pm \$10.00 per person. [www.peckerwoodgarden.org](http://www.peckerwoodgarden.org), 979-826-3232, 20571 FM 359, Hempstead, TX 77445

May 11, 1 - 4 pm., Hibiscus Show & Plant Sale, Nessler Center, Wings of Heritage Room, 2010 5th Ave. North, Texas City, TX

May 14: 6:30 pm, Green Thumb Lecture, Precinct 2 Harris County Master Gardener Will Isbell will present a program on "Insects in your Garden", Location: The Meeting Room at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX 77586. More info: [jansidk@aol.com](mailto:jansidk@aol.com).

May 15: 10 am, Master Gardener Lecture Series, Diana Foss with Texas Parks and Wildlife speaking on Coyotes and Bobcats in our area, FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, Location: The Meeting Room at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX 77586. More info: [jansidk@aol.com](mailto:jansidk@aol.com).

May 20: 8:30-11:00 am, Open Garden Day. You are invited to tour the working and demonstration gardens maintained by the Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your gardening questions. A program on Dividing Bromeliads will be offered from 9:30 - 10:30 am. FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, CHILDREN WELCOME! Location: Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, TX 77034. More info: [jansidk@aol.com](mailto:jansidk@aol.com).

June 9: American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star Chapter Show and Sale, 1-4 p.m., Bellaire Community Center 7008 S. Rice, Bellaire, TX

Recipe for Success has summer internships available. For more information, visit <http://recipe4success.org/get-involved/internships.html>

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

Need speakers for your group? Brenda's "Lazy Gardener's Speakers List" of area horticultural/environmental experts is available free for the asking. Email your request to: [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).

# MULCH PITFALLS PART TWO

BY JOHN FERGUSON

This week we continue with gardening issues associated with mulch. Previously we talked about the colored and ashen mulches being sold in and around Houston.

Last week I was asked if I could go into more detail as to why and how the barks and the colored or ashen mulches cause so many problems.

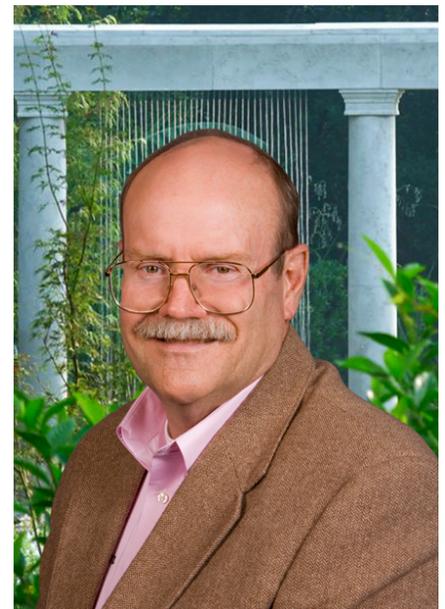
It starts with the soil and what plants require. Researchers have found that healthy fertile productive soils, with low insect and disease pressure all over the world have one thing in common, they have a carbon to nitrogen ratio (C:N) of 30:1 which means that there is 30 parts carbon for every part nitrogen. This ratio is a constant that we frequently see in nature (protozoa, earthworms, birds, humans, etc.).

1) To make the colored or ashen mulches the wood must be very dry hence old pallets, scrap wood, tree trunks, etc. will be used. These type materials contain very little nitrogen and have carbon to nitrogen ratios of 500:1 or more!

The microbes in the soil always eat first (use whatever nutrients that are in the soil to grow and reproduce) before the plants can get their share of nutrients. For microorganisms to break down these type of mulch products with very high C:N ratios, they must use up all the available nitrogen in the soil leaving the plants very nitrogen deficient and stressed. This condition causes the plants to become much more susceptible to insects and diseases.

2) Barks whether Pine or Hardwood all have a C:N ratio of 500:1 to over 700:1. A question I love to ask when I am teaching is "Why does bark not rot on the tree?"

The obvious answer is that barks contain chemicals to kill microbes. In nature when a tree dies and falls over there is only a small amount of bark that is scattered over a large area thus it does not cause any problems. We have been taught to apply bark 3-4 inches deep around plants. This scenario does not occur in nature. As a result several things happen; first a lot of the microbes that prevent soil diseases are killed off by the chemicals in the bark (turpentine's, waxes, phenolics, tannins, etc.) and secondly the high C:N ratio causes plants to become stressed as in the first case with the colored and ashen mulches.



A question I often hear is, "How did this practice of using bark mulches get started?" It started 40 years ago or so when we had millions of cubic yards of bark that had accumulated for years in East Texas as a result of the lumber and paper industry. These huge piles of bark had been sitting there for years essentially composting. As a result the toxic chemicals had been broken down and the C:N ratio had dropped to less than 100:1 as the material decomposed over the many years which resulted in a useful product. This stockpile of decomposed bark was used up many years ago hence all we have now is fresh bark. This is why some companies add boiler ash to chemically burn the bark dark so it resembles the composted bark of years ago so they can deceive customers into buying it.

Note: For comparison, good mature compost will have a carbon to nitrogen ratio of about 20-25:1 that plants love and a properly composted Native Mulch will only have a C:N ratio of 60-90:1. Hence they do not rob the soil of available nitrogen and have trillions of beneficial microbes in them.

An excellent source of information for homeowners and gardeners to learn more about the importance of soil biology in gardening is:

Teaming with Microbes, A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web (Revised Edition), by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis, Timber Press, 2006, ISBN-10: 1604691131; ISBN-13: 978-1604691139 Highly Recommended

## What to do in the Garden this Month.

By Brenda Beust Smith

### The Lazy Gardener

#### APRIL

This month, you really should . . .

- \* Move orchids outside in shady spots. Use in baskets, or hang from fences, limbs or walls.
- \* If necessary, prune spring-blooming shrubs, such as azaleas, quince, wisteria, forsythia and climbing roses after flowers fade. Don't plant wisteria near trees!
- \* Keep grafted roses well watered, but make sure none of your water runs off into the sewers. (Fertilizers & other lawn chemicals are damaging our bayous & Galveston Bay).
- \* Feed all container plants. Feed hibiscus with hibiscus food or a low phosphorus fertilizer.
- \* Plant caladiums in slightly acidic soil with good drainage.

- \* Plant new shrubs before it gets any hotter and keep newly set-out plants well watered.
  - \* Cut flowers to extend blooming season.
  - \* Pinch tips from coleus, copper plants to make them bushier.
- If the spirit moves . . .

- \* Fertilize azaleas, magnolias, hydrangeas, irises with azalea food.
- \* Plant Easter lily bulbs in the garden after they finish blooming inside.

- \* Consider ornamental grasses in among your flowers. These add eye-interest by providing varied leaf textures and shapes. Nurseries carry many new varieties now.

- \* Water, mow often to make St. Augustine fill in dead areas more quickly.

- \* Plant bush beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, eggplants (plants), peas, peppers, pumpkins, squash, watermelon. Put in large, well-established tomatoes so they bear fruit quickly.

- \* Seed bare sunny areas with fast growers such as cosmos, tithonia and other sunflowers.
- \* In the water garden, fertilize hardy lilies after they start to grow. If they aren't blooming as well as they used to, they may need dividing and repotting.

If you're really feeling energetic . . .

- \* Start an herb garden with basil, chamomile, mints, thyme, sage. Plant basil and chives around plants susceptible to whitefly. Plant squash on small hills to discourage problems.

- \* For larger caladium leaves, remove the largest "eye" or bud.

- \* Give tomatoes a light feeding of nitrogen when fruits are golf-ball size.

- \* Mulch tomatoes, peppers, eggplants. Newspaper under mulch slows weeds.

- \* Try shredded sandpaper, crushed egg shells and/or seaweed at base of plants to discourage snails/slugs. (Better yet, get rid of plants eaten by snails/slugs.)

- \* Check with County Extension Agents about pecan grafting workshops this month.

Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- \* Don't panic over silky white webs on tree trunks. Bark lice - good bugs at work!
- \* Don't treat for problems before you see actual damage. (See Insect Removal, Page 29).
- \* Don't seed bluebonnets or most other wildflowers now. Put in plants. Plant seeds in fall.
- \* Don't remove spent foliage from amaryllis, daffodils, irises, lilies. Let it die naturally.
- \* Don't overfertilize. Leaf spots, dark areas on older plants may result.
- \* Don't overwater. Leaf drop can result. (Also is a sign of underwatering!)
- \* Don't plant larkspur, hollyhocks, stocks, delphiniums or snapdragons now. It's too hot.



The monthly gardening activities information above was excerpted from "The LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE." See below to find out how to get the complete guide:

"THE LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD" - Specifically for Houston Area gardens - WHAT TO DO EACH MONTH - when to fertilize, prune, plant what where, best plants for sun, shade, butterflies, hummingbirds, etc. Based on Brenda's quirky 40+ year Houston Chronicle Lazy Gardener column. PDF format, print out only the month you need. \$20 total, checks payable to Brenda B. Smith. Mail to: Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD, 14011 Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039-2103.



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