



Dear Friends,

This is the 12th issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. This a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith, John Ferguson and Mark Bowen (both John and Mark are with Nature's Way Resources). We also have a great cast of contributing 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!

TO PRUNE OR NOT TO PRUNE, THAT IS THE QUESTION . . .

BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH



**Voila! Shrub becomes a tree, l to r, lantana, oleander, hummingbird bush**

First let me say that as far as I'm concerned, pruning's mostly a big moneymaker here. Or pointless busywork.

You pay someone to prune because they tell you such and such a plant HAS to be pruned at such & such a time. Or you read it in a book.

Bull.

With the exception of hybrid tea roses (which really should be), there is no plant we grow that HAS to be pruned to perform.

Pruning creates an open wound. By the time you can slap on pruning paint (which most experts say is useless; Elmer's Glue works just as well), the wound is fully infected with whatever's floating in the air that's potentially going to harm it.

You can't slap on protection fast enough to stop these invaders who are everywhere cheyving for a new victim.

I'm not saying don't ever prune.

I'm just saying, don't prune (or pay someone to prune) just because they say it's time to.

Our hardy flowering plants will flower, fruiting plants will bear fruit, trees will grow, groundcovers will cover, vines will entwine - whether you prune them or not.

One day a lady called to ask when should she prune her climbing roses. Why? I asked. Climbing roses usually don't need pruning.

"Because they're pulling down my house eaves," she replied.

In that case, of course, the answer was: YESTERDAY!

If a plant's pulling down the house eaves, that's a good reason to prune. If its grabbing you as you pass by on the mower, that's a good reason.

If a shrub's gotten too big, but you don't want to get rid of it, prune it back. Prune the top to make it shorter and wider; from sides to make it taller and skinnier.

I'm trying to turn my American beautyberry into a tree. It hits me when I mow.



And, as with the pictures at the top of this column, this opens up the area underneath for more plantings - which is part of my plan. If you do it for this reason, it's called "underpruning."

But, as I said earlier, it's a lot of work. Right now the beautyberry is winning.

\* \* \*

PLEASE NOTE! All this pruning talk about cutting off the top of a plant applies ONLY to shrubs. Never prune across the top of a tree. You'll only weaken it and cause problems down the line. Only excuse for this: powerlines.

\* \* \*

Fruit tree growers prune to get more fruit. It does help. That's a good reason. They don't, however, ever prune the tops of trees!

But most of us get more fruit than we can possibly eat anyway. Is it worth creating an open wound to get even more?

It's your call. It's not necessary.

Pruning triggers new growth. Remaining stalks will send out new leaf shoots that will become new stems. If you want a plant to be thicker, spread more or alter shape, prune the tips off.

Or, you can be really wild and crazy and create a tree out of that shrub as pictured at the top of this column.

This is a fun activity but, be forewarned, not a lazy gardener one. Gotta keep after it.

With most shrubs (exception oleander. See below), select 3-5 good strong stalks. You can try weaving them together to create a single trunk effect. But selecting just one stalk is risky. It might die.

Remove all growth off selected stalks one half way down. As the plant grows upward (it will when you do this), keep removing more lower vertical growth until the bottom of the canopy reaches the height you desire.

As you do this, the "trunk" stalks will become thicker and stronger. But it's a good idea to stake them at first in the direction(s) you want them to grow.

Keep cutting off the lower stalk sprouts for a while. Eventually the bark hardens and these decrease.

Oleanders are so tough, once a rootball gets started producing stalks from the ground, it's real hard to stop them.

Better to pick one good hardy stalk with healthy tip growth.

These root so easily, cut off that stalk, strip off all the leaves on the bottom half and plant so that multiple leaf nodes (where the leafs grew) are below ground. Roots will sprout from those nodes. Use a root stimulator.

Either plant the emerging "tree" where you want it to be. Or pot until it starts growing well and then transplant. Or, keep in the pot. But pick a big pot!

These plants (generally referred to as "standards") will be more tender than their multi-branched cousins. Protect them in winter for a while. A heavy mulch should do the trick and even if they die back, hardy shrubs should return in spring.

MORE ON PRUNING . . .

If you do need to prune, have a good reason (other than someone else's word), it's never a good idea to prune more than 1/3 of a shrub off at any one time. Wait until you see good strong new growth, then you can cut off another 1/3.



This works well with most shrubs altho super-hardy ones like hibiscus and duranta (above) can take a harder pruning and still will probably come back.

As a general rule, we prune (only if necessary!) shrubs that bloom in the spring after they bloom (azaleas, camellias, etc.) Prune in early spring and you'll cut off all the flowers.

Plants that bloom in summer (hummingbird bush, lantana) are pruned in early spring, so they'll put on the new growth that produces the flowers.

If, say, you have to move a shrub, no matter when (altho winter's best, given our summer heat and drought), it's a good idea to prune it back about 1/3.

Ideally a plant's root system equals or exceeds its top growth for the healthiest situation. When you move a plant, part of the root system will be destroyed. It's inevitable.

So cutting off 1/3 of the topgrowth helps the plant focus more energy on replacing those lost roots, rather than having a too-small root system trying to support too much topgrowth and adjust to a new environment at the same time.

If you're going to move an established plant right now, do it a favor. Dig the hole, then fill it with water. Let all that soak in. Fill it again, let that soak in. Fill it a third time and, when it all soaks in, set the plant in.

This way, you will encourage the roots to grow downward which will be a huge help to the plant come our summer heat. Always mulch well after planting.

Good luck!

"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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For correspondence that is specific to Brenda, feel free to email her directly at [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).

## WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

June 1: 10 am, The Arbor Gate. Attend a Field Trial without the Field; Saturday, June 1, 2013  
Hear about & see the latest breeding of ever-popular caladiums. We'll have the latest introductions from the past 5 years to see, as well as the newest trial varieties to evaluate & vote on. Let your voice be heard - here's a chance to let the breeder know what you, the public, wants to see come to market. All your votes & comments will be compiled & added to the trial results for 2013, out of which 6-8 new varieties will be chosen. This is part of a formal field trial, that usually only large growers & university researchers get to attend - so come on out & give us your opinion! For more information, visit [www.arborgate.com](http://www.arborgate.com) .

June 1: 10:15 a.m. Designing your outdoor spaces with naturally inspired elements.  
Learn key tips to boost the look of your Texas landscape. Sometimes we all need a little help getting started with a project. Join us as we walk through the basics of landscaping. From soil preparation, to a simple design, to selecting plants... we'll help you get started. We promise!  
Join us at 10:15 a.m. for the clinic, Landscape Design 101. This 10:15 a.m. clinic takes place both Cornelius Nursery locations. Learn more at <http://www.calloways.com/clinics>

June 3: Open Garden Day The Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 will be hosting Open Garden Days twice monthly during June, July and August on 1st & 3rd Mondays. Hours are from 8:30 am - 11:00 am. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your gardening questions and will present educational programs from 9:30 am - 10:30 am for children & adults. Programs for June 3: For Children - "Plant Identification Game & For Adults - "Why is Plant Identification Necessary." Where: Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, TX 77034. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>

June 4: 7 p.m. The Butterfly Enthusiasts of Southeast Texas (BEST-NABA) Meeting on Tuesday, June 4 at 7PM at The Museum of Natural Science in the Cockrell Butterfly Center. Mark Bowen will be our speaker at our June 4th meeting. His talk will be about managing your natural habitat garden organically. He will explore some state of the art organically techniques and trouble shooting tips for managing and enhancing your natural habitat in a manner that is butterfly/wildlife friendly. He is the author of the books Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas and Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast. Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every other month starting in February at The Houston Museum of Natural Science in the lower floor of the Cockrell Butterfly Center at 7:00PM. For more information

go to <http://www.naba.org/chapters/nababest/>

June 8: 10 am. Tomato Contest. Judges will choose winners in the categories of largest fruit and best tasting fruit. Don't miss out on the fun! For entry and category information, please go to [www.arborgate.com](http://www.arborgate.com) and click on Class Schedule. FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, CHILDREN WELCOME!

June 8: 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. The Plumeria Society of America will hold two sales this year (June 8 & July 20). There will be a Gorgeous Bloom display of the flowers available, an 'Ask the Experts' table plus door prizes throughout the day. Arrive early for best selection. For more information visit [www.theplumeriasociety.org](http://www.theplumeriasociety.org) or Like us on Facebook. Bay Area Community Center, 5002 NASA Rd 1 Seabrook, TX (Clear Lake area)

June 8: 10:15 a.m. Learn the naturally inspired colors of the Summer garden!  
Spring gardening in Texas is a joy ... then summer arrives. Some folks might shut the door and crank up the A/C but not true Texas gardeners! With the right information and the right plants, your landscape becomes a canvas for a Summer show of natural color. Let us provide suggestions for plants that thrive in our Texas heat. Learn the best site selections and important care tips. Join us at 10:15 a.m. for the clinic, Choosing Summer Plant Options.  
This 10:15 a.m. clinic takes place both Cornelius Nursery locations. Learn more at <http://www.calloways.com/clinics>.

June 9: 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. Introduction to Beekeeping. Lecture by John Berry at Wabash Antiques & Feed Store, <http://wabashfeed.com/eventcalendar.html>  
Honeybees are an integral part of our food production system. You can enjoy the benefits of their pollination, and honey more easily than you might think. Join us for a two-hour class meant to help you get started keeping bees. Topics covered included: honeybee biology and behavior, beekeeping history, and beekeeping equipment, including beehive parts and their functions.  
There will be plenty of question and answer time included at the end of the class.

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

June 12: Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens. Lunch Bunch. Wed., June 12, noon - 2 pm, Spring Creek and Harris County Precinct 4 Greenway Projects: With just a few miles of connecting trails, the Spring Creek Greenway and adjoining Cypress Creek Greenway have the potential to connect over 300 miles of existing hard surface and equestrian trails, as well as many Precinct 4 parks and natural spaces from Humble to Tomball. Join Mike Howlett, greenway project manager, for an overview of the largest forested urban corridor in the United States, and discover the multitude of flora, fauna, and recreational opportunities that abound here. Anyone seeking additional information or requiring special assistance to participate in any program should contact Mercer at 281-443-8731 or online at [www.hcp4.net/mercer](http://www.hcp4.net/mercer).

June 15: 10:15 a.m. Cut Flower Gardening Clinic at both Cornelius Nursery locations, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2233 S. Voss; <http://www.calloways.com/clinics>

June 17. Open Garden Day. The Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 will be hosting Open Garden Days twice monthly during June, July and August on 1st & 3rd Mondays. Hours are from 8:30 am - 11:00 am. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your gardening questions and will present educational programs from 9:30 am - 10:30 am for children & adults. Programs on June 17: For Children - "Butterflies" & For Adults - "Irrigation for your Home Gardens." Where: Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, TX 77034. FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, CHILDREN WELCOME! <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>

June 19, 10 am. Master Gardener Lecture Series. Suzy Fischer will be speaking on "Edible Landscape". She is a founding and current board member of Urban Harvest. Her mission is to promote healthy communities and sound nutrition by educating the public. FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. Where: The Meeting Room

at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX 77586. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu>

June 25: 4 - 7 p.m., OHBA Summer Plant Series. Location: United Way, 50 Waugh Dr Houston, TX 77007. Speaker 1: Chris Wiesinger, President and Owner of The Southern Bulb Co. Topic: The Bulb Hunter: A Photographic Journey. Chris is one of the foremost experts on bulbs. Through a beautiful photographic journey Chris will describe his efforts to find rare bulbs and how best to use them in your landscapes to create magnificent beauty. Beautiful bulb-perennial combinations will be presented as well as best planting techniques. Speaker 2: Mike Alexander, Danny Yarbrough & Casey Sherwood of New Nurseries. Topic: New & Underutilized Plant Varieties for Houston. Since our weather varies so drastically from season to season and year to year, we need to find plants that can handle our extreme conditions. All parts of the landscape will be covered from new plant varieties on the scene, to natives, seasonal color, perennials, shrubs, ground covers, trees, edibles, and accent plants. Register today at: <http://summerplantseries.eventbrite.com/> .

July 12: 11a.m. Brazoria County Master Gardeners, Texas AgriLife Extension Office, 21017 County Road 171, Angleton, speaker: John Ferguson, topic: composting (back yard and small scale), for more information contact Dana Morisse-Arnold (979) 864-7713.

July 17, 10 a.m. Harris County Master Gardeners, Pct. 2 at Clear Lake Park, speaker: John Ferguson, topic: health and the environment, for more information contact Edie LeBourgeois at (281) 998-7660.

July 20th: 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. The Plumeria Society of America will hold its second sale in July. There will be a Gorgeous Bloom display of the flowers available, an 'Ask the Experts' table plus door prizes throughout the day. Arrive early for best selection. For more information [www.theplumeriasociety.org](http://www.theplumeriasociety.org) or Like us on Facebook. Location: Fort Bend County Fairgrounds 3350 Hwy 36S--Rosenberg, TX.

July 27: 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. Annual Summer Color Conference and Plant Sale.

Splash into summer with this one-day immersion into perfect solutions for creating a glorious garden that thrives in Houston's summer heat! Gardening experts will share their knowledge of both the tried-and-true and the unusual plants that can give your garden splashes of color during our hot and humid summers. Participants will have exclusive first entrance to a fabulous plant sale with unique and hard-to-find species. The fee is \$70 for Mercer Society members and \$80 for non-members. Reservations required. Call 281.443.8731 or email [msociety@hcp4.net](mailto:msociety@hcp4.net) for more information. Speakers this year will be: Ceil Dow, avid enthusiast and ginger expert will speak on the gingers she loves, Chuck Bybee from JJJ Greenhouses (a wholesale nursery) will present Bedding Plants and Annuals that are good for Houston summers and Norm Arnold of Glorious Gardens will present Landscape Designs that bring out color.

Visit <http://themerchersociety.org/events-programs-2/summer-color-symposium/> for more information.

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

Sharing Your Love of Orchids with Kids.

Sandy Stubbings, Education Committee, American Orchid Society.

What can the American Orchid Society do to interest the youth of today in orchids? That is the question that has been consistently addressed by the Education Committee of the AOS. For any orchid lovers who are involved in Girl Scouting, we have developed an Interest Project and iron-on Patch. The Interest Project is written out and ready to administer. Since we are just beginning to explore possibilities, we are eager to work with Scout personnel to modify and/or develop the requirements for issuing the patch or to have your girls work on the Interest Project as formulated, earn the patch and evaluate it. Both the project and/or patch are available for your use (at the cost of postage) by contacting Sandy at [sstubbings@comcast.net](mailto:sstubbings@comcast.net).

Several leaders who have contacted us have had very good project ideas for girls to earn the patch. Many requirements of the American Orchid Society Interest project can be fulfilled at an orchid show. One excellent idea is to have Girl Scouts help with local shows to earn patches and many of the requirements of the ready -

to - use project can be met in this way.

If Girl Scouts are interested in assisting other children, there are several available activities they can put together and use at an orchid show. The activities can be made into a "Kid's Corner" and the Girl Scouts can put it all together and supervise it on a rotating schedule during the show. The activities have been successfully used and tested at several Houston Orchid Society and SWROGA Shows. Again, please contact Sandy Stubbings at [sstubbings@comcast.net](mailto:ssubbings@comcast.net) for further information.

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 CORNER

BY JOHN FERGUSON

### NATIVE MULCHES



This week we are going to continue to look at the best type of mulch called "Native Mulch".

**Native Mulch (fresh ground)** - This mulch comes directly out of the grinder. It does not have any processing or screening on it. It tends to be inexpensive and useful in special applications. As in all native mulches it is a mix of whatever species came into the mulch/composting recycling facility.

**Double Ground Native** - Often mulch companies will re-grind the native mulch to a finer texture which is commonly called "double ground". This may be available as "fresh ground" or aged. As the double ground native mulch is allowed to sit in large piles it begins to compost. Over the next few weeks it gradually becomes darker and after a few weeks it is a medium brown color with a nice fibrous texture that sets up well and resists washing out.

Due to the drought of 2011 and 2012 we have received very large amounts of dead tree material from the cleanup. As a result we have added double ground mulches both fresh and aged to our product line this year. I personally like to test and use all the products we produce or sell, so I have first hand information on how they perform. So in January I used both the fresh ground and the aged double ground native on my own yard and this is what I have learned. Double ground is not composted hence it has a higher carbon to nitrogen ratio than our premium composted native mulch. To ensure there was not a nitrogen tie-up issue I applied MicroLife 6-2-4 organic fertilizer first to the beds before putting the mulch down. I then applied 2-3" of mulch depending on the plant species and the amount of mulch left over from the previous year. Note: I did a small area with our composted native mulch side by side so I would have a comparison (see picture below).

A few months have passed and this is what I have learned. Pros: It does a very good job of keeping the soil cool and moist, it has decomposed rapidly into humus rich layer, the earthworms have multiplied and grown very fat in the mulch layer, all plants are doing great and growing like weeds (I am having to do a lot of pruning to keep them in check). Cons: Since the mulch is not composted (no heat to kill the weed seeds) I have had numerous trees sprout in the mulch (many oaks species, pecans, etc.) that I have had to pull out and there have been a few weeds also that would not be in the composted mulch. I have also had many species of beautiful mushrooms (fruiting spores of beneficial fungus) of various sizes shapes and colors that appeared after several rains this spring helping the mulch to break down and release the nutrients it contains.

The picture below shows the color difference between the aged double ground native mulch and the composted native mulch in an area that I will be reworking this summer.



If one is not in a hurry, fresh ground native mulch is one of the best ways to naturally break up heavy clay soils and suppress weeds. To suppress weeds it is often applied 4-6 inches thick and sometimes rolled or watered down (weight). The mulch smothers the existing plants essentially killing them. This mulch becomes very active biologically because the microbes are working, and they will use the nitrogen stored in the dead and dying weeds to help break down the mulch. The microbes will also break apart clay particles creating a looser soil.

Different types of native mulch are also used for erosion control, soil improvement, garden paths, land reclamation, filtration of storm water runoff, and any other application where large volumes are required and cost is an issue.

## Tip Of Week:

Many years ago I decided to get rid of all the grass in my back yard and turn it into landscaped areas. To save labor and to improve the heavy black gumbo clay soil I used fresh ground native mulch. First, I took newspapers and opened them up. I placed a 5-6 page thick layer of newspapers on top of the grass (mixed St. Augustine and Bermuda). Next I over lapped the papers by one third and then placed a 5-6" thick layer of fresh ground native mulch on top of the newspapers as I moved along (this kept the newspapers from blowing away). I repeated the process until all the grass was covered. I then watered the mulch to make it heavy so it

would press the paper tightly onto the grass and smother it. In a few months over 99% of the grass was dead and decomposed and the first few inches of the clay had been broken down into a rich soil.

## GOT GARDENING QUESTIONS?

Be sure to check out our gardening blog at [www.lazygardenerandfriends.com](http://www.lazygardenerandfriends.com) to get your gardening questions answered and to interact with other gardeners.



<http://natureswayresources.com/>



<http://wabashfeed.com/>



<http://www.arbortgate.com/>

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST!



**Save 20%: Redeem this coupon for a big discount on Nature's Way Resources Native Aged Double Ground Mulch( <http://natureswayresources.com/products.htm> ). Please note: this offer is for bulk material (by the cubic yard) purchases by retail customers only at Nature's Way Resources, located at 101 Sherbrook Circle, Conroe TX.**

**Offer Expires: 7/1/13**



Try it FREE today.