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LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Gardening Newsletter

Jun 28, 2019

Dear Friends,

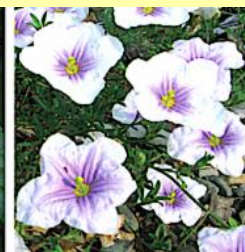
Here is the 298th issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. We really appreciate all of our readers hanging in there with us, sharing stories and inspiring us in so many ways.

Thanks so much!

This newsletter is a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith & John Ferguson. (John is 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.

Please sign yourself up to receive this newsletter by clicking this link: ["Join Our Mailing List"](#). We will never sell or share our mailing list to protect the privacy of our subscribers.

Enjoy!



HIGH RISE HORTICULTURAL

HEADACHES . . . TWO TALES

BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH

In decades of writing gardening columns, I've only talked with two folks who really achieved success with balcony plantings on a tiny high rise open "porch." One was the late Joan Murray, a delightful woman who treasured Lois L. Kaufman's famous quote: "***Plant a seed of friendship; reap a bouquet of happiness .***" The other is one of my longtime hibiscus gurus, Pat Merritt. First: Joan Murray:

Joan's son Steve emailed me several years ago asking for advice for his mother who had moved to a 6th floor apartment in The Woodlands. A Master Gardener, Joan was determined to "keep growing." Her balcony had a strong southern/western exposure.



My advice was based on common sense, since my search for long term, successful balcony gardens was "*nil & none* ." I knew the main reason why these gardens fail. Sun's a major challenge but wind is the real killer.

Something to provide shade to protect soil moisture or at least help shield the plant while young is almost essential. Joan and Steve used solar/wind fabric along the handrail, anchored tightly with zip-ties to stop flapping. (See photo above left.) Not a total fix, Steve recalls, but certainly a help.

Self-watering pots are helpful as is first starting with sun-/drought-loving plants such as bougainvillea, succulents, cacti, etc. Tip: try only one or two of a variety of plants. See which you like and, more importantly, which like you.

When it comes to vegetables, Joan — helped by her screen — harvested tomatoes, cucumbers, and bell peppers. Cherry tomatoes did best, especially in planter boxes with water-trough base and a side (indirect) watering tube. Spider mites were a major problem with larger tomatoes.



Joan's successful decoratives included Asian jasmine which got a little "too happy" in its shady corner. It needed trimming which Joan didn't mind since she felt it helped "cool" the area, benefitting other plants.

Heavy, glazed clay planter pots became too hot to touch, probably baking soil inside. Foam faux pots worked better. Also helpful was keeping plants in black nursery pots slipped inside larger decorative planter pots. Not only did this provide some air circulation inside the decorative pot, it made the plant easier to move or replaced. Crowding pots close together really cuts down on needed air circulation. Space them if you can or use a variety of sizes in groupings.

If you don't have self-watering pots, daily watering is essential. Steve recalls Joan's greatest successes were directly related to how cool they could keep the pots. The jasmine had the coolest soil due to location. Even diligent watering didn't help things in clay pots.

Joan expected veggies to be the most vulnerable, but overall they did pretty well in small plastic planters with water basins. Medium size plants, in plastic pots or the large foam planters, did ok. Plants in soils with a heavier portion of clay, rather than the lighter vermiculite, also fared better.

Summer always took some toll. Plants that started out thriving -- like russellia, Mexican cacti, bougainvillea and Meyer lemon -- did suffer in June-July. But all started recovering in August with steady watering. Gayfeather and vinca seemed more summer-hardy, but eventually heat took its toll. Sweet potato vine was a delightful success.

Below, l to r, bougainvillea, gayfeather, russellia, sweet potato vine and vinca



* * *

HIGH-RISE HIBISCUS. After internationally-recognized hibiscus expert Pat Merritt lost her husband Roz, she decided to give up the hundreds of hibiscus plants they had collected over the years at their Southwest Houston suburban home.

Pat moved to a high rise apartment with a balcony and -- can you imagine? -- had to decide of that huge collection to take with her.

When Pat speaks on hibiscus, I listen. For decades, Roz and Pat have been stalwarts of the international hibiscus scene, especially the American Hibiscus Society and our local AHS/Lone Star Chapter. AHS President was one of many offices Roz held, at the same time as he was hybridizing new delights for our gardens. Pat oversaw the revision of the [*American Hibiscus Society's Tropical Hibiscus Handbook*](#) as Image Editor, with the late Barry Schlueter handling the text.



Two magnificent hibiscus hybrids were named in their honor: *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* 'Roz Merritt' (left above) & *H. rosa-sinensis* 'Patricia Merritt' (center), both by renowned Houston area hybridizer Barry Schlueter.

Pat now has a deep, narrow, east-facing balcony. Naturally her first two choices were her and Roz's namesakes above. Then, just for great color, she added a garden variety, 'Sunny Wind,' below left, a yellow with a red center that blooms constantly.

Pat wanted "texture," so picked 'Snow Queen' for its green and white variegated foliage. But even experts are still learning, and sometimes it takes time to see if a plant is the. Pat admits, *"I soon discovered that I didn't have enough sun to keep the foliage from turning all green so this one may be donated."*

Pat loves white hibiscus, so brought over 'Dainty White,' an ever-blooming tall, skinny variety that doesn't take up much room.



Above l to r, 'Sunny Wind,' 'Snow Queen,' 'Dainty White' and 'Red Wave'

Pat's sixth hibiscus is 'Red Wave,' another textured one that has red in its leaves. It, too, may be donated for the same reason as 'Snow Queen' . . . not

enough sun to keep it variegated.

Pat says she will probably replace 'Snow Queen' with a Plumeria named 'Grapette' (right) that is a clone of one Roz purchased from Bear Creek Farms about 30 years ago.



The best place to learn about growing hibiscus in the Greater Houston area? [The American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star Chapter.](#)

FAVOR? IF YOU HAVE A BALCONY GARDEN with successful longtime plantings, do share! What are you growing, what advice can you share and, even better, send pictures! Email me at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

* * *

TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST/COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER is accepting registration for its Fall 2019 Class, Aug. 20-late Oct. 12 classes split between Tuesday evenings and Saturdays, with makeup classes available. \$50. Contact Margo "Mac" McDowell at 281-633-7033, mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu or txmn.org/coastal . Sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

* * *

LOOKING FOR CLUB PROGRAMS? The latest "LAZY GARDENER SPEAKER LIST" is free for the asking.
lazygardener@sbcglobal.net

Brenda's column in the LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener.

A PDF OF THIS NEWSLETTER IS POSTED AT
<https://www.natureswayresources.com/new.html>
We hope you will repost & share it with anyone and everyone!



**NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF
SOIL AND PLANTS # 90**

Remember the old saying by Hippocrates, “Let food be thy medicine”? A new study from the University of East Anglia in cooperation with Harvard University reinforces this. They found that eating a cup a day of blueberries improved heart health and reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease by 15%. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2019) . Many varieties of blueberries grow well in the Houston area and there are several pick your own blueberry farms in the region. A mature rabbit-eye blueberry plant can produce as much as 15 pounds of berries. Many pollinators love the flowers and many species of birds relish the ripe berries. When blueberries are grown next to woodlands the plants get better pollination and produce more fruits (USDA). The USDA also found that growing native grasses next to blueberry plants corrected signs of iron (Fe) deficiency.

The journal *Environmental International* (2019) had a recent article that demonstrated that restoring environments to a wide range of plant species promoted good bacteria over bad bacteria. They found a direct connection between a healthy ecosystem and human health. In particular they found it increased bacteria that boost our immune systems. This is a good reason to increase the diversity of plants in our landscape. The greater the diversity of grasses, flowers, herbs, shrubs and trees the more health benefits one’s garden provides from microbes and earthworms, to butterflies and birds.

A problem that gardeners often face in Houston is the disease *Phytophthora*. Research at Cornell University has found that it can be controlled using certain plants like *Brassicaceae* family as cover crops. These include mustards, cabbages, broccoli, etc. as they have sulfur compounds in them called “glucosinolates” which give some members of this family their spicy taste. When these plants are turned under, they act as a natural fungicide for this disease. They also have deep fast-growing taproots that helps break up hardpan and loosen the soil. Additionally, they return a lot of nitrogen to the soil and return 3.5 time more carbon than other species. A bonus is that many pollinators love to feed on the pollen and nectar of the flowers.

Researchers at the University of Sheffield’s physics lab have found that photosynthetic bacteria that directly use sunlight for energy, use a mechanism of nature called quantum entanglement to communicate with each other. Similar work at the University of Oxford stated it would explain the remarkable speed of enzyme-catalyzed reactions we find in nature.

The June issue of Science News had a summary of a research paper published in the journal Functional Ecology. They discovered that some species of plants can grow directly from rock (no soil required). Species of plants that have this ability to secrete malic and citric acid from their root tips that dissolve nutrients (elements) directly from the minerals composing the rock.

A study published in the journal Environmental Sciences Europe (2019) has found another problem caused by use of the herbicide glyphosate (think Round-Up). One of the breakdown products of glyphosate is a toxic chemical called AMPA (α -amino-3-hydroxy-5-methyl-4-isoxazolepropionic acid) where it is slow to degrade further. In the soil it harms earthworms preventing them from growing properly and performing their normal ecosystem services from aerating soil to eating weed seeds. It also causes reproductive damage in earthworms. Bacteria and fungi are also sensitive to this chemical preventing them from cycling nutrients and storing carbon in the soil. This chemical has also been found to cause changes in the reproductive cycle, metabolism, growth and behavior of fish, insects and mollusks. We now have companies marketing meatless burgers made from genetically engineered soy that requires very high levels of the cancer-causing chemical glyphosate.

Have You Tried . . . **STARRY EYES NIEREMBERGIA**

(*Nierembergia gracilis* 'Starry Eyes')

This adorable perennial also known as cupflower blooms summer through fall. Prolific flowers cover 2' x 2' upright mounds. Ideal for low plantings, edging, pots or hanging baskets. Part to full sun. Tolerates high heat & humidity. Does well in containers.

Unlike some other nierembergias, 'Starry Eyes' is root-hardy in winter here.



*Starry Eyes Nierembergia is carried by Nature's Way Resources. ([Map](#))
Or contact our sponsor, Montgomery Pines Nursery in Willis, our other
sponsors below or your neighborhood nurseryman for possible sources.*

* * *

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER

CALENDAR EVENTS

GARDEN/PLANT EVENTS ONLY

*Events are in Houston unless otherwise noted. **No events** are picked up from newsletter, etc.
Individual events must be submitted in exact format below to lazygardener@sbcglobal.net*

SAT. JUNE 29: RAINWATER HARVESTING by NAT GRUESEN, 9-11 am, AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St. (FM 519), La Marque. Free. Galveston

County Master Gardener event. Register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-309-5065, aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html

SAT., JUNE 29: BONSAI CLASS by JIM MAAS, CLYDE HOLT, & PAUL NESTRSTA, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SAT., JULY 6: CACTI & SUCCULENTS CLASS by JIM MAAS & PAT CORDRAY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SAT. JULY 6: BEST PRACTICES OF WATERING by KAROLYN GEPHART, 9-11am, AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM 519), La Marque. Free. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com, 281-309-5065. aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html

TUES., JULY 9: GROWING PLUMERIAS, 7-9pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Drive. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org

WED., JULY 10: TREE IDENTIFICATION. Noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

THURS, JULY, 11: HOUSTON ROSE SOCIETY ICE CREAM SOCIAL AND SUMMER CELEBRATION, 7pm, Cherie Flores Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Dr.. Free. houstonrose.org

THURS., JULY 11: GARDENING ORGANICALLY by DIANE NORMAN, 10-11:30am, Genoa Friendship Gardens Educational Center Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Pasadena. Free. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., JULY 11: WATER CONSERVATION, 6:30-8:30pm, Barbara Bush Library, 6817 Cypresswood Dr., Spring. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

SAT., JULY 13: TROPICAL SYMPOSIUM, 8:30am-4pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Fee. Register: 713-274-4160.

SAT., JULY 13: MINIATURE FAIRY GARDEN W/WATER FEATURE CLASS by JIM MAAS, PAT CORDRAY & BRENDA HESSE, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$55. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SAT., JULY 13, WATER SENSE: RIGHT PLANTS, LESS WATER. 8-10am, & AWARD WINNERS: KNOWING THE BEST FLOWERS, 10:30am-12:30pm. AgriLife Extension Office, 9020 Airport Rd, Conroe. \$5 each/\$8 both. Montgomery County Master Gardener event. 936-529-7824; mcmga.com

MON., JULY 15: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS OPEN GARDEN DAY, 8:30-11:00am, Genoa Friendship Gardens Educational Center Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Pasadena. Free. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., JULY 16: HOUSTON BOTANIC GARDEN UPDATE by JOY COLUMBUS, 7pm, West Gray Multi-Service Center, 475 West Gray. Free. Bromeliad Society/Houston event. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

TUES., JULY 16: WATER CONSERVATION – 6:30-8:30pm, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 930 Corbindale. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., JULY. 18: VIRTUALLY WILD! TEXAS – CONNECTING STUDENTS DIGITALLY by JAIME GONZALES, 6:45-8:30pm; Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway. Free. Native Plant Society of Texas/Houston Chapter event. npsof.org/houston

THURS., JULY 18: WATER CONSERVATION, 6:30-8:30pm, Freeman Branch Library, 16616 Diana Ln. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. 713-274-0950;

hcmga.tamu.edu

SAT., JULY 20: PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SHOW & SALE, 9:30am-pm, Bay Area Community Center, 5002 E Nasa Parkway, Seabrook. Free. theplumeriasociety.org

AT, JULY 20: TEXAS ROSE RUSTLERS SUMMER MEETING, 10am-3pm, Antique Rose Emporium, 10000 FM 50, Independence. Free. Texasroserustlers.com

SAT., JULY 20: WATER CONSERVATION – 10:30am-12:30pm, Maud Smith Marks Library, 1815 Westgreen Blvd., Katy. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. 713-274-0950; hcmga.tamu.edu

SUN., JULY 21: MULCH - SECRET WEAPON OF SUCCESSFUL GARDENERS by JOHN FERGUSON, 2pm, Judson Robinson Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Dr. Free., Texas Gulf Coast Fern Society event. 713-284-1994

SAT., AUG. 3: 14" METAL HANGING BASKET CLASS by JIM MAAS & PAT CORDRAY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SAT., AUGUST 10, DIY: COMPOSTING AND ENRICHING THE SOIL, 8-10am, & HONING IN ON YOUR FALL VEGETABLE BOUNTY, 10:30am-12:30pm. AgriLife Extension Office, 9020 Airport Rd, Conroe. \$5 each/\$8 both. Montgomery County Master Gardener event. 936-529-7824 or mcmga.com

WED., AUG. 14: BIRDS OF A FEATHER IN YOUR GARDEN, noon-2pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. Register: 713-274-4160.

SAT., AUG. 17: PLUMERIA CLASS by JIM & MAAS & LORETTA OSTEEN, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

TUES., AUG 20: TEXAS MASTER NATURALIST/COASTAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER CLASS begins, ends Oct. 12. \$50. Register: 281-633-7033, mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu or txmn.org/coastal .

SAT., AUG. 24: FALL & WINTER VEGETABLE GARDENING CLASS by JIM MAAS, PAT CORDRAY & PAUL NESRSTA, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SAT., SEPT. 14: MINIATURE FAIRY GARDEN CLASS by JIM MAAS, PAT CORDRAY & BRENDA HESSE, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SAT., SEPT. 21: GARDENING FOR HUMMINGBIRDS & BIRDS CLASS by JIM MAAS, PAT CORDRAY & KATHRYN COURTNEY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

SUN., SEP. 22: TIDBITS FROM 50 YEARS WITH DAYLILIES by Hershail Theilen, 2-3pm. Klein United Methodist Church, 5920 FM 2920, Spring. Cypress Creek Daylily Club event. Free. cypresscreekdaylilyclub.simplesite.com

SAT., SEPT. 28: 14" METAL HANGING BASKET CLASS by JIM MAAS & PAT, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488, maasnursery.com

TUES., OCT. 8: GROWING PLUMERIAS, 7-9pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Drive. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org

SAT. DEC. 14, 2019: CHAPPELL HILL GARDEN CLUB CHRISTMAS HOME TOUR, 10am-5pm., Chappell Hill. \$20 advance/\$25 tour day. 713-562-6191; 979-337-1200

If we inspire you to attend any of these,

please let them know you heard about it in . . .
THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!
& please patronize our Newsletter & Calendar sponsors below!

PLEASE READ BEFORE

SUBMITTING AN EVENT FOR 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

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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, it then 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 which morphed into her Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD. which she now emails free upon request.

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 specialty shows on HoustonPBS (Ch. 8) and her call-in "EcoGardening" show on KPFT-FM.

For over three decades, Brenda served as 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 Pablo Hernandez 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 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.

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 and quality control.

Pablo helps this newsletter happen from a technical support standpoint.



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