



## LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



**Nov. 22, 2019 - Issue #318**

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[Nature's Way Resources](#) owner John Ferguson, "The Lazy Gardener" Brenda Beust Smith and Pablo Hernandez welcome your feedback and are so grateful to the many horticulturists who contribute their expertise.

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## SILVER LINING IN THAT EARLY COLD SPELL -- FALL COLOR!

*Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away; / Lengthen night and shorten day;  
Every leaf speaks bliss to me / Fluttering from the autumn tree.*

*'Fall Leaves Fall' by Emily Brontë (1818-1848)*

**BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

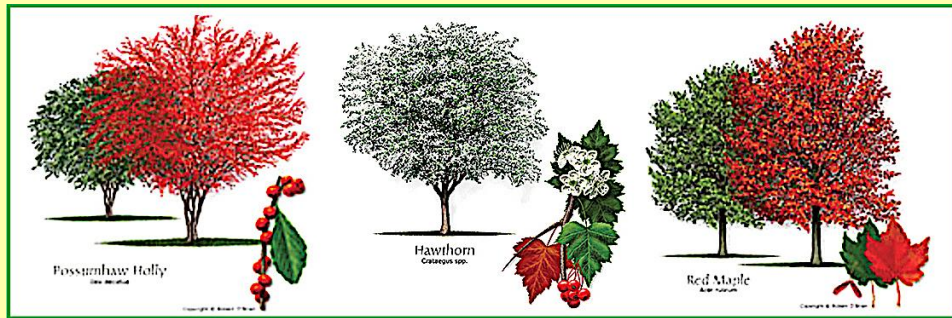
Much as I dislike cold weather, I am so grateful for that early blistering cold spell. We have it to thank for the beautiful fall color around Houston. Rapid fall in temperatures produces prettiest fall color, as leaves suddenly quit processing food, chlorophyll breaks down, dominant green color disappears and suddenly we delight in explosions of reds, yellows and oranges.

Can you identify trees by their fall color? It's hard. We so seldom see it. The cheerful red/orange/yellow leaves are probably Chinese tallow. Enjoy. but don't plant unless you want a yard full of them. Terribly invasive and major threat to native habitats.

Like to add at least one spectacular fall color tree? Texas A&M to the rescue. The wonderful Custom Selector website:

<http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/CustomSelector.aspx> allows you to click on numerous preferences (including Counties), then recommends best choices. Give it a try!

Some Harris County recommendations (and sketches) from this website include, from left to right, below: Possumhaw (*Ilex decidua*), Mexican Plum (*Prunus mexicana*) and Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*).



**Wonder where the yellow went?** Check out today's **"HAVE YOU TRIED . . ."** suggestion below between John's column and the Calendar.

\* \* \*

**Tip o' the Trowel to Texas Department of Transportation** for the wonderful fall color trees and shrubs incorporated into our freeway/highway medians and border plantings by TxDOT and its community partners.

\* \* \*

**READER JOBETH K.** wrote expressing the same frustration I'm feeling right now: *"All those dead stalks the cold killed look so ugly! Can I cut them back to the ground?"*

Welcome to my world. My wonderful hummingbird and butterfly-attracting salvias have been a delight all summer. Fall color is the upside to that early cold spell. Some flowering plants dying back much earlier than usual is the downside. I'd like to cut my dead stalks back too.



But, sorry, JoBeth. For a while at least, be a gongoozler. Be strong. Leave them alone. Think about all the minuscule (and larger) soil-inhabitants now salivating at the thought of compost-rich feasts to come from these decaying stalks.

Our weather will probably typically roller-coaster until spring. Right now plants are yawning and thinking: *"Seems a little early but, what the heck . . ."* as they withdraw life sources from branch tips. As temperatures soar back upward, which they certainly can, some plants will probably push out new stalks from now-dying limbs.

But, make no mistake. The dying-back process has started. Warmer temperatures might trigger new growth, but severe pruning of live tissue is

another major trigger. That's a double-whammy. Tender new growth is more susceptible to dieback that just might extend down to the roots.

Dead-dead stalks aren't going to come back. If you think you can cut back and not touch ANY live growth within the stalks, have at it.

But this dieback doesn't mean your garden has to suddenly become colorless. We don't often plant for "winter garden color" here. Our winters were always short, many flowers bloom longer than they do in points north. Our truly cold spells are sporadic and spring early-arriving.

On the other hand, our winters seem to be changing, and that might mean changes in the way our plants hang on and how quickly spring comes our way.

One of the first things I planted in our "new to us" yard was a Yuletide Camellia. I had written often about how these always bloom on Christmas Day and what wonderful happy holiday season message they send. I have one now (*not mine at right*) that I will probably have to move (they can get large here when planted in the ground). But for now it's small, right by our front door and absolutely covered with buds!



Maybe it would help to draw eyes away from dead plants. Focus on filling around dead black stalks with cold-loving, winter bloomers such as camellias, paperwhites and lenten rose (Helleborus), or these cold-lovers below:



### CYCLAMENS

Mine lasted in hanging baskets by the front door all winter long last year. They also do equally well in ground. Just be sure they are EXTREMELY well drained. Water-holding polymers (Soil-Moist, etc.) added to soil in baskets or containers helps keep them moist but not too wet. To see truly spectacular cyclamens, drop by [Mercer Botanic Garden](#) anytime this winter.

**VIOLAS, VIOLETS AND PANSIES.** These three winter-blooming delights below are "cousins" -- all in genus *Viola*. These low-growers are often used for borders or edging, but they're great for hiding those died-back summer bloomer stalks! Violas (Johnny-jump-ups) and pansies are annuals for us. Violets, like our native lawn wildflowers, can be perennial. ((*African violets aren't related. They belong to the genus Saintpaulia spp.*)

*L to r, below — smallest to largest — are violas, violets and pansies.*



**BEAUTIFUL WINTER VEGETABLES** - Winter vegetables that need cold are

great for filling in too. Many must be planted now in this area, such as . . .



(left to right above) arugula, collards, burgundy lettuce, Swiss chard, mustard greens and kale. Plant in between dormant summer-beautiful plants. For a full list of good vegetable varieties for us and best planting times, check out [Urban Harvest's Fall Planting Chart](#). Whatever you do, don't follow planting time rules from any other area! We garden year-round here.

\* \* \*

**MASTER GARDENER TRAINING** ... many area Master Gardener groups are planning 2020 training sessions including: .

- **FRI., DEC. 20: WALLER COUNTY 2020 MASTER GARDENER TRAINING REGISTRATION DEADLINE.** Dates & other details: [txmg.org/wallermg/training](http://txmg.org/wallermg/training); 979-826-7651 x 3068.

We're happy to list all Master Gardener training registration deadlines. Email notice, using the same format as Waller County (above) to: [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).

**"LAZY GARDENER SPEAKER LIST" & "PUBLICITY BOOKLET"**

are free — Just email [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto: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

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## MULCH UPDATE # 34

### AGED NATIVE MULCH

A question we occasionally hear from customers is; "Why does your mulch have so many fines in it?"

(These smaller particles -- the fines -- are denser and will settle and the lighter woodier pieces will naturally float to the top recreating the compost-mulch layer we find in the forest that plants prefer, **in only one step.**)

The short answer is that it makes the mulch a much higher quality which works better and faster, resulting in healthier and more beautiful plants. To be a successful gardener in Texas one must mulch (and everywhere else also). Mulch comes from the German "*molsch*," meaning "soft," and refers to any loose, generally soft material that is laid down on top of the soil to protect a plant's roots or spread lightly over the plant itself.

Mulch is not a soil amendment; it is a covering or surface layer used to protect the topsoil. Nature does not allow bare ground hence neither should we.

***Mulching is considered by many to be the most important step in any gardening program. Hence the results one gets is directly tied to the quality of the mulch one uses.***

All natural or organic mulches will improve the soil but like all things, they vary in quality and effectiveness. Good mulch lets air (oxygen) and water enter the soil and allows carbon dioxide to escape. Good mulch will readily decompose releasing the stored nutrients which will provide microorganisms, earthworms and beneficial insects a good home, food and an energy source.

If one listens to Randy Lemmon or Danny Milliken, the hosts of our radio gardening shows, or read about mulching in many gardening books, it is recommended to place down a two-inch layer of compost before applying the mulch.

The Bible tells us to study nature, hence this process copies nature where we have a soil layer, then a layer of deep dark brown crumbly stuff (i.e. compost) with a lighter brown three-inch layer of leaves and twigs on top (mulch).

The old approach is to have a person order and apply two different products. This is often time consuming and confusing for many folks. Hence, it is often not done.

At Nature's Way Resources, we make our Aged Native Mulch (composted) in a way that includes the compost!

We make our "native" mulch primarily from the small branches and limbs of trees which is the nutrient rich portion. This is why deer and other animals eat them for food.

The cambium layers of bark and leaves quickly decompose into a fungal rich compost full of nutrients and beneficial microbes that plants love and require. These small compost particles are the fines one sees in the mulch. These smaller particles (fines) provide the energy and food for the microbes and earthworms to allow them to create a healthy soil for your plants.

These smaller particles are denser and will settle and the lighter woodier pieces will naturally float to the top recreating the compost-mulch layer we find in the forest that plants prefer, ***in only one step.***

General benefits: Economical, the composting process concentrates nutrients and stabilizes nitrogen, the heat from the composting kills weed seeds and pathogens, improves plant and soil health, and it sets up quickly to resist blowing or washing out as it feeds the microbes required. The composting process naturally turns the mulch into a humus rich, deep beautiful chocolate brown.

Numerous studies have shown this type of mulch prevents many plant diseases, encourages high levels of microbial biodiversity in the soil, and increases tree and plant growth rates.

This type of mulch encourages strong and vigorous root growth that leads to plants that can withstand a drought or strong winds much better. Fruits tend to be larger and more flavorful; flowers have more intense colors and the fragrance is stronger.

Over 30 years of research has shown that this type of mulch improves soil quality better and quicker (whether clay or sand) than any other amendments. Over time it will turn even gumbo clay into a beautiful rich loam that plants love.

Our goal is to help our customers have beautiful gardens and flower beds. It takes a lot more time and effort to grind, process, and compost the mulch properly, but we believe you, the customers, are worth it.

\* \* \*

## Have You Tried ...

### WHITE FRINGE TREE

*(Chionanthus virginicus)*

This native East Texas tree is spectacular whether used as a large dome-shaped shrub or pruned into a small domed ornamental tree. Soft green leaves and magnificent clusters of fringe-like blooms. Deciduous with brilliant yellow fall foliage. Tolerates moist soils, 20'-25' high; 25' wide. Blooms on old wood. Light pleasant fragrance.



*Fringe trees are 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**

**ADULT GARDEN / PLANT EVENTS ONLY**

**PLEASE READ BEFORE  
SUBMITTING AN EVENT FOR THIS CALENDAR**

Events **NOT** submitted in the **EXACT** written format below may take 2 weeks or longer to be reformatted/retyped. Submit to: [lazygardener@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).  
• No pdfs please! • Type text into email. • Put your group name on the 'Subject' line.

SAT. NOV 23: THE GREAT PEPPER EXTRAVAGANZA by GENE SPELLER, 1-4 pm; AgriLife Extension Office, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St./FM 519, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free. Free. Register: [galvcountymgs@gmail.com](mailto:galvcountymgs@gmail.com), 281-309-5065; [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/index.html)

TUES., DEC. 3: HEALTH BENEFITS OF GARDENING by DR. JOE NOVAK, noon-1pm, Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event.

THUR. DEC. 5: CITRUS SEMINAR & TASTING by MONTE NESBITT, 6-8:30pm; Extension Office, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St./FM 519, La Marque. Free. Register: [galvcountymgs@gmail.com](mailto:galvcountymgs@gmail.com), 281-309-5065; [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston)

SAT. DEC 7: GROWING GREAT TOMATOES (1 of 3, GROWING FROM SEED by IRA GERVAIS, 9-11:30am; Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St./FM 519, La Marque. Free. Register: [galvcountymgs@gmail.com](mailto:galvcountymgs@gmail.com), 281-309-5065; [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston)

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

FRI., DEC. 20: WALLER COUNTY 2020 MASTER GARDENER TRAINING REGISTRATION DEADLINE. Dates & other details: [txmg.org/wallermg/training](http://txmg.org/wallermg/training); 979-826-7651 x 3068.

THURS., JAN. 9 :EXTREME BED BUILDING by MARY FULGHAM & RANDY KEEN, 7pm, Cherie Flores Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Houston Rose Society event. Free. [houstonrose.org](http://houstonrose.org)

FRI., JAN. 10, 2020: RECYCLE, REDUCE, REDUCE by Native Plant Society of Texas, & PLANT SALE. 10am, First Christian Church, 1601 Sunset Blvd. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs event. Free. [houstonfederationgardenclubs.org](http://houstonfederationgardenclubs.org)

TUES. JAN. 14, 2020: PLUMERIAS IN THAILAND by MARK WRIGHT, 7-9pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. [theplumeriasociety.org](http://theplumeriasociety.org)

TUES. MAR 10, 2020: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PLANT SOCIETIES by MARK WOMACK, 7-9pm ; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. [theplumeriasociety.org](http://theplumeriasociety.org)

FRI., APRIL 10, 2020: EXCITING UNDERUTILIZED PLANTS ADAPTABLE TO HOUSTON REGION by ADAM BLACK. 10am, First Christian Church, 1601 Sunset Blvd. Federation of Garden Clubs event. Free. [houstonfederationgardenclubs.org](http://houstonfederationgardenclubs.org)

FRI. MAY 8, 2020: THINGS I WISH I HAD LEARNED SOONER (ABOUT ROSES) by BAXTER WILLIAMS. 10am, First Christian Church, 1601 Sunset Blvd. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs event. Free. [houstonfederationgardenclubs.org](http://houstonfederationgardenclubs.org)

TUES., MAY 12: BONSAI by SCOTT BARBOZA, 7-9pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. [theplumeriasociety.org](http://theplumeriasociety.org)

TUES., JUL 14: PLUMERIA IN THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS by NICOLE TIERRMAN, 7-9pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. [theplumeriasociety.org](http://theplumeriasociety.org)

TUES., OCT 13: FALL PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SOCIAL/LUAAU 7-9:00 pm;

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

