



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Dec. 13, 2019 - Issue #320

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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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SAFFRON SUCCESS! WINTER ENHANCES GARDEN VEGETABLES

By Brenda Beust Smith

I loved doing the [camellia column](#) last week and now have camellias to thank for hearing from two friends from the past. Childhood pal Susie Parks Lilley reminded me of the wonderful camellias her father grew in her "across-the-street-from-us" home in Houston's Riverside community. And longtime Memorial Area gardener Ed Holland sent a shot of his now-in-bloom Sassanqua camellias (below) in the Memorial area. These may have a shorter bloom period than Japonicas, but silver lining, "...*They make up for their short bloom life by carpeting the ground around them with colorful petals.*"

Ed's sassanquas: l to r, below, 'Kanjiro', prolific 3-month pink; white 'Mine-No-Yuki' (Snow-On-the-Mountain); tall red 'Sparkling Burgundy,' and pink 'Interlude.'



MACEY J., HOWEVER, WAS PUZZLED by last week's references to "Sassanquas, Japonicas and Reticulatas." What, she asked, are the difference in these? Coushatta Camellia Society President Frank Ohrt generously adds to his [last week's Spotlight Article:](#)



"The genus Camellia has 50+ species. There are three main species grown for flowers (L to R above): Sassanqua, Japonica, and Reticulata.

- *Sassanquas have smaller leaves, smaller flowers (but more), are more sun-tolerant and cold hardy, and start blooming in late fall.*
- *Japonicas, from Japan (!) and Korea, have larger leaves, wider variety of bloom size and form, and bloom later than sassanquas, though their blooming periods overlap.*
- *Reticulatas are from southwest China, are similar to japonicas, but usually have larger blooms. They are a bit more finicky to grow."*

If you want to see camellias in full color, drop by Coushatta Camellia Society's annual free Show & Sale, Sat.-Sun, Jan. 18-19, 1-4pm, at First Christian Church, 3500 North Loop 336W, Conroe. cousattacamelliasociety.com)

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SAFFRON SUCCESS! It's such fun when experts get unexpectedly surprised by a plant! Marilyn O'Connor's email about harvesting her first crop of saffron threads was an eye-popper. I didn't even know one could grow saffron here, much less harvest threads (vivid crimson stigma and styles) to be used as seasoning and coloring.

When Marilyn -- aka The Herb Lady" -- says she too never heard of anyone growing saffron here, her own discovery becomes all the more amazing. Marilyn is a frequent herbal club speaker/course teacher. A former longtime Herb Society of America member, Marilyn's into total edible landscaping (including flowers). "If I can't eat it, I don't plant it." Marilyn will be teaching this spring at Adult Leisure Learning at [Lone Star College/Montgomery](#) in The Woodlands. She details her discovery below.

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NINE WINTER EDIBLE CROPS TO PLANT NOW! Below Marilyn's Spotlight

Article is a not-to-be-missed, post-on-your-refrigerator article by [Dany Millikin](#):

- Head Gardener of [McGovern Centennial Garden](#) in Hermann Park,
- Conservation Program Manager for The Memorial Park Conservancy and
- host of [HomeshowGardenpros](#) (7-8am, Saturday on 610am radio).

WE GARDEN YEAR-ROUND HERE but the key to success, especially in our blistering hot summers and roller-coaster winters, is using only local advice and that's what Dany Millikin provides here and on his weekly shows.

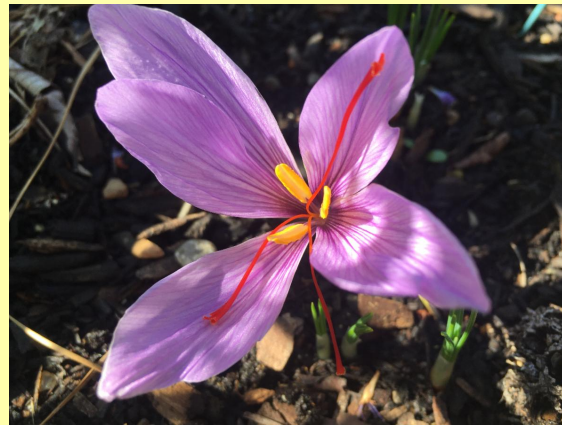
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"LAZY GARDENER SPEAKER LIST" & "PUBLICITY BOOKLET"

are free — Just email 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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SAFFRON (*CROCUS SATIVUS*) CAN BE HARVESTED IN HOUSTON

**By MARILYN O'CONNOR
'THE HERB LADY'**

I happened to see an ad in a magazine from White Flower Farm for the corms to grow saffron. I've always wanted to grow saffron and gave them a call in late July. I told them I live in Zone 9 and they said yes, I can grow them here. They suggested I order them and they would send them when time and temperature for our area were right for the corms.

They shipped them in late September and I planted them October 9. By the middle of November, they were growing and blooming. I harvested the red/orange stigmas and dried them. A tweezer is helpful as they really shrink once dried.

I found that I have to harvest the flowers as soon as they bloom, otherwise the

flowers disintegrated rather quickly. That's the fun of gardening -- always a surprise gift from Mother Nature!

Grow organically -- especially if you are going to eat from your garden -- and make sure your lawn service is using organic products in their landscape treatments.

I really encourage everyone to play in the dirt and use all your senses - it's the best therapy I know of for a happy life.

* . * . *

NOTE:

- Email Marilyn at: theherblady11@att.net
- Marilyn's next course will be this spring at Lone Star College-MONTGOMERY, 3200 College Park Dr. Conroe . LoneStar.edu/Montgomery

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Winter Vegetable Gardening in Houston and on the Gulf Coast

by Dany Millikin

Houston's winter has mild temperatures that bring out the best flavors in home vegetables. Pesky mosquitoes, weeds, and diseases are less bothersome. And we can grow some warm-season and most cool-season crops.

Warm-season vegetables are frost-susceptible so leave out the beans, cucumbers and summer squash that can't take cold during this winter season. They should go into your garden soon enough, joining February's planted tomatoes.

Frost-tolerant crops that need cooler conditions include beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, kohlrabi, lettuce, radishes, spinach and turnips.

- Eight hours of direct sun daily is required, plant accordingly. Root crops

(such as turnips) and leafy vegetables (like lettuce) tolerate some shade, but still need substantial winter sun. A southern exposure is best due to the angle of the sun. A garden that catches the early morning sun will dry more quickly, reducing the chance that harmful fungi or other diseases will develop.

- Good air circulation is important.
- Easy access to a water source makes gardening much easier.
- Success relies on an organic, loose and well-draining soil.
- Mulch to conserve soil moisture, moderate soil temperatures and discourage weeds.

Nine winter crops that aren't too late to plant now

- **Carrots, seed:** mid-October-December, plant in groups so you don't have too much at harvest. Carrots take a long time to get edible.
- **Collards, transplant:** September-March, this fast-growing delicious leafy green is a nutritional powerhouse and can last all the way through spring.
- **Lettuce, leaf, seed and transplant:** late-September-April. Always be lettucing, that's my motto.
- **Onion, transplant:** mid-October-January. Tell me a vegetable you use more often.
- **Peas, snap, seed:** late-September-early February. Best to grow snap peas on a trellis, they can get a little birds nesting without.
- **Radish, seed:** September-February, very fast from seed to table. Great for kiddos
- **Spinach, seed/transplant:** October-November. I love growing spinach, easy to grow, easy use.
- **Turnips, seed:** September-February. If you pickle turnips are a must; grow for green and for roots. Most food per square foot of any garden food.

NOTE:

- Hear Dany Milikin's [HomeShow Radio](#), Saturday mornings 7-9am on Sports Radio 610.
- Access Dany's show archives at homeshowgardenpros.com/tag/dany-millikin/.

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NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOILS AND PLANTS #105

A new study by the University of Iowa and the U.S. Geological Survey (2019) has found that when neonicotinoid pesticides are exposed to chlorine-based water treatment (city water supplies), they transform into chlorinated disinfection byproducts (DBPs). These byproducts are over 300 times more toxic and hazardous than the original poison.

Also, one needs to remember that neonicotinoid pesticides are 1,000 times more toxic than DDT (which has been outlawed) which makes the danger much worse.

For gardeners this means several things:

- Many bedding plants (~50%) one buys from their local nursery are treated with these poisons. When you bring them home and water them with municipal water the toxicity greatly increases.
- These poisons are often applied to plants in a systemic form so it spreads to all parts of a plant. Hence, when bees, butterflies and other pollinators visit they plant for pollen or nectar they are often killed. This is more common in the discount sellers as they purchase lower quality plants where more toxic chemicals were used. Ask your nursery if their plants were raised using neonicotinoid pesticides, if so or they do not know, then do not purchase them.
- The research also demonstrated even higher toxicity on mammals (319 times more toxic). For the health of your children and pets avoid plants treated with these poisons. We have known for years that there is strong links to these chlorinated chemicals to cancer and birth-related health problems.
- To avoid these problems, look for organically-grown plants. As the old saying goes: "It is better to be safe than sorry".

If you want to learn more on the dangers of this class of pesticides, the Dr. Mercola newsletter has a nice article on the subject titled "**Neonicotinoids Pose Ecosystem Wide Threat**" that can be found at the link below.

www.mercola.com

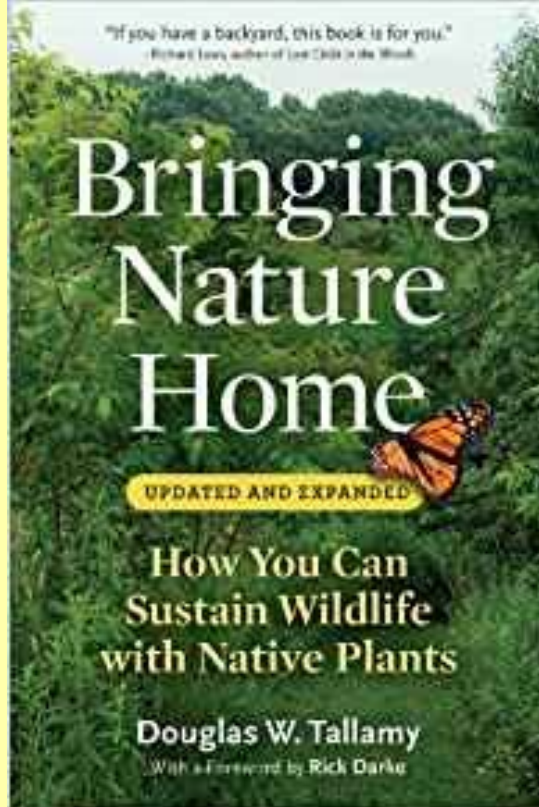
A study from the University of Stockholm has found that even small woodlands (less than an acre) can store more carbon in the topsoil layer than larger acreage and provide numerous benefits to wildlife as they naturally have more edges and which provide the environment for many plants that feed wildlife. (Journal of Applied Ecology, December 2019)

Habitat gardening is exploding across the country and now we have another reason why. A study from the University of California at UC Davis (December 2019), has found that attracting song birds to one's garden can greatly reduce pest insects. Songbirds are voracious predators of bugs, aphids, whitefly, scale, caterpillars, ants, and earwigs.

A great book on the subject is: "Bringing Nature Home - How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants" by Douglass W. Tallamy, Timber Press, 2014, Edith Printing, ISBN-13: 978-0-88192-992-8

It would also make a great Christmas gift for your favorite gardener!

Note: If insects eat plants with the neonicotinoid pesticides on them and then a bird eats the dying insect, it will die also. It is believed that these toxic pesticides have killed billions of birds in



America alone.

A few weeks ago, we asked the question: "Are plants Intelligent"? The Max Planck Institute for Chemical Ecology released a new study on sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*) in the Journal Scientific Reports (2019). They found that when the leaves were attacked by a predator, they produced a chemical called "sporamin" that causes an insect to lose its appetite as it prevents insects from digesting their food. It also tells neighboring plants to turn on their immune system and produce this chemical. Communication and cooperation?

Researchers at the University of California-Berkley have found that plants have a leaf microbiome. They studied tomato plants and found that certain species of microbes were essential in protecting the plant from disease and pests. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (2019).

Tens of thousands of organic gardeners and farmers have known this for decades and have been using compost tea to provide the microbes for the plant microbiome.

Diseases Controlled with Compost Tea (sample list)

Alternaria solani - early blight on tomatoes
 Botrytis cinerea – grey mold on strawberries, geraniums, beans, tomatoes, peppers
 Diplocarpon rosae – black spot on roses
 Pseudomonas syringae pv. Maculicola – leaf spot
 Sphaerotheca pannosa var. rosae – powdery mildew on roses
 Sphaerotheca fulginea – powdery mildew on cucumbers
 Uncinula necator – powdery mildew on grapes
 Venturia inaequalis – apple scab on apples
 Venturia conidia – apple scab on apples
 Xanthomonas vesicatoria – leaf spot on tomatoes
 Podosphaera pannosa var. pannosa – powdery mildew on roses
 Pythium ultimum – damping off in cucumbers
 Fusarium sp. – root rot in cyclamens
 Fusarium oxysporum – fusarium wilt
 Monilinia taxa – blossom rot on cherries
 Phytophthora sp – root rot on avocados
 Phytophthora infestans – leaf blight on tomatoes and potatoes

The Journal Compost Science and Utilization (2002) has a very good article on this subject, "Compost Tea: Principles and Prospects for Plant Disease Control". They found that a **properly-made** compost tea could help in the control of over 50

species of pathogens.

I was asked the other day, "Why do we not hear more about these issues on the news?" The Dr. Mercola newsletter had an article on how companies buy off reporters titled "[Bayer Buys Reporters and Sprays Illegal Poison](#)":

* * *

Have You Tried ...

OAKLEAF HYDRANGEA

(Hydrangea quercifolia)

Year-round interest! In Spring, large dark green leaves unfurl, followed by long cone-shaped white bud clusters that open to striking small, bud-like flowers in summer. Fall's turns leaves into blazing crimsons, purples, oranges, golds, and bronzes, rivaling maples! Gradual exfoliation reveals cinnamon-brown peeling bark. All day bright shade or full morning sun with light afternoon shade. Lightly acidic soil. Woody shrub up to 6' Don't prune until after flowers bloom or you'll remove the buds!



Oakleaf hydrangeas 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.

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LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

**ADULT GARDEN / PLANT EVENTS ONLY PLEASE READ BEFORE
SUBMITTING AN EVENT FOR THIS CALENDAR
THEN CHECK TO MAKE SURE YOUR EVENT IS IN! HOWEVER . . .**

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

DEC 12-30: CHRISTMAS VILLAGE AT BAYOU BEND, 6003 Memorial Dr. [Ticket info](#).

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

SAT., DEC. 14: HOLIDAY IN THE GARDENS, 11am-4pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble. Free. hcp4.net/parks/mercer/holiday/

FRI., DEC. 20: WALLER COUNTY 2020 MASTER GARDENER TRAINING REGISTRATION DEADLINE. Dates & other details: 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

THURS JAN. 9: HYDRANGEA'S & GENERAL GARDENING by ANITA NELSON,10 am, MUD Building, 805 Hidden Canyon Dr, Katy. Free, Nottingham Country Garden Club event. ncgctx.org

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

FRI., JAN. 10, 2010: RECYCLE, REDUCE, REUSE by Della Barbato, 10 am, First Christian Church, 1601 Sunset Blvd. Houston Federation of Garden Clubs event. Free. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org

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

SAT.- SUN., JAN. 18-19: 46th ANNUAL CAMELLIA SHOW AND SALE, 1:00-4:00pm, First Christian Church, 3500 North Loop 336 West, Conroe. Coushatta Camellia Society event. Free. cousattacamelliasociety.com.

SUN., FEB. 23: CACTI AND SUCCULENTS by JACOB MARTIN, 2pm-3pm. Klein United Methodist Church, 5920 FM 2920, Spring, TX 77388. Cypress Creek Daylily Club event. Free. cypresscreekdaylilyclub.simplesite.com

SAT.-SUN., MAR. 7-8: SPRING BRANCH AFRICAN VIOLET CLUB SHOW & SALE, Sat.: 9am-5pm Sale, 1-5pm show. Sun.: 10am-3pm Sale. Judson Robinson Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Dr. Free. kjwross@yahoo.com

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

SUN., MAR. 22: BIRDS OF THE BAYOU CITY by MARY ANNE WEBER, 2pm-3pm. Klein United Methodist Church, 5920 FM 2920, Spring, TX 77388. Cypress Creek Daylily Club event. Free. cypresscreekdaylilyclub.simplesite.com

SAT., MAR. 28: CYPRESS CREEK DAYLILY CLUB SPRING DAYLILY & PERENNIAL PLANT SALE, 10am-3pm. Wunderlich Historical Farm, 18218 Theiss Mail Route Rd., Klein. Cypress Creek Daylily Club event. Free. cypresscreekdaylilyclub.simplesite.com

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

SUN., APR. 26: HOW TO GROOM A DAYLILY FOR A FLOWER SHOW by MARY GAGE, 2pm-3pm. Klein United Methodist Church, 5920 FM 2920, Spring. Cypress Creek Daylily Club event. Free. cypresscreekdaylilyclub.simplesite.com

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

SAT., MAY 9: DAYLILY PLANT SALE 10am-3pm. Gethsemane Lutheran Church, 4040 Watonga, Houston, 77092. Houston Hemerocallis Society event. Free. ofts.com/hhs/calendar.html

TUES., JUL 14: BONSAI by SCOTT BARBOZA, 7-9pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org

TUES., OCT 13: FALL PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SOCIAL/LUAU 7-9:00 pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. theplumeriasociety.org

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



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 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.

