



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Mar. 27, 2020 - Issue # 332

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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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CORONAVIRUS CANCELLATIONS

**If your event in our calendar below is cancelled, please let us know as soon as possible at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net
Include DATE, FULL TITLE and SPONSOR of cancelled events.**



"SO, BRENDA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN YOUR GARDEN THESE DAYS?"

-- Marcella J. & Nancy, readers

by BRENDA BEUST SMITH

Marcella, emailing from Sugar Land, and Nancy from The Woodlands were curious about the same thing: "What are YOU doing in the garden right now, Brenda?"

Like many folks these days, I'm pretty much stuck at home, although I hear it's pretty easy to maintain six-foot-social-distancing in nurseries.

I'm mainly showing my plants who's boss.

Previous owners weren't into planting anything other than tiny bloomless boxwoods. Most of my plantings in our new-to-us (post-Harvey) yard are little over two years old now. Most are still in their original nursery pots with the bottoms cut off about 2 inches.

Why? This acre lot was a home business. About half the yard is blacktop. The rest is grass/weed-covered but underneath is a deep layer of grave intertwined into a steel wool-like mesh with still-growing roots of chopped down trees. Sigh . . .

It quickly became obvious I couldn't dig traditional holes as one usually does with new plants. So I dug as deep as possible (2"+/-) and set in the "bottomless" nursery pot with plants-still-in as purchased. Obviously camouflage was needed. Kind neighbors agreed to set their raked & bagged leaves/needles on the curb. I pick them up (new neighborhood bag lady) and pile them around the black pots.

I also use these bagged leaves/needles in low yard areas where water would stand for days (even months) after a heavy rain.

As John explained to me, the weight of water (and other factors) standing over time in low spots literally "hardens" soil below (aka lake bottoms). Water no longer soaks in as should. Composting leaves/needles return organic matter to the soil that in turn triggers growth of more vital microorganisms and the soil begins absorbing water again.

There are other ways to correct this problem but, as a lazy gardener, I found this the easiest route. It's definitely working. Lawn grass is now growing on these former "lake" areas and hopefully one day, it will be replaced with blooming plants.

Showing plants who's boss also has a therapeutic value during these often frustrating days.

A lot of shrub-like low, side growth has developed on plants I want to be small trees or at least tall vertical shrubs, such as my Confederate rose, "Peppermint Lace" crepe myrtle, esperanza (*Tecoma stans*), hamelia, Japanese (tulip) magnolias, Pride of Barbados, thryallis, giant Turk's cap, etc.



Note: pictures above and below are just examples, not my actual plants. Mine are still mostly still prepubescent! Above, l to r: Confederate rose, "Peppermint Lace" crepe myrtle, esperanza (Tecoma stans), hamelia. Below, l to r: Japanese (tulip) magnolia, Pride of Barbados, thryallis, giant Turk's cap,



At this still early stage of my plants, it's easy to encourage vertical branching by either popping off new lower horizontal branches and/or sliding your fingers down lower sections of stalks to pop off new young sprouts. More established lower horizontal branchlets may take a pair of snippers.

Either way, removing these doesn't hurt the plant, it will make the upper vertical branch grow taller by routing more energy upward. And, let's be honest. In these days of "shelter-in-place," snipping off small branchlets is a satisfying way to work out frustrations without hurting anyone!

Back to the leaves/needles piled up around my bottomless black nursery pots, they don't last long, of course. They break down. Which is fine. My master plan is to build layers of rich compost atop that steel wool-like-tree-root/gravel-mesh-mess.

But as my "cover" gradually composted down, I worried neighbors' eyebrows were going up. *"Who is this strange woman and what is she doing?"* To add a bit of whimsy (and draw the eye away from those black pots), I posted one of my wrought iron sprites on the fence over each plant. I guess it worked. They made me smile and everyone's been really nice.



This yard is so different from my former 50+-year-old Lazy Gardener Landscape, which was on a tree-covered wetland on Greens Bayou. This yard (where it isn't really low) is MUCH better drained with lots more sun.

Some plants took two full years to start growing and produce flowers. To my absolute amazement, I've only lost a couple of those I've put in. I have faith. They might return. We lazy gardeners are patient souls.

Now my search is for plants whose roots are strong and ornery enough to poke right through blacktop to reach and grow into the soil below.

So far, I've only had two successes planting right on top blacktop: Mexican flame vine and pencil plant (right). The pencil plant, a gift from Penny Brown, was started in that white bottomless plastic paint bucket with the Mexican flame vine. But it's now apparently growing quite happily in the leaf/needle compost layer that's building up around the bucket on solid blacktop. All suggestions of plants with roots that will break through blacktop are welcome!!!

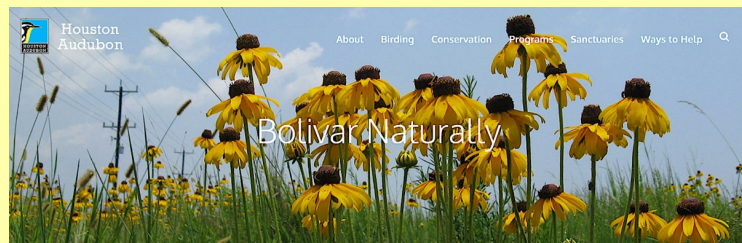
I recently spotted this yard's first monarchs and first rufous (I think!) hummingbird this spring. Now that we're home all the time, these arrivals seem easier to spot. A fun activity would be to report arrivals with [Journey North](#), which tracks migrations of these and other wild treasures to the north in the spring and back south in the fall. [Journey North](#) even provide safe means of contacting others in your area who have reported spottings.

* * *



[BOLIVAR NATURALLY](#)

is a treasure trove of recommended pictured plants for both hummers and butterflies along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. This Houston Audubon



Society (HAS) is just one of many resources on its website. Also check out these other Audubon helps with identifying our natural treasures:

- **[BUTTERFLY WATCHING TIPS](#)**
- **[HUMMINGBIRDS OF HOUSTON](#)**

SPEAKING OF BUTTERFLIES: As you've probably noticed in our sadly shortened calendar, almost all area plant sales have been cancelled or postponed. One nice note came from [Cockrell Butterfly Center](#) Director Erin Mills who reports all the plants from their cancelled spring sale will be sold from a plant cart outside of gift shop once the museum is able to reopen.

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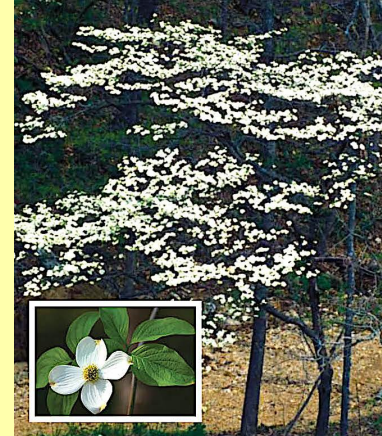
In our Spotlight Article below, Houston gardening radio pro Dany Millikin -- one of our sponsors who helps bring you this free newsletter! -- shares his expertise on great trees we should plant more often. Dany, who is also Executive Director of the Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance, shares the

[HomeShow Garden Pros](#) radio show with:

- [Nelson Nursery & Water Garden](#)'s Anita Nelson & Mary Nelson Gonzales
- [Warren's Southern Gardens](#)' Diane Bulanowski
- [Plants for All Seasons](#)' Sherri Harrah & Zach Buchanan
- [Enchanted Forest & Gardens](#)' Joey Lenderman.

Tune in Saturdays, 7-9am on SportsRadio 610AM). Dany is a trained Horticulturist and Soil Biologist. So when he recommends, we better listen!

FIRST, THOUGH, SPEAKING OF TREES Are you one who has (as I have) tried & failed to grow beautiful East Texas dogwoods (*Cornus florida*, right)? Fact is, the farther north & east you live from Houston downtown Houston, the easier *C. florida* are to grow in home gardens. But the farther south & west, the tougher they are to grow. Fortunately another native, rough leaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*), might prove more successful for all of us. Don't miss this issue's **"HAVE YOU TRIED . . . ROUGH LEAF DOGWOOD"** below between John's column and the Calendar.



* * *

Now, Danny Millikin's unique take on great trees for our gardens!

* * *

"LAZY GARDENER SPEAKER LIST" & "PUBLICITY BOOK LET"

are free — email request to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

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 FEW AWESOME & WEIRD FRUIT TREES"

by DANY MILLIKIN

[HomeShow Garden Pros](#)

I don't know many people who love fruit and fruit trees more than I do. I love eating it, seeing a laden tree, meeting new fruit trees, and especially successfully planting, growing, and harvesting them. Sharing this passion and

some the information needed to really succeed is a natural progression to your benefit. Get ready to learn about a few wacky trees that are easy to appreciate.



PERSIAN MULBERRY
(*Morus nigra*)

This excellent tall shade tree doubles as a delicious fruit producer. Pinkie-sized tasty sweet berries springing in abundance. Really a very heavy producer, and early in the year. One note: don't plant over driveway, fruit drop (and mess) is plentiful.



DWARF
BONANZA PEACH
(*Prunus persica*
'Bonanza Peach' Dwarf)

Flavor wise, similar to a tasty robust yellow peach. But only 6' tall. Never needs pruning. A sculptural wonder, it loves shade. Be aware of root suckers, Grafted roots can overtake the small top. Then...no fruit.



LYCHEE
(*Litchi chinensis*)
Very sweet fruit, a true tropical but more cold-hardy than the star fruit. Racquet ball sized fruit with large seed that can be a choking hazard. Medium to small dark green evergreen tree. Perfect for that family that loves a tropical flare.



JUJUBE
(*Ziziphus jujuba*)
This fast-growing, deciduous tree can handle any weather. Often known as the Asian Date, this thorny monster can grow hundreds of sweet and dry "mini apples." Be aware of thorns (barbs and hooks) and propensity of roots to send up volunteers.



STARFRUIT TREE
(*Averrhoa carambola*)
This true tropical is a fast-growing waxy leaved tree. Needs to be planted on the south side of your home to protect from freeze. When mature, produces many unique star-shaped fruits. Starfruit is lovely and tasty, but when unripe is ever so slightly toxic; always wait til fully ripe.



JABOTICABA
(*Myrciaria cauliflora*)
A Brazilian wonder that grows hundreds of ping-pong ball sized fruits right on the trunk of the tree. Smokey, dark flavors that really surprise and will become the wonder of your landscape. Tree has crepe myrtle-like bark and leaves. Instead of flowers you get snacks!

Growing fruit is the easiest way to incorporate edible plants into your landscape. Take this list, shop, buy, plant, and enjoy! Gotta get Growin'!

NOTE: You can hear Dany and his fellow experts on the Home Show Garden Pros radio show Saturdays, 7-9am on SportsRadio 610AM.

* * *



BOOK REVIEW

For The Love of Soil – Strategies to Regenerate our Food Production System, by Nicole Masters, Printable Reality, 2019, ISBN: 978-0-578-53672-9 (pbk)

It has been a long time since I have been impressed by a book on soils. Particularly one that was easy to read and understand and relates soil to our health and to the issues of ecology and climate change.

Nicole has done a very good job of tying regenerative agriculture from our farms and ranches to our backyards. She covers and clearly explains soil health - plant health - animal health - human health and how they are connected.

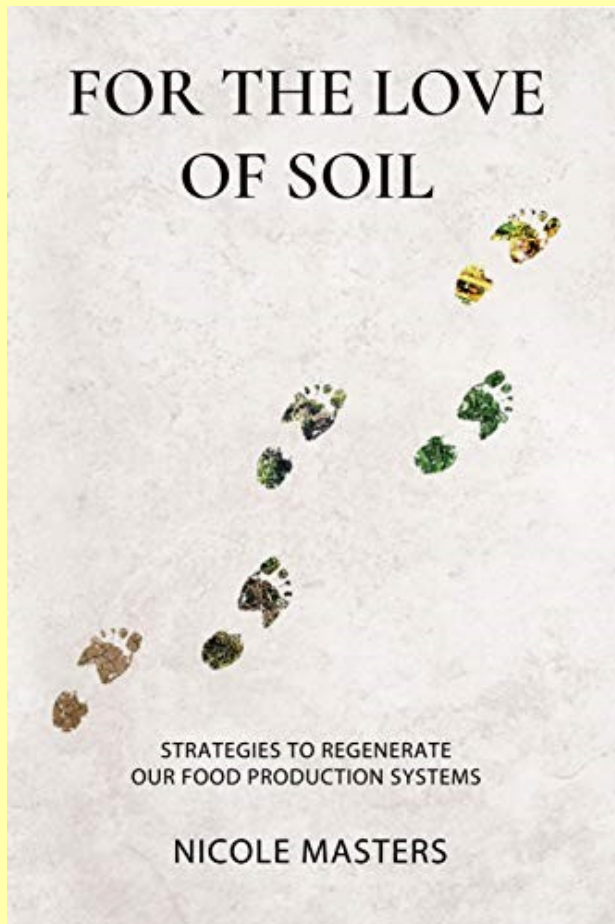
As she states “If you are interested in water quality, food security, fishery beds, climate change, food and human health, you really need to get interested in soil health”.

In light of the Coronavirus issues and the media hype, this is the first book for the average person where she discusses microbial populations and covers good viruses in the soil and the benefits they provide. In nature just like bacteria and fungi, the good species of viruses far outnumber the bad guys. A teaspoon of healthy soil may contain over 10 billion viruses all working together as part of the soil food web to make us healthy. As she points out, research has shown that organically grown fields have 4-5 more times of these beneficial viruses than conventional fields. She even touches on how fungi can transform minerals from rocks in the soil into different types of minerals making nutrients available.

She even mentions things like how excess phosphorous (P) in the soil from artificial fertilizers have been linked to cancers in animal studies. She covers items from why weeds grow to organic matter and how plant communities work together for group health and benefit, creating fertile soil in the process.

Not to be left out, she mentions all the problems caused by insects and weeds (or more correctly the environmental damage caused by the pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, etc.) and how to prevent most of them just by improving one's soil.

Overall, just a great book for anyone wanting to learn more and take care of their yard, farm or ranch.



From the Amazon website:

About the Author

Nicole Masters is an independent agroecologist, systems thinker, author and educator. She has a formal background in ecology, soil science and organizational learning. She has been providing agricultural consulting and extension services since 2003. Nicole is recognized as a knowledgeable and dynamic speaker on the topic of soil health. Her team of soil coaches at Integrity Soils work alongside producers in the U.S., Canada and across Australasia. Supporting producers who work with over 1.1 million acres to take their operations to the next level in nutrient density, profitability and environmental outcomes. She is one of a growing number of

people who are facilitating a rapidly expanding world of quality food production and biological economies.

* * *

HAVE YOU TRIED . . .

ROUGH-LEAF DOGWOOD

(*Cornus drummondii*)

Unlike the more common dogwood trees, rough-leaf dogwood tends to be more of a multi-trunked, understory shrub that can grow to 16'x16' but takes easily to pruning. Showy clusters of creamy white flowers bloom from May to August, with multiple-bird-attracting fruit, and red foliage in Fall. It tolerates our slightly alkaline soils. Roughleaf dogwood prefers some moisture, but can tolerate dry conditions if planted in deep soil. Full sun to heavy shade, but flowers and fruits better in more sun. Showy white fruits attract 40 species of birds, so may disappear quickly.



* * *

ROUGH-LEAF DOGWOOD 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.

At Nature's Way Resources we have uploaded our [Master](#) and [Native](#) Plants inventory online to implement a curbside pickup for orders. Any questions and orders for the plant nursery can be directed to Carol at nwrnursery@gmail.com.

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

ADULT GARDEN PLANT EVENTS ONLY

ALWAYS CHECK TO MAKE SURE YOUR EVENT IS IN! HOWEVER . . .

PLEASE READ BEFORE SUBMITTING EVENTS!

- *Events NOT submitted in the EXACT format below may take 2 weeks or longer to be reformatted/retyped and added to calendar.*
- *Events written in the email in this EXACT format will be copied & pasted immediately into the next upcoming calendar.*
- *No pdfs or flyers!!! They only delay publication.*
- *Submit to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.*
- *Put group name in email subject.*

**PLEASE NOTE:
IN VIEW OF "SHELTER IN PLACE" DIRECTIVES,
WE HAVE REMOVED ALL MARCH EVENTS**

**IF YOU HAVE CANCELLED AN APRIL EVENT,
PLEASE LET US KNOW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AT
lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com or
lazygardener@sbcglobal.net**

SAT., APR. 4: HERB GARDENING by JIM MAAS, PAT CORDRAY & KATHRYN COURTNEY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SUN., APR. 5: POLLINATION CELEBRATION, noon-4pm, Armand Bayou Nature Center, 8500 Bay Area Blvd. Pasadena. abnc.org. (281) 474-2551

SAT., APR. 11: WILD THYMES HERB GARDENING by JIM MAAS, & MELDA SIEBE, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SAT., APR. 11: SOIL ISSUES, 8-10am, & BEST HERBS FOR YOUR GARDEN, 10:30am-12:30pm, AgriLife Extension Office, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe. Montgomery County Master Gardeners event. \$5/\$8 both. 936-539-7824; mcmga.com

SAT., APR. 18: 14" METAL HANGING BASKET by JIM MAAS, & PAT CORDRAY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SAT., APR. 18 : MANNERLY CLIMBERS ON PROPER STRUCTURES by CLAUDE GRAVES, 10am, Charles B. Stewart West Branch Library, 202 Bessie Price Owen Dr., Montgomery. Texas Rose Rustlers event. Free. texasroserustlers.com

SAT., APR. 18: BENVENUTI AMERICAN DAYLILY DISPLAY GARDEN DAYLILY SALE, 9am-2pm, 509 Huckleberry Dr., Lake Jackson. Brazosport Daylilyt lorisgarrett@comcast.net; 832-922-5732; 979-529-9258

SAT. APR 18: TREES AND THEIR CARE 101 by SUSAN ROTH, 9-11am, COMPOSTING by JIM GILLIAM, 1-3 pm,; Extension Office, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St./FM 519), La Marque. Free. Register: galvcountymgs@gmail.com. 281-309-5065; waggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/

WED., APR. 22: HOUSTON BOTANICAL GARDEN UPDATE by JOYCE COLUMBUS, 7:30 pm, Metropolitan Multi-Services Center, 1475 West Gray. FREE. Houston Cactus & Succulent Society. hcsstex.org

THURS., APR. 23: MS. MARIKO GONDA'S GARDEN, 7-9pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Houston Hemerocallis Society event. ofts.com/hhs/

SAT., APR. 25: PLANTING IN GLASS by JIM MAAS, & PAT CORDRAY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SAT., MAY 2: GARDENING FOR BUTTERFLIES & BEES by JIM MAAS, & PAT CORDRAY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SAT., MAY 2: PARTY FOR THE PLANET, 6-10pm, Armand Bayou Nature Center, 8500 Bay Area Blvd. Pasadena. abnc.org/pftp; party@abnc.org; 281-474-2551

SAT., MAY 2, MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS OPEN GARDENS DAY, 9:30-12:30. AgriLife Extension Office, 9020 Airport Road, Conroe. Free. 936-529-7824; mcmga.

SAT., MAY 9: HOUSTON HEMEROCALLIS SOCIETY DAYLILY SHOW, 1-3pm, & PLANT SALE 10am-3pm. Gethsemane Lutheran Church, 4040 Watonga, Houston, 77092. Free. ofts.com/hhs/calendar.html

SAT., MAY 9: BRAZOSPORT DAYLILY SOCIETY ANNUAL SHOW & SALE, 1-4pm, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 501 Willow Dr, Lake Jackson, nfreshr@aol.com

TUES. MAY 12: PLUMERIA IN THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS by NICOLE TIERRMAN, 7-9 pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org

SAT., MAY 16: PLUMERIA by JIM MAAS, & LORETTA OSTEEN, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SAT., MAY 16: LONE STAR DAYLILY SOCIETY SHOW & PLANT SALE, sale, 10am-4pm, show 1-4pm, Epiphany Lutheran Church, 5515 West Broadway, Pearland. sandra_lockhart@ymail.com

SAT.-SUN: MAY 16-17: BROMELIAD SOCIETY HOUSTON SPRING THE DECADE OF BROMELIADS SHOW & SALE, Sat.: Sale 9am-5pm, Show 2-5pm. Sun.: both 11am-4pm, Judson Robinson Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Dr. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

SAT., MAY 23: MINIATURE FAIRY GARDEN by JIM MAAS, PAT CORDRAY & BRENDA HESSE, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$45. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

SAT., JUN. 13: 14" METAL HANGING BASKET by JIM MAAS, & PAT CORDRAY, 10am, Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

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

For event submission rules, see top of calendar
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.

