



# LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



**Apr. 24, 2020 - Issue # 336**

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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](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net)



## GARDENERS SHARE THEIR TREASURES

*"A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust."*

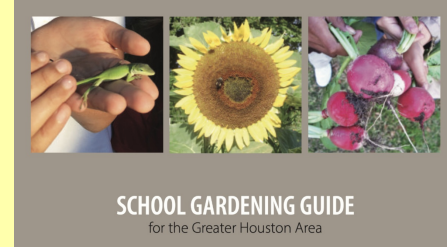
-- Gertrude Jekyll

**by BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

**IRONIC, ISN'T IT**, that the same reason we were forced to cancel all April 22, 2020 Earth Day celebrations has now triggered enormous benefits to our planet in the form of very visible reduced air pollution, clear waters and more?

**HERE'S ANOTHER SILVER LINING**, Thanks

to [Urban Harvest](#), one of this area's most valuable assets. This horticultural educational organization (a prime supporter of community gardens) is now offering free -- to everyone -- its "**SCHOOL GARDENING GUIDE**." This information-packed downloadable manual not only addresses the most effective ways to create an edible garden (for adults as well as children), it lists area-specific time guides, best varieties to plant, and a host of other incredible, time-tested recommendations and precautions specifically for our area.



Again, you don't have to donate to download the [free manual](#).

But PLEASE do so if you possibly can. This manual is usually part of a much-needed revenue source for Urban Harvest. Use this link: [free manual](#)

\* \* \*

**ANOTHER SILVER LINING**, thanks to readers, are all the right-this-minute-spectacular bloomers submitted to us. I'm learning about new varieties I've never seen before.

Good example, **JEAN FEFER's** Chirita (or Primulina), right, a cousin of African violets.

Jean, well known for her Bible Garden and plant propagation lectures, found this Chirita at Mike Lowery's [Another Place in Time](#). She particularly likes this specific one's slightly red variegation.

Although these are easy to propagate, they do grow very slowly. Jean's is in a hanging basket and does need winter protection.



\* \* \*



**ED HOLLAND's** 3-years-old poinsettia looked like this (left above) not long ago. As he's learned from decades of growing poinsettias in his Memorial area landscape, pruning these (center photo) after colorful red leaves fade encourages thicker, stronger growth on the mother plant. Easily-rooted cuttings (top right) are another reward.



Ed potted nun's orchids, at right, live outside until they bloom. Then, he says, the fragrance is so wonderful, he moves them inside. Amazing thing is, they're always in bloom on Easter Day, no matter when the date actually falls.



\* \* \*

**HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL!** [Houston Botanic Garden](#) is still planning a fall Grand Opening, even though our ongoing pandemic has triggered severe cuts in its fundraising efforts. Work is progressing on many unique focal garden fronts at the former 132-acre Glenbrook Golf Course site on Sims Bayou, just across the Gulf Freeway from Hobby Airport.. [Map](#). Among plantings that have staffers excited are:



- **CORKSCREW VINE** (*Vigna caracalla*), above left, a fascinating beauty in the Vine Collection
- **MEXICAN SUGAR MAPLES** (*Acer saccharum* 'Skutchii'), above right. Seven of these rare specimens are now in HBG's Upland Forest as part of a cooperative study with [Dr. David Creech at the Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches](#).

More delights and ways to support this garden can be found at [hbg.org](http://hbg.org). Do yourself a favor. Sign up for the free [Houston Botanic Garden newsletter](#) to keep up with this exciting new venue.

\* \* \*

#### PEONY EMAILS STILL COMING!

**KAYE COREY**, a big fan (me, too!) of [Southern Living's Grumpy Gardener column](#), recalls author **STEVE BENDER** writing once that to grow peonies in the South, you should weekly dump a big bag of ice on the roots. Kaye asked if **GAYE HAMMOND** (profiled in [last week's](#)



[newsletter](#)) did this to get her peony to bloom in Houston?

After I stopped laughing, I contacted Gaye who said she definitely did NOT do this! And Steve himself elaborated, *"The ice thing was really tongue-in-cheek. I would never do it, but some people swear by it, so I thought I'd give them some love!"*



I can identify! In the '80s, I interviewed a gardener who watered her bearded iris all summer with ice cubes! She succeeded in getting blooms, but nothing like she was accustomed to "up nawth." After a few years, she gave up on these magnificent-but-normally-heat-intolerant "northern" bloomers. ***But that's not the end of the story . . .***

Fast forward to a mere 20+ years ago when **DR. BOB RANDALL** (co-founder of Urban Harvest) planted bearded iris in his SW Houston garden. They've been blooming beautifully ever since.

Bob writes: *"Ours are a lovely violet, but also sometimes white . . . and one this spring (at right) half white and half violet . . . perhaps the bicolor is a seedling of a purple and white? All are in well drained beds that don't get irrigation."*



**BOB'S NOTE ABOVE SHOULD INTEREST DALE PHILLIPS . . .**

Dale's normally solid snow white Shirley Temple hibiscus suddenly produced this single "split" pink/white bloom. Quite a surprise! He does have a pink hibiscus about 25 ft. away. Could they have crossed?

**PAT MERRITT**, one of our most respected hibiscus authorities, doubts it. Sports, (genetic mutations on an existing plant) are not unusual among hibiscus. Far more likely, Pat says, this is due to a case of unstable genes. In fact, she said, it's not unusual for a hibiscus to throw multiple totally different sports.

**"UNLOCK YOUR INNER ARTIST" . . . League City Garden Club is encouraging everyone of all ages to "Unlock Your Inner Artist" with an art contest featuring backyard drawings, etc., of trees, flowers, butterflies and other wildlife. Details: [leaguecitygardenclub.org](http://leaguecitygardenclub.org)**

\* \* \*

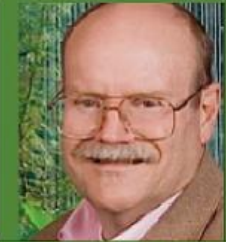
**"LAZY GARDENER SPEAKER LIST" & "PUBLICITY BOOK LET"**

**are free — email request to: [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)**

**Brenda's column in the LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER**



## John's Corner . . .



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *Since we're all spending a lot of time now staring at our yards, by a special request, John's rerunning this great satire from 2019.*

# How to Grow Weeds

The plants we call weeds have a role in nature. This means they have a purpose and that purpose is most often to fix soil problems. To ensure we have a good supply of weeds in our gardens and lawns, we need to use bad soil or mess up the soil that we have and turn it into dirt.

The plants we often call weeds love soils (really just dirt) that are full of bacteria and very little fungi. So how can we create dirt full of bacteria?

One of the best ways is to apply a full spectrum fungicide. Healthy soil can have up to 3,000 species of fungi in a tablespoon of soil. A broad-spectrum fungicide will kill all or most of these good guys. To ensure we do a thorough job it is best to reapply the fungicide several times.

Step two is to apply a glyphosate-based herbicide like Round-Up. Glyphosate is broken down by bacteria hence it creates an explosion of bacteria in the soil that weeds love. This is why weed problems tend to become worse after using these type herbicide products. As a bonus, glyphosate also acts as a mineral chelator, and minerals such as calcium, zinc, copper, and manganese act as cofactors in many enzymes. This mineral suppression opens the plant up to disease, especially our perennials which again selects to make a better dirt for weeds to grow.

Step three is to reduce the oxygen levels in the soil as bacteria can live in low oxygen levels where the good guys -- like beneficial fungi, microarthropods, earthworms, etc. -- cannot live. One of the best ways to do this is to apply an artificial fertilizer. All artificial fertilizers are chemically salts.

To use an analogy, what happens to a pair of pliers left out in the rain and dew for a few weeks? It becomes locked up (frozen) as the salt called iron oxide or rust is formed. Similarly, the salts in artificial fertilizers can lock up soil particles forming hardpan that prevents oxygen and water from entering the soil.

Another benefit of these salts is that they often kill earthworms. Earthworms aerate the soil, just the opposite of what is required for a good crop of weeds. Additionally, many species of earthworms eat weed seeds! How can we have a

good crop of weeds if we let their seeds be eaten and destroyed. Note: Another way to get rid of these pesky earthworms is to apply a pesticide as many of them also kill earthworms.

Another way to help ensure a good crop of weeds is to water regularly and watering daily is best. Water in the dirt fills up the pore space preventing oxygen from being there. Municipal water also has chlorine in it. Many of the soils along the Gulf Coast are high in sodium hence when we water a lot, the sodium (Na) combines with the chlorine (Cl) in the water, forming table salt (NaCl). Note: This salt effect can be increased by using amendments high in salt such as cow manure or poultry manure products which ensure that you are creating conditions to help the weeds grow strong.

As an extra bonus fluoride in the municipal water generally remains in solution and plants are exposed to this chemical by water, air and soil. Fluoride is a poison that accumulates in plant foliage and often leads to toxicity symptoms on sensitive plants. This happens over time thus we may not realize why are plants are getting sick and declining or just die suddenly.

Fluoride strongly inhibits photosynthesis and other processes in many plants. It is absorbed by the roots (or stomata) and moves through the plant accumulating in the leaf margins. A wide variety of plants are fluoride sensitive. A few examples by common name are: apricots, box elder, blueberry, sweet corn, Douglas-fir, gladiolus, grapes, Oregon grape, western larch, peach, pine, plum, blue spruce, tulip, corn plant, yucca, spider plant, Tahitian bridal veil, liliium spp.

Some of our plants are very fluoride sensitive to as little as 1 ppm in water and a wide variety of plants are subject to fluoride damage which weakens them. However, many common weeds are not sensitive to fluoride which allows the weeds to out-compete our other plants. Hence, make sure those irrigation systems are set to come on every day to ensure the best and highest number of weeds. Watering regularly is also loved by the sedge family of weeds like nutsedge and others like dollar weed. These weeds really appreciate you helping them out.

Healthy fertile productive soils have a carbon to nitrogen ratio (C:N) of 30 to 1 written 30:1. To have a lot of weeds we must prevent this from occurring. One of the best ways to do this is use a dyed mulch (black, red, blue, etc.) on our flower beds. For the dyes to stick it works best on mulch made from old pallets, trash wood, etc. that have a C:N ratio of over 500:1. This helps ensure that required nutrients for healthy plants are tied up and weakens the ornamental plants so they cannot compete against the weeds.





Many companies want you to be successful in growing weeds and want to help you as it helps them also, as it is very profitable for them. Below is an advertisement from a trade magazine that explains why so many companies sell dyed mulch as they take your money and help you kill your plants so one can have a good weed crop.

## COLORED MULCH = INCREASED PROFITS



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Many weeds prefer soil low in nutrients or elements. Weeds like dandelion will not grow very well if at all, or the seed will not even germinate IF the soil has



plenty of available calcium (Ca). This means we should never use products like re-mineralizer or greensand, bone meal, etc. that provide extra calcium in the correct form. Most weeds do not like soils with lots of available nutrients. Another effective way of growing weeds is to never mulch at all. This allows the soil to quickly dry out, soil temperatures to soar which cooks the roots of our ornamental plants greatly stressing and weakening them. Nature hates bare ground hence nature will quickly cover the soil with a good crop of weeds which can easily out compete the stressed plants.

In lawns, one of the best ways to have happy weeds is to cut the grass very short. For example, St. Augustine grass will naturally grow to 15-18 inches tall. When we cut it to 3 inches or less, we stress the grass out which weakens it. As a result, it cannot out compete the weeds. Many species of weeds require sunlight for their seeds to germinate. Cutting the grass short ensures that plenty of sunlight reaches the ground to help the seeds out. If the grass is cut at four inches or higher the blades of St. Augustine are so thick, they block the sunlight from reaching the ground which shades it, preventing the weeds from germinating.

Luckily, most lawn mowers are made for Northern grasses that need to be cut short and can only cut 2-3 inches tall without modifications. Another item that helps the weeds grow in lawns is make sure one uses a dull mower blade. The duller the blade the more it tears and stresses the grass weakening it which makes it easier for weeds to get established. Another benefit of cutting the grass short (lack of leaf surface for photosynthesis) is that the roots of the grass will not go deep into the dirt. For grass to be healthy it needs an even amount of water, when we mow the grass short it reduces the amount of nutrients and water the roots can get, which also weakens the grass and helps the weeds. The grass dries out easily and quits growing very much allowing the weeds to gain the advantage.

As most weeds like poor quality soil or dirt, one should never top dress their lawns or flower beds with a good compost. Also avoid humates at all cost as both of these materials improves the soil and helps the soil become healthy. Most weeds do not like healthy soil. It goes without saying one should never aerate one's soil before topdressing as it allows oxygen to enter the soil and undo the compaction that many weeds like.

For those whom want extra credit there are a few more things one can do to increase the number of weeds one has. A common method of increasing your weed population is to apply nutrient amendments when they are not needed. For example, applying Epson salts (magnesium sulfate) is a common practice. If these elements are not needed as shown by a soil test, this will load the soil with extra magnesium (Mg) changing the calcium to magnesium ratio. This will cause many soils to turn into hardpan full of compaction issues that many weeds love. Similarly applying gypsum (calcium sulfate) when calcium is not needed will also cause soil problems and help many species weeds to grow better.

Another way to increase weeds is to use what is known as ashen mulch. Many companies take coal ash that is full of heavy metals and is extremely alkaline (more alkaline than drain cleaners like Drano) and mix it into their mulch. In a couple days it chemically burns the mulch black. When one applies it to their soil it changes the pH (acidity) making the soil alkaline tying up nutrients so our



plants cannot absorb them. This makes our weeds very happy and they go out and grow wonderfully.

If a gardener follows these guidelines, they are assured of having lots of weeds of many kinds for years to come.

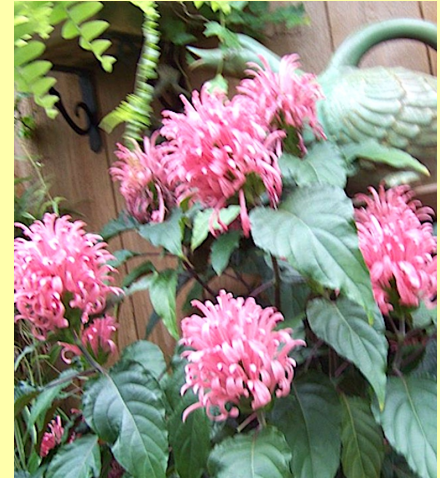
\* \* \*

## HAVE YOU TRIED . . .

### PINK JUSTICA

(*Justicia carnea*)

Also known as Brazilian plume flower, pink justica is a lush, soft-wood, sun-tolerant, shade-loving shrub with thick pink tubular flower clusters early summer to late autumn. A hard pruning in late winter, and regular dead-heading during summer help to promote new blooms.



*This pink justica 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](mailto: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!**

- *droppable-1586288881933* 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](mailto:lazygardener@sbcglobal.net).
- Put group name in email subject.

- **WE ARE REMOVING CANCELLED CALENDAR EVENT AS SOON AS NOTICES COME IN.**
- **CHECK UPDATED CALENDAR BELOW BEFORE ATTENDING ANY PREVIOUSLY-SCHEDULED EVENT, AS WELL AS THOSE STILL LISTED IN**

**CASE OF LAST MINUTE CANCELLATION.**

SAT., MAY 16: LAKE JACKSON GARDEN CLUB ANNUAL SPRING PLANT SALE/GARDENERS FLEA MARKET, 9am –noon, Lake Jackson Civic Center Outside Plaza. 333 Hwy 332 East, Lake Jackson. lakejacksongardenclubtx@gmail.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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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.

