



# LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



**May 1, 2020 - Issue # 337**

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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)



## CELEBRATING "NOW" FLOWERS AND OUR GARDENING ROOTS

*"If you tend to a flower, it will bloom,  
no matter how many weeds surround it."*

— Matshona Dhlwayo

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

Early Native Americans used the moon's stages to track different seasons. An especially neat one, starting now, will peak Sat., May 18: the Full Flower Moon. This annual happening predicted for early tribes the coming of -- among many "fertility" aspects -- numerous flowers coming into full bloom.

Following Native Americans use of "six directions," and the Earth's seasonal

changes, many early white settlers adopted their New World's thousands-of-years-old guidelines to learn grow crops. And many folks still do today. Friday, May 1, they will prune to discourage new growth. Saturday and Sunday, they'll be harvesting above ground crops.

Among other "best days" activities as listed by the [\*Old Farmer's Almanac\*](#):

- [destroy pests and weeds](#) - May 17, May 18, May 19, Jun 14, Jun 15
- [harvest above-ground crops](#) - May 2, May 3, May 29, May 30, Jun 25
- [harvest below-ground crops](#) - May 20, May 21, Jun 7, Jun 8, Jul 14
- [prune to discourage growth](#) - May 8, May 9, Jun 14, Jun 15, Jul 11
- [prune to encourage growth](#) - May 1, May 27, May 28, Jun 23, Jun 24

Of course, these are national guidelines. We have to adjust for the fact that our subtropical region is ahead of the rest of this nation weather-wise. We should celebrate a Full Flower Moon in mid-March! Those early folk were mostly in areas where cold weather (or the threat thereof) kept them from even thinking about planting anything until now.

That's one reason it's been such great fun for me to hear from local readers about "right-now" spectacular bloomers in OUR local yards. I've added some plants mentioned in our [past two issues](#). Color does help in this trying period!

- CHECK OUT THIS GARDENIA! Below, is one of a pair of gardenias on either side of sidewalk steps in the NRG Stadium area. These bloom so reliably. The owner isn't sure exactly what kind they are, although *Gardenia jasminoides 'Veitchii'* has been suggested.

Many gardenias are hard for folks to grow here. They like a slightly acidic soil, much of ours is alkaline. They like to be well drained all the time, we have monsoon rains. These are growing on the slope of raised property.



This owner tucked a delightful little fairy vignette into one of the bushes exciting neighborhood children strolling by with their parents. When the owner mentioned one fairy had disappeared, first one little girl returned with a miniature gnome and the next day someone else added a miniature beehive.

Slowly it became a neighborhood project, with the owner moving the figures around after dark for a new scene each day!

This owner enjoys (and is very successful at) rooting cuttings. Email me for a copy of her rooting instructions: [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)

\* \* \*

**PATTY MCFALL** is  
definitely cheered by two  
of her right-now



bloomers: her yellow Mermaid rose and pink shell ginger. Mermaid's 5" wide, fragrant, summer through fall blooms are made even more prominent by reddish thorny stems



(discourages fence-hoppers!). Evergreen foliage, tolerates part shade. Patty says her shell ginger has grown about 15' high by 12' wide after being cut to the ground just two years ago!

\* \* \*



**INGRID HAMILTON** shares some really great-right-now choices, above, for our area, l to r:

- Angel trumpet
- Magnolia -- a volunteer, from a neighbor's tree's seed!
- Fireman's cap [Erythrina Crista-Galli](#) -- from [Warren's Southern Gardens](#) in Kingwood)
- Pentas -- a favorite of bees!
- Kalanchoes

Thanks to everyone for sharing all these wonderful timely suggestions! I hope these will inspire you to try some you've never grown before.

\* \* \*



**PEONY FANS ABOUND! TOM BARGER** is another Houstonian successfully growing Itoh peonies. His now 5-year-old plants bloom faithfully every spring. A couple even repeat-bloom after being cut back in late Fall. He has a couple of herbaceous ones which, even tho they require more cold, did bloom this spring. Tom's heard of the ice treatment, but hasn't tried it. His 20 peonies are both inground and in pots. He suggests looking for them at [The Arbor Gate](#) in Tomball and [Maas Nursery](#) in Seabrook. (Left above: ['Cora Louise' Itoh Peony from Monrovia website](#))

\* \* \*

## POTPOURRI

- **LOCAL UPDATES ON LOVING OUR NATURAL OUTDOORS:**
  - [HERE IN HOUSTON's Facebook page](#)
  - [ARMAND BAYOU NATURE CENTER](#)

- ["HOUSTON AND NATURE"](#) - Nivien Saleh podcast

- [PLANT IT FORWARD](#) hosts a Fri., May 1, 4:30pm [Facebook Live Farm Tour](#) of its tomato beds with Q&A. This unique nonprofit empowers area refugees with agricultural skills to develop sustainable farming businesses. After 9 years, PIF now boasts 13 well-acclimated farmers earning a living off the land, a success story profiled on Anthony Bourdain's, *"Parts Unknown: Houston."* (10/30/1916). PIF facilitates a weekly Farm Share subscription program, coordinates sales to restaurants and distributors and its farmers direct sales at farm stands and farmers markets.
- **SPEAKING OF FARMERS MARKETS -- GLAD TO HELP PUBLICIZE!**  
During this crises period, Urban Harvest's weekly Saturday Farmers Market is 8am-noon, in St. John's School parking lot, 2752 Buffalo Speedway. 70 local vendors & producers within 180 miles of Houston with Drive-Thru Service for Online Pre-Orders, and Double Up Houston Produce Boxes ("CSAs"). Next market is on May 2. Details: [urbanharvest.org](http://urbanharvest.org).
- SEND NOTICES OF UPCOMING MARKETS TO:  
[lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)
- **WALK AROUND THE YARD!** New research at Cornell University found at little as 10 minutes in a natural setting helped college students feel happier with well-documented reduction of physical and mental stress.
- **WHO WILL SELL US PLANTS?** Oops! The horticultural industry has an age problem: too few upcoming young nursery industry folks to replace the aging ones. More than half the upcoming job openings will go unfilled if projections of younger folks entering the industry continue to be so bleak. Scary when you think horticulture is probably one of the most important careers in terms of saving our planet. Strange, too, since the rate of home gardens [among younger families has increased rapidly in recent years](#) and is still climbing. Available jobs will abound!

\* \* \*

**"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**

**is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener**







(from the [Houston Rose Society Facebook Page](#))

## WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH MY ROSES DURING THE VIRUS EPIDEMIC?

By **BAXTER WILLIAMS**  
American Rose Society  
Master Rosarian

The short answer is “Everything you did before.” The difference is now you have time to do it. Water bushes to maintain turgidity, and feed with good fertilizers, whether manufactured or “natural”. Since they have just bloomed and you have cut away the spent blooms, replenish the nutrients and moisture lost in that cutback.

Now is a great time to rework the soil in beds. Some of us remove aged soil and replace it with new. What better soil than Nature’s Way Resources own “Rose Soil”? Refurbishment is not complete without adding mulch. A 2" deep layer will keep the beds cooler, hold in moisture needed in summer’s heat, and make weeds easy to extract.

I recently removed the landscape timbers bordering two rose beds, took out some bushes, reworked their holes (as above), and put new bushes. Since the grooming took away the spent blooms, the bushes are ready to put out new growth. Now is a good time to “molest” the bushes, while the temporary break in their growth is caused by the grooming.

Consider adding an irrigation system for your garden and, perhaps, lawn. Large, well-grown Hybrid Tea roses need about an inch of water a week in the heat of summer months. Note: Many irrigation systems have controller boxes meant to be installed inside (garages, sheds, or utility rooms). For a little more money you can buy controls that can be mounted outside (in the rain).

Most irrigation water is delivered through underground piping and solenoid valves. Be aware wiring is cheap and easy to install. Use in-house telephone wire, the kind that is run around the baseboards (100-foot Southwire CAT 5E 4-wire cable); costs about \$25. There is no need to buy expensive special “moisture-proof” cables that have extra thick insulation. The 4-wires allow signals to 3 solenoid valves (with one wire being used as a “common”). Solenoid valves cost about \$20 each, and are easily mounted underground in a 10-inch wide plastic box that costs about \$13. Connections are easily made by using 3-M UR squeeze-on connectors that cost about \$15 for a 100-count

box.

Keep 'em watered and disease free, and cut the spent blooms after they begin to deteriorate, and your roses will give you marvelous color from April through November.

*More details are available from the Houston Rose Society  
[houstonrose.org](http://houstonrose.org)*

\* \* \*



## **NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS #117**

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen a huge increase of folks buying our vegetable and rose soil mixes to start their own vegetable gardens. Likewise, in the nursery we have seen a very large increase in folks buying all kinds of vegetable transplants for their Victory gardens. In today's column I want to explore why it is so important to grow as much of our own food as possible.

There was a nice article in the Doctor Mercola newsletter the other day titled:

### **Is It Time to Start Growing Your Own Food?**

- The benefits of growing your own food include the enjoyment of fresh organic produce, getting exercise in the garden and reducing stress.
- Victory gardens were encouraged during WWI and WWII; some are again turning to gardening in response to COVID-19.
- Conventional farms are incentivized by profit: Many are growing crops to be used in processed foods. This potentially contaminates water and air and reduces biodiversity.
- The No. 1 rule for growing nutrient dense food is healthy soil; protect it by diversifying your plants, avoiding tilling and by covering the surface with cover crops or mulch.
- Quality seeds are essential. In small spaces you can grow your plants in pots indoors or on balconies and enjoy nutritious powerhouse sprouts all year long. The full article can be found at: [articles.mercola.com](http://articles.mercola.com)

[A related short video](#) on regenerative agriculture with Dr. Mercola and Gabe Brown an organic farmer from North Dakota who is growing many types of organic crops on less than 20 inches of rain each year. This video illustrates how the modern principles of gardening based on soil biology that we often call organic works so well and saves people money.

**We** have several major issues with the nutrient density of our food supply. As soils became depleted of many nutrients, plants were bred (hybridized) to grow on nutrient or mineral depleted soils. Many of these plants no longer have the ability to absorb the nutrients even if they are present in the soil.

This one reason why many folks are growing heirloom vegetables. Not only do they taste better they tend to have much higher nutrient density.

It is believed that 85-90% of the plants ability to absorb nutrients is controlled by microbes in the soil. This requires a wide range of microbes as each species might be responsible for helping the plant absorb a single element.

For the microbes to help release and collect the elements (nutrients) they must be present in the soil. Lastly as we have been farming the same plots of land for decades, each crop has mined the elements from the minerals in the soil, especially trace, micro and pico amounts of many elements. This is why it is so important to re-mineralize our soils.

The following is an excerpt from an article in Ecological Farming Daily:

### **Nutrient Depletion In Our Food**

Over the last 70 years, the level of every nutrient in almost every kind of food has fallen between 10 and 100 percent. This is an incredibly sobering fact. An individual today would need to consume twice as much meat, three times as much fruit, and four to five times as many vegetables to obtain the same amount of minerals and trace elements available in those same foods in 1940. *Note: Since this study was done there have been an additional 25+ years of declining nutrient density, hence the problems are much worse today.*

Dr. David Thomas (5,6) has provided a comprehensive analysis of historical changes in food composition from tables published by the Australian Medical Research Council, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Fisheries and Foods, and the Food Standards Agency. By comparing data available in 1940 with that in 1991, Thomas demonstrated a substantial loss in mineral and trace element content in every group of food he investigated.

The nutrient depletion summarized in Thomas' review represents a weighted average of mineral and trace element changes in 27 kinds of vegetables and 10 kinds of meat:

#### **5. Mineral Depletion in Vegetables** (1940-1991; average of 27 kinds of vegetables):

Copper – declined by 76%

Calcium – declined by 46%

Iron – declined by 27%

Magnesium – declined by 24%



Potassium – declined by 16%

**6. Mineral Depletion in Meat** (1940-1991; average of 10 kinds of meat):

Copper – declined by 24%

Calcium – declined by 41%

Iron – declined by 54%

Magnesium – declined by 10%

Potassium – declined by 16%

Phosphorus – declined by 28%

Significant mineral and trace element depletion was also recorded in the 17 varieties of fruit and two dairy products tested over the same period (5). The mineral depletion in meat and dairy reflects the fact that animals are consuming plants and/or grains that are themselves minerally depleted.

In addition to the overall decline in nutrient density, Thomas found significant changes in the ratios of minerals to one another. Given that there are critical ratios of minerals and trace elements for optimum physiological function, it is highly likely that these distorted ratios have an impact on human health and well-being (5).

*Remember this study only looked at major and minor elements. Declines in the micro nutrients are far worse.*

I found an interesting bit of trivia in a journal article the other day: “Americans eat one cubic centimeter (~1/4 teaspoon) of plastic each week.” Plastics contain many chemicals that hurt our health from being directly toxic to the disruption of our hormone systems.

Researchers at Virginia Tech University did some tests on watering plants with very slight concentrations of salt and compared them to those watered with no salt. The amount of salt used was 700 times less than the amount of salts found in seawater. They looked at three common salts; calcium chloride ( $\text{CaCl}_2$ ), sodium chloride which is common table salt ( $\text{NaCl}$ ), and potassium chloride ( $\text{KCl}$ ). They found that when soils were irrigated with small amounts of saltwater there was more carbon dioxide released (up to 20% more) than in soils without any salts. This implies that when even small amounts of salt are present the microbes destroy organic matter (humus) in the soil at a faster rate than normal. Humus is critical to have good soil structure and for the soil to hold water till plants need it.

This another reason for gardeners to avoid high salt products (poultry manure products, cow manure, spent mushroom substrate a.k.a. mushroom compost, etc.).

This especially true along the Gulf Coast where we naturally have many soils with high salt levels and that receive additional salts blown in on tropical storms.

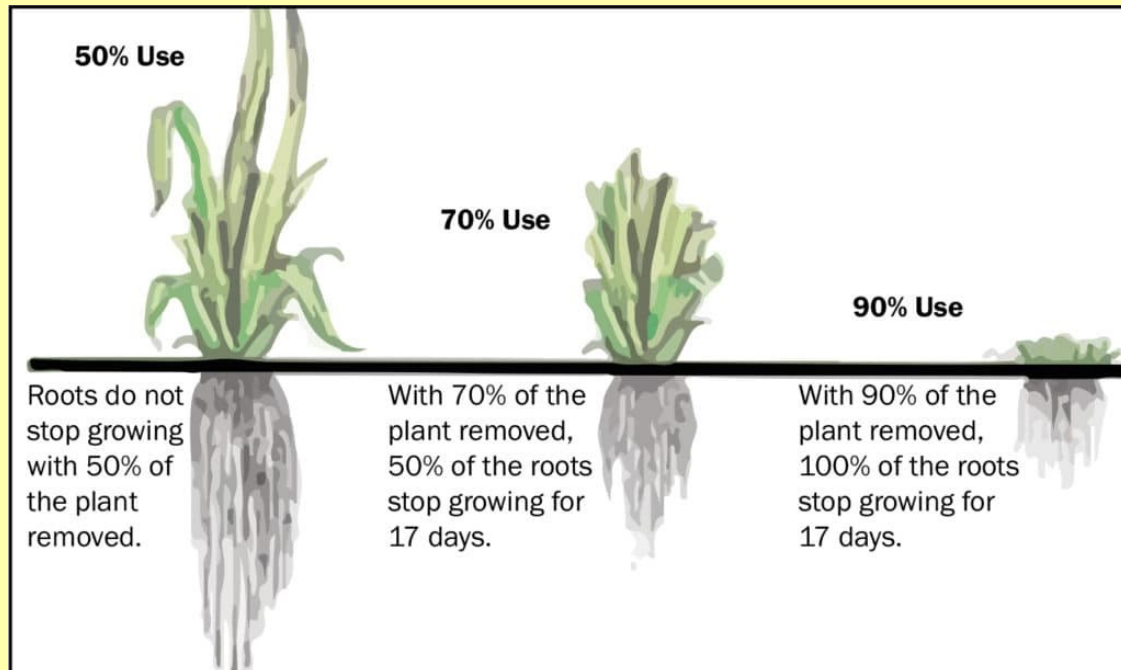
With summer approaching the subject of watering our lawns will become more important. Many folks I know, have not had to water their St. Augustine lawns



since the drought of 2011! Studies from the University of Florida have found that the roots of this grass have the genetic potential to grow 12 feet deep. So, why don't they?

One of the reasons is how the grass is mowed. In nature, depending on the variety, the leaf blades of St. Augustine will grow 12-18 inches long. Hence when we cut it short, say 3 inches or less, we remove too much of the leaf blade (75-95%) needed for good plant health.

As the chart below indicates, the stress of mowing and being cut too short stops the roots from growing deep.



If we want healthy lawns, we need to mow our St. Augustine to a height of a minimum of four inches. Note: Most lawnmowers do not have a setting this tall and will require modification to cut tall.

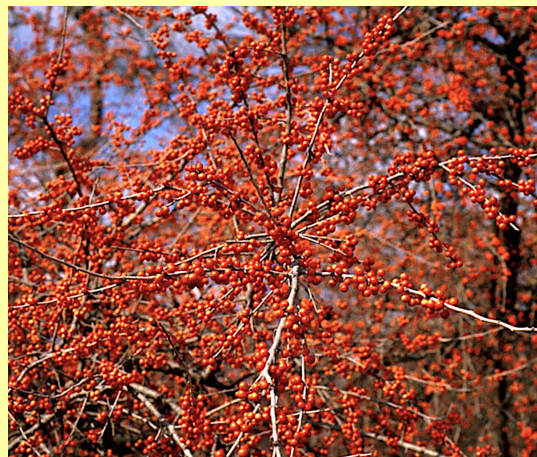
\* \* \*

## HAVE YOU TRIED . .

■

### **POSSUMHAW DECIDUOUS HOLLY** (*Ilex decidua*)

A large shrub/small tree, female possumhaw tolerates our heavy rains as well as extreme droughts, this East Texas deciduous native blazes in fall & spring with red, orange or yellow fruit. 8'-12'+ tall, 6'-10' wide. Attractive to bees, butterflies and/or birds, especially cedar waxwings or robins in spring.



**Possumhaw deciduous holly 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-1586288881933Events 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](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://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 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.

