



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



May 8, 2020 - Issue # 338

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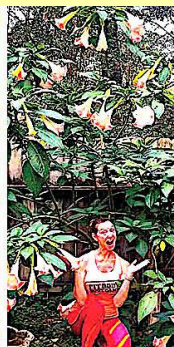
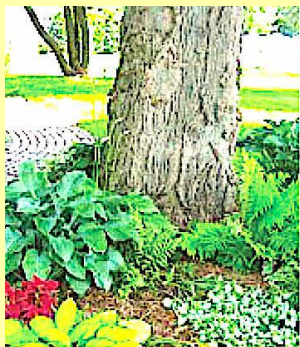
Nature's Way Resources owner John Ferguson, "The Lazy Gardener" Brenda Beust Smith and Pablo Hernandez welcome your feedback and are so grateful to the many horticulturists who contribute their expertise.

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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



'MESSING' WITH ROSES, PLANTING UNDER TREES, MORE 'WOW-NOW' SPECTACULARS

"Nature has a way of evening the odds."

— Anthony T. Hincks

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

Several readers -- who asked NOT to be identified -- want to know exactly what Houston Rose Society stalwart Baxter Williams meant in last week's Spotlight Article: ["What should I do with my roses during the virus epidemic?"](#)

Baxter wrote: *"Now is a good time to 'molest' the bushes, while the temporary break in their growth is caused by the grooming."*

Baxter & I both thank you -- good laughs are more than welcome these days!

Then Baxter explained that his use of the word molest *"...is not a sinister one, just a weird way of expressing that, while roses are 'asleep,' they can be disturbed and pruned/groomed/moved without negative consequences."* And he added:

"Keep 'em watered and disease free, cut spent blooms after they begin to deteriorate, and your roses will give you marvelous color April through November. More details are available from the Houston Rose Society at www.houstonrose.org."

"Acceptable plant abuse" has actually been around a long time. Generations of gardeners *"switched okra," "spanked tomatoes"* and *"shook fruit trees."* I personally knew a nonblooming Seven Sisters antique rose that produced magnificent blooms after being beaten with a broom.

Whether from switching, beating, shaken by hard winds or hands or "molesting," such physical movements loosen a plant's blood vessels that carry sap, intensifying a necessary aspect of bud production. You can actually buy "abusers": [A tree shaker in action](#).

With bisexual plants (like tomatoes) a light, gentle brushing is all it takes to help "share the pollen." Many flowers are bisexual: both male and female reproductive structures present. Who else would tell you these things?

For most plants, wind is vital to good health. No wind (or human intervention) during key growth phases may stunt developmental maturity. That's a very simplified view of a very complex aspect of Nature. But failure to produce fruit, flowers, etc., would mean no seed, no offspring, no continuation of the species.

Have you ever noticed how, after we have exceptionally bad hurricanes or even windy storms, flowers seem to bloom more than usual? One of my favorite Southern garden celebrities, Felder Rushing, explains "beatings" (whether by you or another force) trigger the release of the plant hormone "traumatin" (similar to our adrenalin) which, in turn, stimulates new growth and buds. Nature at work!

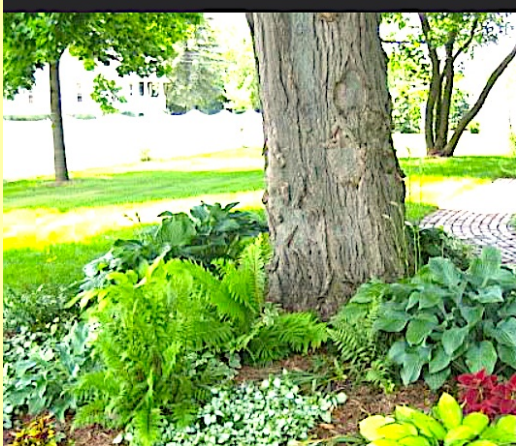
"Mechanical perturbation" (the scientific name) can be tricky, tho. You don't want to break branches or traumatize the plant. And, as many authorities advise, it's best to do it at night. That's so the neighbors don't see you.

PS. We never whipped okra, but learned the hard way it has to be harvested on time or you'll have grown some mighty fine tent stakes.

* * *

GARDENING UNDER TREES

Much as we love our trees, they can pose a problem underneath. No grass will grow in heavy shade. St. Augustine is



our most shade-tolerant grass but, it too, wants SOME sun.

First & foremost: never compromise your trees. They take too long to grow, they're too valuable and so hard to replace.

They're also bullies who will consume all the nutrients and moisture they can. They don't like to have their roots disturbed. But they will tolerate subtle, slow root-intertwining with many other

plants. You just have to find the right "intertwiners" for your trees.

If you've tried and failed growing grass or other plants under trees, how about a new approach? Now is the perfect time to do this. First . . .

1. Watch the tree area closely for a week or longer's better. Shade is not uniform all day, or year-round. Mornings may be brighter on one side than the other. Sunny patches are usually found somewhere. Note deepest shade.

This will help determine which plants to put where. Early morning and late evening sun usually comes in at an angle. That's often enough for "partial sun" plants. Our late afternoon/evening sun, even angled, is still strong enough in summer enough for some "full sun" plants. Once you know generally how the sun lies . . .

2. Border the "dead" area under trees with a hose. Irregular curved lines look more natural and "professionally planned" than do straight lines. But that's just a personal choice.

3. Mow around the "hose border." Make any necessary adjustments so mowing will be as easy as possible.

4. Replace the hose border with rocks, bricks, clumping plants, landscape timbers -- anything that will keep grass from growing in there.

5. Fill the enclosed area with no more than 2 inches of good soil. Any more and you run the risk of harming the tree by cutting off too much oxygen. It may work, but the risk is too great. Then fill the enclosed area with the tree's own leaves. These will not cut off oxygen to the roots and are its very best fertilizer. That's how Nature does it.

6. Instead of planting in the ground or in regular pots, insert cylinders at least 6-8" deep and around 8-12" wide, depending on what you decide to plant into the leaves so the bottoms are just sitting on top added soil. If you can't find cylinders, just saw off the black nursery pot bottoms and set them right in. The pots aren't going to show because you're going to cover them with leaves -- or mulch if you don't have enough leaves. (Watch bags set out on curbs by neighbors. That's what I do.)

7. Fill the cylinders with good potting soil, preferably with water-soluble polymers mixed in. Not too many! These swell up, holding water in a form plant roots can access without rotting them. Or moisture-holding potting soil, which

has these already mixed in.

8. Time to pick plants. Best for this to go to your independent neighborhood nurseryman. You want someone who can reliably tell you which plants that can take shade do best in your area.

Pick out a wide variety -- one or two plants of shade-lovers such as azaleas, begonias, caladiums, camellias, chocolate plants, coleus, columbine, gingers, ferns, impatiens, indigofera, ligularia (leopard plant) and paperwhites to name just a few,



Shade-lovers, l to r: cane begonias, chocolate plants, peacock gingers, indigofera and ligularia.

Don't overlook shade-loving vines like, l to r, bleeding heart, clematis, climbing hydrangeas, evergreen wisteria, spreading vinca/periwinkles, star jasmine, rangoon creeper, These will hopefully spread out over your leaves like a groundcover. You can direct the vines' growth in circles around the pot or spread them out any way you like.

Again, at first don't plant a lot of any one thing - one or two plants for a wide variety will give you a chance to see which you like and - **MOST IMPORTANT** - which like you. Tip: in our area, many plants box stores put in their "Houseplant" sections will easily live year-round in gardens. But make sure these go in new soil, not the growing medium they're sold in. It's not good for long term growth.

9. Pile leaves up around the plants, cylinder and all. The mulch will also help them better survive summer heat/drought and winter cold.

10. Water and fertilize right in this cylinder (saving time/energy/money).

By the time the roots reach soil below (the reason you want a cylinder and not just a pot with a hole in it), they will be numerous and strong enough to establish an intimate relationship with the established tree's roots. Your decomposing leaf mulch will help fertilize both tree and plant roots.

When we have our monsoons in spring and fall, your plant roots will have a well-drained dry zone in which to maintain healthy growth. This way too, if some die or you don't like them, you're only replacing a few, not a whole bed!

* * *



- **Fulshear Farmers' Market** — every Saturday, rain or shine, 9am-1pm, 9035 Bois d'Arc Lane @ FM 1093, Fulshear. . Everything is made, grown or produced within a 200 mile radius of Fulshear.
fulshearfarmersmarket.com.

Send Farmers Markets notices to lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com



TWO MORE "WOW-NOW" BLOOMERS! -- INGRID HAMILTON encourages folks to plant morning glories. So easy from seed! She's not sure but this probably the old fashioned Heavenly Blue.



We already spotlighted angel trumpets, but had to post this shot of **TINA COCHRAN's** in The Woodlands. Started in a pot just a few years ago, this treasure is in the ground now and has been blooming since last fall. It does get sunlight but is also shaded by huge pine trees. *Send your Wow-Now bloomers to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com*

PARDON A BIT OF PERSONAL GLEE! My only 4+' angel trumpet can't compete with Ingrid's, but it's a major triumph after 50+ years of failures at our pre-Harvey home on Greens Bayou. Never had a angel trumped survive, much less bloom. This gift last fall from cousin **PENNY BROWN** Is my first success!



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"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



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS #118

Soil biology is critical for good plant growth and health. We now know that perennial plants like shrubs and trees want soils dominated by fungal species. On the other hand, annuals, some grasses and weedy species prefer soils dominated by bacteria.

There is now a new tool for gardeners that allows them to quickly find out information about the microbiology of their soil. The five-minute video below introduces one to this new tool. For years gardeners have used moisture, pH, oxygen meters, etc. to help get the best results from their gardens.

This new technique is quick and inexpensive as compared to sending a soil sample off to a laboratory.

[This video](#) gives a brief discussion of what fungi in soil does, as well as how the microBIOMETER® can help you measure how much fungi you have. Also, it shows how to measure Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Fungi and Saprophytic Fungi by testing at different distances from the rhizosphere.

A study by the University of California published in the journal Cell Systems (April, 2020) has found that microbes living in biofilms have a memory. They discovered that bacteria use what is known as ion channels to communicate with each other (Ions are just an element like calcium or iron that has an electrical charge).

They also found that the bacteria could retain a memory of previous events for a few hours. Researchers stated this could be the first steps in developing a biological based computer.

Many folks I have talked with have expressed frustration in growing bulbs in the Houston area. Often their bad experience is using the wrong varieties for our area. These are typically sold at big box stores or chain garden centers. However, there is one nursery that specializes in bulbs for the Gulf Coast and that is [The Southern Bulb Company](#) owned by Chris Wiesinger.

A great Mother's Day gift for a gardener whom loves bulbs would be his book "The Bulb Hunter" by Chris Wiesinger.

Have you ever noticed that when digging in the garden and a sharp thorn or other item causes a bleeding cut and that it stops quickly?

It has been discovered the reason why by researchers at the University of British Columbia and published in the Journal Blood Advances (April 2020). If you are like me, you are probably wondering what is the link between human

blood and the soil in our gardens? They found that the presence of healthy soil in wounds, activates a blood protein that causes wounds to be sealed off and stop the bleeding.

I remember that when I was in Boy Scouts over 50 years ago, that I was taught as an emergency measure to place soil in a wound to stop bleeding. It turns out that silicates (the most common mineral in soils) activates the blood clotting factor.

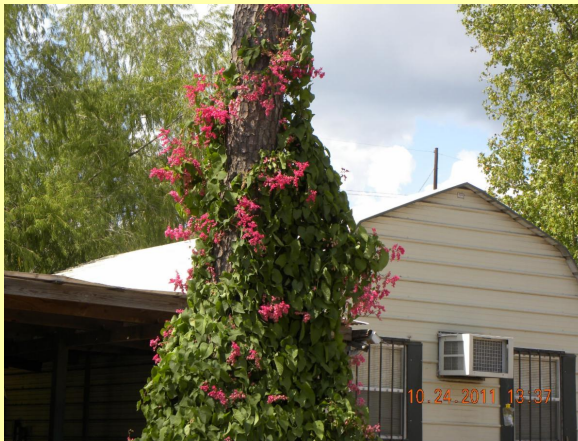
This is another reason to be an organic gardener and have a healthy soil.

Bee populations are in severe decline all over the world. So, what can an urban gardener do to help out?

An international team led by folks at Penn State University has found that flowering trees, shrubs and woody vines are among the top food sources for bees in urban environments (Journal Ecosphere April 2020). They found that members of the maples, oaks and willows were the most important spring pollen sources.

One of my favorite bee plants is the Coral Vine (*Antigonon leptopus*) which is native to Mexico but grows extremely well along the Gulf Coast. This vine is a perennial, grows fast, no disease or pest problems, drought and weather tolerant. It blooms from late spring through the summer and well into fall. It is covered with beautiful pink flowers that can be a show stopper. It will grow up a pine tree or quickly cover an arbor or fence.

It is also a bee magnet, as they love this plant. Sometimes the bees are so numerous one can hear a steady soft buzz from all the wings.



The pictures are from outside of our sales office a few years back. We have them growing at several locations on the property as they are so beautiful and beneficial.

Researchers at the University of California have discovered that some bacteria have the ability to collect water by digesting rock, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (April 2020).

They found that in rocks made up of gypsum which is the mineral calcium sulfate combined with a few molecules of water in its crystal structure. It has

the chemical formula $\text{CaSO}_4 + 2 \text{H}_2\text{O}$. Ca is the symbol for calcium, S is sulfur, O is oxygen, SO_4 together is called sulfate, and everyone recognizes H_2O as the symbol for water.

These microbes have evolved to secrete acids that allow them to remove the water molecules from the rock and use them as their source of water. By removing the water molecules, it changes the rock from gypsum to a rock with a different crystal structure called anhydrite. God's creation continues to amaze me.

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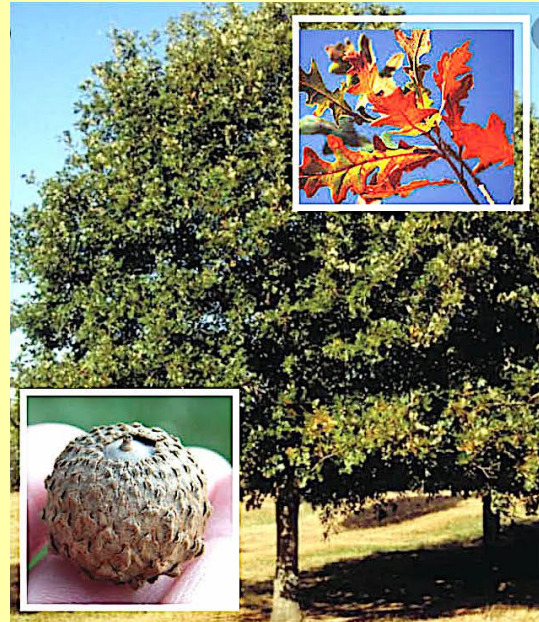
HAVE YOU TRIED . .

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OAK, OVERCUP

(Quercus lyrata)

This native deciduous tree has a short trunk, an open, irregularly rounded crown and light gray bark with rich yellow/red/brown fall color. It's so named for the way the acorn is almost entirely enclosed in a scaly cup. 45'-70', easy to transplant, tolerates most soil conditions in partial shade to full sun. Often planted as an ornamental, to improve wildlife habitat and for bottomland restoration. Overcup oaks can withstand significant flooding and poorly drained soils and are tolerant to drought and cold, but grows as easily on sites with better drainage and soil texture.



Overcup oak 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!

- 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.
- 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., 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.

