



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Dec-11-2020 | Issue 368

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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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Nature's Way Resources will accept Christmas trees from home owners for recycling at no charge. They must be not be flocked or have tinsel on them and Christmas tree stands should be removed.

CORONAVIRUS CANCELLATIONS

If your event in our calendar below is cancelled, please let us know as soon as possible at lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

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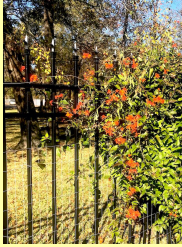
WANTED: FLOWERS THAT LAUGH AT THE COLD — BOTTLE TREES & POINSETTIAS

*"It's been a too long time / With no peace of mind
And I'm ready for the times / To get better"*

— Allen Reynolds "Ready for the Times to Get Better," sung by Crystal Gayle

by BRENDA BEUST SMITH

IF YOU STILL HAVE COLOR after these recent light freezes



(covered plants don't count!), I'm jealous. About all I have left are one Mexican flame vine and the amazing Montezuma Crown orchid in a hanging basket ([Epidendrum - pictured last week](#)). My other Mexican flame vine (in almost identical situation) is a mass of brown popcorn. Everything will return, of course.

At least my Yuletide camellia, covered with buds, is almost guaranteed to be in bloom on Christmas Day, (*More on camellias next week*). In the meantime, this yard definitely needs more flowers that bloom December through Spring. So keep sending in reports on not-protected, still-blooming plants.

- **JEFF HEILERS**, Mercer Botanic Garden's horticultural operations coordinator, is enthusiastic about *Penstemon* 'Cha Cha Cherry' blooming nicely now and may be a good spring bloomer. Bright red, tubular flower spikes on bushy, compact green foliage. (*Kim Hammond photo*)



- **SANDRA NICHOLS** in Clear Lake reported her (not-covered) pink pentas were unfazed by recent light freezes. Anyone in the northern reaches have pentas still blooming?



Sandra also chimed in on [last week's underprunning](#) to create "trees" out of "willing" shrubs. Spreading lower branches of Sandra's hummingbird bush (pictured here with her pentas) were a problem in her small backyard. She decided to try creating a hummingbird bush "tree" like one she saw at Rockford, TX's annual [HummerBird Celebration](#). Now Sandra has plenty of flowers for hummingbirds and also sees cardinals, mockingbirds and chickadees on lower trunks. ([Rockport's 2021 Festival](#) is tentatively scheduled for Sept. 16-19, 2021)

* * *



'WOW NOW' BACKSTORY — BETTY SIRMONS is very attached to her gorgeous ginger, *Hedychium* 'Elizabeth' (even though her 'Betty' isn't a nickname for Elizabeth). Turns out the hybridizer of this unusually tall-growing (up to 9') beauty is none other than renowned Florida ginger expert Tom Wood. And "Elizabeth"? His girlfriend, Elizabeth Forrester -- probably, he adds, to the dismay of British friends who thought he named it after the queen! If you're really into gingers, check out Tom's digital book, "*Hedychium The Gingerlilies*." Email Tom for details: gingers@gator.net.

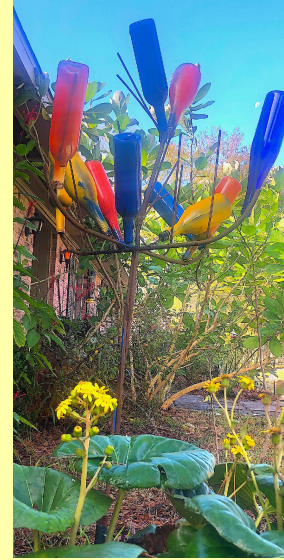
* * *

DALLIE SMITH in Waller asked if bottle trees are still "in style." She can't find a stand. I don't keep up with "styles," Dallie, but I bought my bottletree stand (pictured) decades ago at Joshua's Native plants. And I do believe it protects

plants by keeping "haints" away. ([Rest of story](#)).

As Felder Rushing explains "...*bottle trees are concepts — not recipes.*" Some say bottles must be "haint blue" (pale blue/green). But most you'll see are cobalt blue. (Anyone know why?) I prefer multi-colors (use Rust-Oleum spray), but had no blue paint so left that out. Bad idea. A nearby young pink magnolia died. I added blue and planted a tractor seat plant (*Farfugium*) instead. It's thriving! Who's to say? It also laughed at our mild freezes.

* * *



FREE! "URBAN HARVEST WINTER PLANTING GUIDE" (downloaded pdf) is available. Now is our

time to plant arugula, garlic cloves, kale, onions, radishes and sorrel. And seeds of beets, carrots, lettuce, rutabaga, spinach and turnips. The Guide also includes Feb. and Mar. plantings, along with Urban Harvest classes, and Farmers Market info. Over 135 area community gardens are affiliated with Urban Harvest, including 65 in ['urban food deserts'](#) that really need your help. Want to get more bang for your Christmas charity-giving bucks? Join and support [Urban Harvest](#).

* * *

POTPOURRI:

- **GARDENING TRENDS FOR 2021** You can guess most of them: vertical gardens, working with-not-against nature, edibles, do-it-yourselfs, lower maintenance, etc. But one did surprised me: Houseplants. And that Amazon's best seller indoor plant is the Christmas cactus. I've only ever kept one alive for any length of time. After it bloomed, I stuck it in a remote dry shady spot and forgot about it. In November, something pink peaked through other foliage. It was my Christmas cactus, covered with buds and blooms! Just like Olivia Walton's! Lovely for a while. Then it died.
- **NATIVE PLANT GARDEN GRANT TIME** -- If you're involved in an existing or upcoming Monarch project using natives in a public/school space, grant applications for the Native Plant Society of Texas's annual "2020-2021 Bring Back the Monarchs to Texas" projects are now being accepted. [Rules](#). Deadline: Feb. 15, 2021. (830.997.9272 or state@npsot.org.) ([Local NPSOT chapters](#))
- **DON'T WANT FOLKS CALLING YOU 'LAZY'?** **ROBERT HAMM** has another great moniker: "Self-Paced Gardener." I love it!



LAST CHRISTMAS I gave a beautiful poinsettia to a treasured relative. She smiled & said, "*Brenda, this is fake.*" It was! In my



defense I had repeatedly checked two adjacent sale displays, one real, one fake. Left, returned, picked prettiest one. Fooled me completely. Be careful! Fake ones look REALLY good these days.

DONNA ZAPATKA TO THE RESCUE

I don't want to leave you thinking about what an idiot I am! So here's an encouraging report from Donna in Atascocita. She planted these two poinsettias (pictured) in February in a shady spot behind her garage — two years ago for the pink one and this past spring for the red one. She never fertilized, watered when planted but not since. They are right next to her compost pile. Both have colored up beautifully right on schedule! PS. I love this! — Donna's plants were never inside. She uses fake ones indoor to avoid past-messes with dropped leaves!



*Brenda's LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER
column is based on her 40+ years as Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener
Email: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com*

John's
Corner . . .



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 139

Researchers at Penn State did a study to find where the fungal pathogen *Colletotrichum fioriniae* comes from. This fungus causes the disease known as anthracnose in over 100 species of fruit and vegetable plants from apples to strawberries. This fungus thrives in warm and humid conditions like we have along the Gulf coast.

Previously it was thought that the disease survives on the leaves of infected plants. What they discovered was that this fungus was present in at least 24 species of forest plants, however it did not cause any disease. This finding explains why just pruning off diseased (infected) wood does not work as a control method. Journal of Phytopathology 2020.

I suspect that plants grown in organic soils full of microbes and trace elements (minerals) like that found in a forest, are naturally resistant to this disease. Organic apple growers have far less and issue with this disease than those using chemicals and artificial fertilizers.

We often talk about trace elements in this column. A paper in the journal Nature's Communications (2020) was on the element uranium (U). Very small amounts of uranium have been found in human bones as well as plants, microbes and animals.

When uranium is in the +6 electrical state it is highly soluble in water and can spread through the ecosystem. When in the +4 state it is not as soluble. They found the presence of the mineral magnetite helped convert uranium from +6 to the +4 electrical state. This was done by the formation of small wires only 1-2 nanometers in size (1-2 billionths of a meter).

What interests me is "Why does the body store uranium in our bones as the body has an elaborate mechanism to remove heavy metals from our body"?

A few years ago, we did a study on all 79 elements found in the human body and uranium was not one of them. At the same time the element Europium (Eu) had no known biological role. Europium is not easily absorbed by plants hence very little gets into the food chain. However, a couple laboratory studies on animals fed diets with *Europium increased their lifespan by 100%*.

Research from Ludwig-Maximilians-University published in the journal ChemBioChem (2018) has found the bacterium *Methylophilum fumariolicum* uses europium to make an enzyme that converts methanol into formaldehyde. Its active site consists of the cofactor PQQ (pyrroloquinoline quinone) which is critical for many biological functions from microbes to humans.

Members of the *Carya* family (hickories and pecans) often have 16 ppm of this element (IF it is in the soil).

We are still in our infancy of learning how the body uses trace elements hence always a good reason to Re-mineralize your soil. This element is found in mineral sands of igneous rocks. This is why the Re-mineralizer product from Nature's Way Resources has granite and basalt sand (both igneous rocks) along with greensand in it to ensure all the trace elements are present.

Benefits of Re-mineralization of one's soil:

- Provides slow, natural release of elements and trace minerals.
- Increases a plants resistance to insects, disease, frost and drought.
- Increase the nutrient intake of plants.
- Increase yields and increases Brix reading.
- Increases growth rate and diversity of microorganisms.
- Increases earthworm activity.
- Speeds up formation of the humus complex in soil.
- Prevents soil erosion.
- Increases the carbon storage rate and capacity of soils.
- Increases nutrient density of food crops.
- Enhances flavor of crops.
- Reduces weed problems.
- Rebalances soil pH.
- Makes organic fertilizers work more efficiently.

Speaking of nutrients and trace elements, over the past year there have been numerous studies released on protecting oneself from COVID-19 by nutrition. At the gym the other day while warming up on the treadmill, I saw a new commercial for a vitamin package with extra vitamins D and C, and the trace minerals magnesium and zinc for immune system support. These are the same nutrients given President Trump when he had COVID-19 and recommended by many doctors to protect oneself from this virus.

Note: Consuming foods with glyphosate (the active ingredient of the herbicide Round Up) on them prevents this from working as it prevents the absorption of these essential elements from the food one eats. Genetically modified foods (GMO's) have the highest level of contamination. Another reason to grow one's own food or at least buy organic whenever possible.

For those whom want to learn more about the importance of re-mineralizing our soils there is an organization dedicated to this cause known as "Re-mineralize The Earth"

www.remineralize.org

The Soil Health Institute has a [new film out called "Living Soil"](#) on modern regenerative agriculture and gardening.

Have You Tried . . .

WAFER ASH

(Ptelea trifoliata)

This small ornamental deciduous Texas native is a member of the Citrus Family. Small white flowers May-June and decorative seed discs can last through winter. Food & shelter for many birds, nectar for butterflies. Averages 15' high & wide. Tolerates full sun to part shade, likes to be on the dry side so plant in well-drained spot in this area. Ideal understory tree. Medicinal uses and fruits used in beer as substitute for hops (hence the nickname, hoptree)



*Wafer Ash is carried by Nature's Way Resources ([Map](#)).
Or contact our other sponsors below or your neighborhood
nurseryman for possible sources.*

**LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS
HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER
CALENDAR EVENTS**

All events in Houston unless otherwise specified.

See Farmers Markets at end of calendar

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.*
- **FARMERS MARKETS** -- Normally we do not run non-gardening/plant events. During this pandemic, when most gardening events have been cancelled, we are happy to publish a running list of local Farmers Markets. See at end of calendar.

Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com.

PLEASE ALWAYS put group's FULL name in email subject.

CHECK WEBSITES FOR ON-SITE COVID-19-RELATED PRECAUTIONS!

SAT., DEC 12: CHAPPELL HILL GARDEN CLUB 2020 CHRISTMAS HOME TOUR, 10am-5pm, Tickets \$20-pre-date/\$25 tour day. Tickets: chappellhillgardenclub.com/home-tour.html

SAT., DEC. 12: HOLIDAY AT THE HOUSTON BOTANIC GARDEN: CELEBRATING NATIONAL POINSETTIA DAY, 9am-5pm, a.m. to 5 p.m., 8210 Park Place Blvd. \$15/adult, \$10/child & student. Tickets: hbg.org/events/holiday-at-the-garden-2020-12-12/

MON., DEC. 14: GET THAT POND GROWING WITH "SLOW" AND "FAST" NATIVE WETLAND SPECIES (virtual), 6:30-8:30pm, free. Clear Lake Chapter - Native Plant Society of Texas event. Register: uhcl.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYvce6ppz0rHtyXDNUhHD7riXQAz3EUIDCP

WED., DEC. 16: HORTICULTURE MYTHS by STEPHEN BRUEGGERHOFF (virtual), 10-10:30am. Free. Harris Copunty Master Gardeners event. Register: eventbrite.com/e/gardening-on-the-gulf-coast-tickets-106812198160

SAT., DEC. 19: THE JOHN FAIREY GARDEN IS HAVE OPEN DAY TOURS, 9am, 10am & 11am, 20599 FM 359 Road, Hempstead. \$10. No reservations needed. figarden.org

2021

THURS., JAN. 14: CREATING MASTERFUL ROSE BEDS (virtual), 7-9pm, free. Houston Rose Society event. global.gotomeeting.com/install/289934037 Access code: 289-934-037. Or: +1(312)757-3121

SAT., JAN. 23, 2021: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FRUIT TREE SALE, 9am-noon, Richard & Meg Weekley Park, 19110 Longenbaugh, Cypress. hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/

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LOCAL FARMERS MARKETS

- **URBAN HARVEST FARMERS MARKET**, Saturdays, 8am-noon, in St. John's School parking lot, 2752 Buffalo Speedway.
- **FULSHEAR FARMERS MARKET** Saturdays, 9am-1pm, 9035 Bois d'Arc Lane @ FM 1093, Fulshear.
- **THE WOODLANDS FARMERS MARKET AT GROGAN'S MILL**, Saturdays, 8am-noon, Grogan's Mill Shopping Center Parking Lot, 7 Switchbud Pl., The Woodlands
- **BEAUTY'S GARDEN**, Acres Homes Farmers Market Saturday, 10am-2pm, 4333 W Little York Rd.

- **WESTCHASE DISTRICT FARMERS MARKET**, Thursdays, opens 3pm, St. Cyril of Alexandria Catholic Church, 10503 Westheimer Road (at Rogerdale Road, one block west of Beltway 8)
- **MEMORIAL VILLAGE FARMERS MARKET**, Saturdays, 9am-1pm, 10840 Beinhorn Rd.

Although normally we do not run out-of-garden events, during this pandemic period when most gardening events have been cancelled, we are happy to publish a running list of local Farmers Markets.
Send notices to lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com



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 . . .

THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!

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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 -- started in the early '70s as a fun side-, it then ranked as the longest-running, continuously-published local newspaper column in the Greater Houston area.

Brenda's gradual sideways step from reporter into gardening writing -- first as a just-a-fun side Chronicle assignment in the early '70s -- 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 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 Humble, TX, and is married to the 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.

