



Dec-18-2020 | Issue 369

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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.

2020 Nature's Way Resources Holiday Hours

We will close at noon on Thursday, December 24th. Closed Friday, December 25th through Sunday, December 27th. Reopen on Monday, December 28th at 8 am.

Close at noon on Thursday, December 31st. Closed Friday, January 1st. through Sunday, January 3rd. Reopen on Monday, January 4th at 8 am.

We wish everyone a safe and happy holiday.

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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DON'T TELL ME WHEN TO BLOOM!

CAMELLIAS: QUEENS OF THE GARDEN

*"If flowers can teach themselves how to bloom
after winter passes, so can you."*

— Noor Shirazie

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

ONE THING ABOUT GARDENING HERE . . . never say never! Never carve in stone when flowers will or won't bloom. Witness:

- **GRACE ANGELO GIVENS'** angel trumpet may not be the mass of pink blooms it was a few months ago. But then, it should be dormant now. Obviously, it hasn't gotten the message! And ...
- **JOSANNA BRATTIS SMITH's** carolina jessamine obviously isn't satisfied with being one of East Texas earliest, most vibrant spring bloomers. Getting jump on wildflower cousins, I guess.

Probably both are a little tricked by our roller-coaster temps. Or, maybe these ladies are deliberately ignoring their seasonal orders to give us something to smile about these days?

Don't try to trigger blooms if they're not occurring naturally. Let the plant decide what's best now.



* * *

AS PROMISED LAST WEEK, MORE ON CAMELLIAS —Why camellias have slipped in popularity, I don't know. They're beautiful late fall through spring, evergreen the rest of the year, ideal for shady spots and super hardy with the right placement. Their decreased use is definitely our loss.

Could be horticulturists once made it seem they were picky growers by over-emphasizing needed care. But that's not true and their shrinking use is sad for our gardens, especially in shady areas. My now-three-year-old, totally-ignored, now-covered-with-buds 'Yuletide' is testimony to their hardiness. 'Yuletide' (see Ed's camellias below) is almost always in bloom on Christmas day.

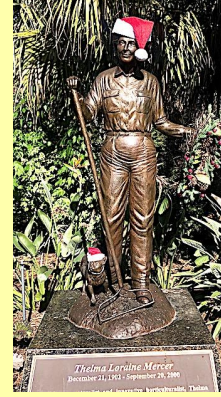
If ever a year existed when we all could use the soul-soothing beauty of these queens of the garden, this is certainly is it and will continue to be. They're lush evergreen shrubs even when not in bloom. Two types do best here (check variety heights when you buy). Plant both for longest bloom span:

- **SASQUANAS** flower mid-fall to early winter (smaller, fragrant blooms)
- **JAPONICAS** flower mid-winter to spring (larger flowers and leaves).

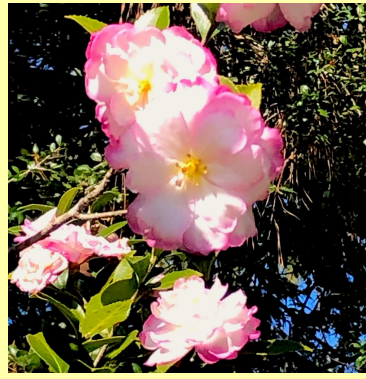
The good news is deer aren't overly-fond of camellias but wintering-over butterflies and hummers definitely are, as were multitudes of bees on many camellia blooms I recently photographed at [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#) in North Harris

County. In Mercer's large collection are camellias planted by garden namesake, Thelma Mercer, whose statue greets you at the public garden's entrance. Thelma, an avid horticulturist, and Charles Mercer settled this land on Cypress Creek in the '40s and sold it to Harris County Pct. 4 in 1974.

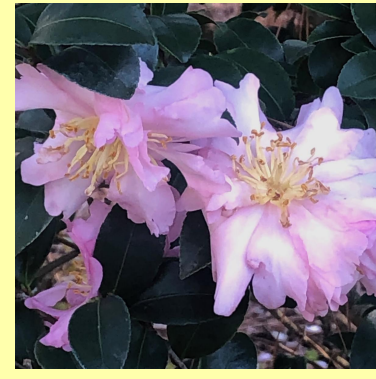
(Brenda Beust Smith photos)



**CAMELLIA JAPONICA
'DESIRE'**



**CAMELLIA SASANQUA
'LESLIE ANN'**



**CAMELLIA SASANQUA
'PINK SNOW'**

[COUSHATTA CAMELLIA SOCIETY](#) based in Conroe is our area's only still active group left from the proliferation of camellia societies when I first started the Lazy Gardener column in the 1970s. Ed Holland, an American Camellia Society Judge and CCS member, warns with camellias . . . *"as with all plants, soil is most important ingredient."* His advice:

- Camellias require about the same care as azaleas, a loamy, acid soil.
- Don't let them dry out and fertilize twice annually with a good acid fertilizer, just after blooming and the first of October.
- Light requirement varies between varieties. Sasanquas are the easiest to grow and have varieties that vary in height and light requirement and make a beautiful year round shrub.

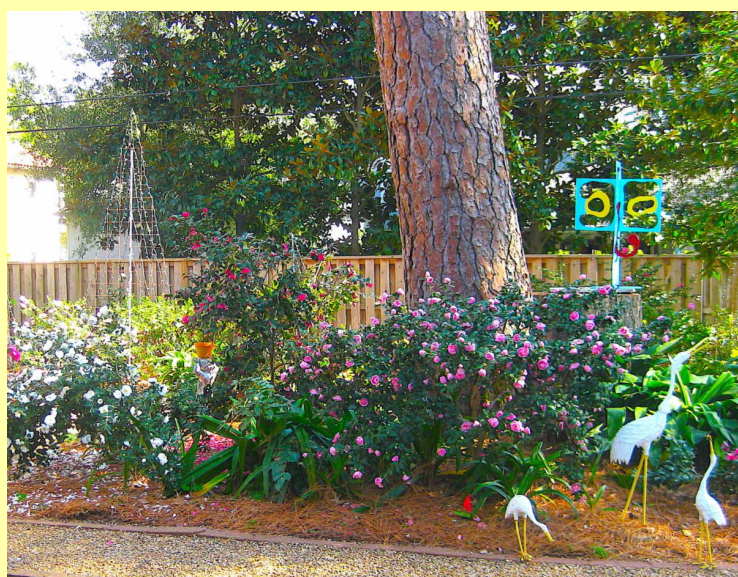
Ed finds camellias easy to grow, using branch-trimming to improve circulation solves problems they might develop and loves the carpets of color provided by falling petals. He and I share a penchant for spotting outdoor plants where they will provide the best viewing from indoors, especially in winter. Below, Ed's photos of just a few of his camellias:



Pink 'Chansonette' in front of a tall, red 'Sparkling Burgundy' (sasanqua)



C. 'Kanjiro' (sasanqua) prolific month bloomer



Above C. 'Yuletide'

Left, white Mine-No-Yuki AKA Snow-On-the-Mountain and pink 'Interlude' (sasanqua)

NOTE: COUSHATTA CAMELLIA SOCIETY'S website should be your first go-to-resource if you've never grown camellias here. Doublecheck any growing advice from other areas with a local source. coushattacamelliasociety.com/

* * *

READERS REPORTS: THANKS TO . . .

- **MARCIA GARDNER (& APOLOGIES TO) FELDER RUSHING!** for quoting some color expert instead of knowing Southerners on [*"haint blue" for bottle trees last week*](#). Felder's [*BOTTLE TREE HISTORY*](#) details what Marcia also graciously pointed out for our readers "...old bottle trees that graced our Mississippi countryside were cobalt blue because they were all Milk of Magnesia bottles! Best way to keep those "Haints" from coming around!" Cobalt blue rules! (Who else would tell you these things?)

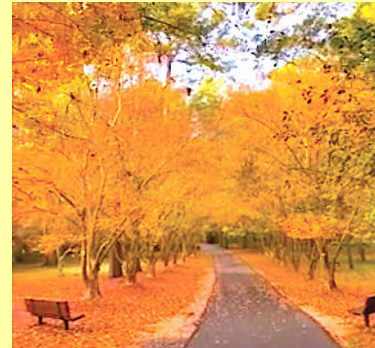


- **DON DUBOIS** for an important P.S. to last week's [*"HAVE YOU TRIED . . . WAFER ASH"*](#) column which, he points out, "is also a host for the giant

swallowtail caterpillar." Lots of folks want to attract this popular butterfly.

UPDATES:

- [Houston Botanic Garden](#) is open for socially distanced outings through holiday season, 7 days a week, 9am-5 pm. 8210 Park Place Blvd, \$12.50-\$15/adults; \$8-\$10/child, students. [713-715-9675](tel:713-715-9675). (Closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day).
- [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#) West Side Arboretum's ["Jake Roberts Maple Collection"](#) is in full fall color. Great isolated walking along West Side Arboretum's 3+ miles of riparian trails. Then cross over Aldine-Westfield to Mercer Botanic Gardens to check out their camellias and other flowers blooming now. Take a pad and pencil to make notes on varieties you'd like in your own garden.



P.S. Sharon Beust Smith (cousin) who saw this notice on [Facebook](#) wondered if Mercer will rake up all these fallen leaves? Mercer's Botanical Collections Curator **Suzanne Chapman** provided the answer:

"No, staff do not mulch or shred the leaves, too much else to do ... some may be blown when they fall on trails, then they will be mow-mulched around the trees, the rest decompose in the woods."

And, she adds, *"I do this at home too...save almost all the leaves and pine needles for free mulch!"*

Good advice for all of us!

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

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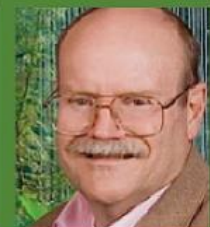
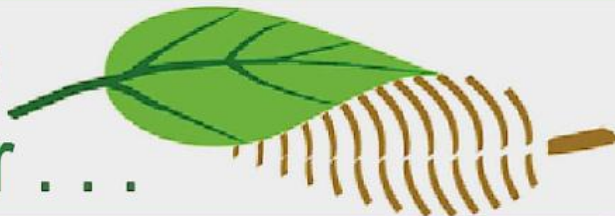


PINES AND PRAIRIES CHAPTER NOW IN PROCESS OF FORMING

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN JOINING US, PLEASE VISIT THE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS WEB PAGE AND GO TO TOP RIGHT CORNER AND CLICK ON RED BOX OR USE LINK BELOW:

<https://npsot.org/wp/join-renew/>

UNDER CHAPTER AFFILIATION CHOOSE "PINES AND PRAIRIES."
THIS CHAPTER WILL SERVE (BUT NOT LIMITED TO) THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY AREA.



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 140

I have had several inquires over the past few months on growing cannabis species. As in all plants, members of the cannabis family grow best in soils full of microbes. They also do best when they are inoculated by mycorrhizal fungi. They also like soils full of trace minerals like those in the Re-mineralizer in addition to a good organic fertilizer like those from Microlife. Hence, a soil that is 33% leaf mold compost, 33% good composted topsoil and 33% washed weed free sand is a great starting point. Then mulch with a good aged (composted) native mulch.

Earthworms love this type of soil and will grow to high numbers in it. Cannabis species are often a target for parasitic nematodes. Earthworms are a natural control of parasitic nematodes as are many species of beneficial fungi that trap and kill the bad nematodes.

Due to the pandemic, there has been a tremendous interest in growing one's own food. I was asked the other day "Why do we need sulfur to grow healthy plants and what is its importance?"

A few years ago, we did a series of articles on all 79 elements found in the human body. Hence here is the article updated with new information on the benefits of having adequate sulfur in the soil. Sulfur is element number 16 on the periodic table.

MINERALS - The Elements and What They Do Part 9

16) Sulfur (S) - Found in igneous rocks at 260 ppm, shale at 2,400 ppm, sandstone at 240 ppm, limestone at 1,200 ppm, fresh water at 3.7 ppm, sea water at 885 ppm, and soil at 700 ppm, marine plants at 12,000 ppm, land plants at 3,400 ppm, marine animals 5,000-19,000 ppm, land animals at 5,000 ppm.

Sulfur is one of the few elements that is found in pure form in nature and has a yellowish color. It is often found in association with salt domes that create many of our oil reservoirs. Sulfur occurs in several forms, however, in nature sulfur is most commonly found and used as the sulfur-oxygen compound known as sulfate (SO_4^{-2}).

The mineral pyrite or iron sulfide (FeS_2) is known as fool's gold, manganese sulfate (MnSO_4) is used as a fertilizer and as a supplement in animal feed, gypsum or calcium sulfate (CaSO_4) is often used to release excess sodium in

clay soils and used in many fertilizer formulations, iron sulfate (FeSO_4) is sometimes used in gardening. When in college I remember when Lake Nacogdoches was being constructed. As the construction crews built the dam, they excavated several hillsides exposing the buried layers. In one of them were beautiful, large (3-5" long), clear crystals of a mineral known as selenite which is calcium sulfate with two water molecules attached.

Sulfur is a basic ingredient of gunpowder, hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) smells like rotten eggs and is dangerous at high concentrations; it is a common ingredient in smog from burning diesel fuel or coal. Sulfur is used in car batteries in the form of sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4). Many of the scents we consider odorous contain sulfur.

Sulfur is found in many enzymes and vitamins, it is a main component of keratin, which composes our hair and nails or feathers. Sulfur is an important structural element used in most proteins and many amino acids. Sulfur is a component of vitamins, coenzymes, thiamin, biotin, lipoic acid and participates in many enzymatic reactions.

Sulfur is found in MSM (Methylsulfonylmethane) found in plants and in animals that reduces inflammation and decreases joint and muscle pain.

Deficiency of sulfur results in degenerative types of arthritis involving cartilage, ligaments, tendons, Systemic Lupus, Sickle cell anemia and various collagen disorders. Sulfur helps detoxify the body, increase blood circulation, reduces muscle cramps and back pain, helps remove inflammation, and helps the body have more energy that is useful.

Sulfur has recently been found to help protect the myelin sheath over nerve endings.

Sulfites, sulfur dioxide (SO_2) and sulfites (SO_3^{-2}) are a common preservatives and antimicrobial agents added to foods and medicines (think wine) as they kill microbes. Sulfites can trigger adverse reactions in sensitive people, from asthma issues to behavior in autistic children, the FDA records that several deaths have occurred to excess sulfites used in foods.

Sulfur is essential for good health: eggs, onions, garlic, and cabbage and other cruciferous vegetables are good sources of sulfur. Nuts and seeds are often good sources on sulfur. However, for proper absorption one also needs high levels of vitamin-C.

The main dietary sources of sulfur include allium and cruciferous vegetables, animal proteins, dairy, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Gardening and Landscaping Problems Associated with Sulfur (S)

In soils up to 90% of sulfur is tightly bound to humus, so SO_4^{-2} is the major exchange anion. It is interesting that soils around the world have carbon to sulfur ratios of 100:1 and most sulfur in soils only occurs in organic forms. Sulfur is a structural component of humic and fulvic acids essential to healthy soils.

Sulfur is considered a primary plant nutrient (.05-1% of a plants tissue contains

sulfur) and it is used by plants only in the sulfate form. Soil microbes are responsible for converting sulfur into a sulfate form that plants can use and then plant roots extract sulfate ions (SO_4^{-2}) from the soil.

Nitrogen fixing plants (legumes) require adequate sulfur for good nodule development. If there is not enough sulfur in the soil or it is out of balance in relation to other elements in the soil, then the plant-microbe system cannot obtain nitrogen from the air and fix it in the soil. All organisms from microbes to earthworms use sulfur in the form of the amino acids (cysteine and methionine) that are used to build proteins.

Plants use a lot of sulfur as it is required in the production of proteins and seeds plus it improves the taste of our foods.

A few plants have been found to emit carbon disulfide (CS_2) from its roots to protect them from parasitic nematodes. Excess sulfates in the soil reduce selenium absorption by plants and can create soils that are too acidic for most plants.

Sulfur is one of the easiest leached of all mineral nutrients and it is easy to mistake a sulfur deficiency as a nitrogen deficiency as well as magnesium, iron or potassium deficiencies. Shortages of sulfur are signaled by sick crops, insect, bacterial and fungal attack, upper leaves may turn yellow, stems stay small and woody, root become long and slender, symptoms often resemble a nitrogen shortage.

Sources: compost, native mulches, molasses, sulfates, gypsum, elemental sulfur, feathers, green sand, fish emulsion.

Note: The Re-mineralizer product is 60% greensand and a natural source of sulfur.

The interest in growing one's own food has increased tremendously as a result of Covid as the best prevention is health nutritious food. The Organic Consumers Association has an informative discussion on why growing our own food is important.

The People's Agenda for Food Democracy

Below is a link to a recorded conversation with Vandana Shiva, Ronnie Cummins, Hans Herren and André Leu as we discuss how the poison cartel and tech billionaires have increased their control over our food systems with GMOs, pesticides and fake highly processed foods. Their push for digital agriculture is an attempt to mine our data and turn it into the next external input. These billionaires are seeking to deregulate corporations and their tech tools while also pushing to increase policing and surveillance of the people. In the same way that Monsanto tried to make seed saving illegal, the poison cartel is now trying to use the pandemic to shut down small farms that produce healthy real food. We need to promote agroecology and organic agriculture to regenerate our food and farming systems and empower people to build truly free, fair and democratic societies. The need for active participation of citizens in shaping Food Democracy, and the duty of governments at all levels to regulate for food democracy and protecting the planet and people has never

been greater.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQTkjsS59IQ&feature=youtu.be>

Another good video on soil regeneration and carbon storage is called '**SOIL CARBON COWBOYS**' and is only 12 minutes long. If one thinks about it, they will find the answer to why grass-fed beef is so nutritious and good for us.

<https://vimeo.com/244995097>

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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. 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/

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 . . .

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an organically based service company

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.

