



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



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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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TREES IN THE NEWS -- ZOMBIES ABOVE, CHALLENGES BELOW

"This would be the most dangerous threat to Texas's tree inventory since the 2011 drought."

--- Diane Cowen, Houston Chronicle Architecture/Home Design Writer

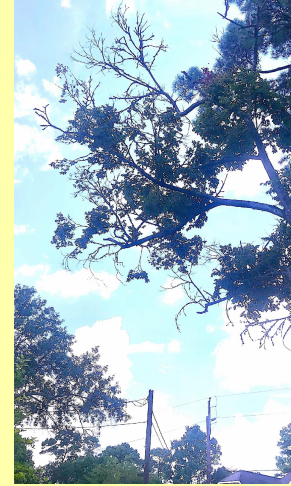
"February's Deadly Freeze Gives Rise to Zombie Trees Across Texas"

by BRENDA BEUST SMITH

Hopefully everyone has read ["February's deadly freeze gives rise to zombie trees across Texas"](#) -- [Diane Cowen](#)'s recent great [July 30 article](#) in the Houston Chronicle. One scary excerpt:

"... Arborists and other tree experts say that in the months to come, the state could lose thousands if not millions of trees ranging from tall Mexican or California fan palms to a wide range of hardwoods such as lace bark elm, Chinese tallow and water oak. This would be

the most dangerous threat to Texas's tree inventory since the 2011 drought."



Diane's full article quotes warnings and advice from area tree experts well worth heeding. Keep an eye on trees as we move through hurricane season, which peaks in mid-September and (supposedly) ends Nov. 30. Extremely brittle dead branches can be easily blown off after this current heat wave.



ANOTHER THREAT: Tree roots must grow deep to balance soaring top growth. During droughts, if only top soil areas are watered, roots may grow upward seeking moisture. Anchor security becomes compromised. Personally, we'll never know if that's why, in 1983, Hurricane Alicia's winds toppled this one (pictured) through our roof and into our bedroom. But that's a real possibility.

* * *

WE NEED HEAT ZONE MAPS! Thanks to **Deb Pavosky** who, in the current [Maas Nursery](#) (Seabrook) newsletter, made great points about "Zone Watching" — a must if shopping online. But it's tricky. To quote Deb:

"Because our temperatures can be SO VERY HOT in late summer and also because we DO NOT COOL OFF very much at night, our Zone 9 is very different from the Zone 9 in, say, California. Again, Zones are based on average lowest winter temps, they don't really take into account that summers can be equally as brutal as winters here and a plant that can handle full sun in zone 9 CA may wither and die here in full sun in August."

Heat Zone maps do exist - google for these. But they're often hard to use. They'll say, eg, that temperatures in Zone 9 *"rise above 89°."* Oh, really?

Prepare to be frustrated. I searched for an Heat Zone Map online that made sense to me. I couldn't find one. Not even the [American Horticultural Society's Heat Zone Map](#) (pdf download with frustrating "89+° range").

It's a problem. Labels on many if not most plants sold today carry the Cold Zones on labels. None list the Heat Zone of a particular variety.

Best decision: buy your plants locally from an independent nurseryman you trust. They want and need your repeat business, so they'll do their best to sell you plants that will succeed in our zones, hot and cold.

CHALLENGES BELOW THE TREES As if Zombie Trees aren't bad enough, a lot of folks share the dilemma faced by League City Garden Club's **Leslie Wong*** who wrote: *"...with older bigger trees cutting off sun and roots sucking nutrients from below, my sun-loving grass and perennials are really suffering."*

St. Augustine is our most shade tolerant grass. If it's not happy, time to look outside the box. Leslie's looking at Asiatic jasmine and dwarf mondo grass, but would like more shade-loving, under-trees suggestions.

Consider ajuga, ardesia, Australian violet, begonias, chocolate plants, ground orchids, holly fern, hostas, hydrangeas, indigo, impatiens, jacobina, lysimachia, white- or purple-flowering oxalis, peacock gingers, pentas, pigeonberry, phlox, plumbago, spring snowflakes, toadflax, torenia, wedelia or wood fern.



L to r, begonias, purple oxalis, torenia, ground orchids, chocolate plant

BEFORE YOU BUY ANYTHING . . . The one thing you DON'T want to do is interfere with or damage your tree's roots. Easy solution:

1. Mark off a 2'-3' minimum-width, "no-plants-collar" around the tree base. Essential microbacterial activity takes place where bark meets soil. Interfere with this vital zone and you might lose your tree.
2. Next, outline your under-tree dead area with a garden hose, etc. Check periodically throughout a sunny day to be sure the outline includes all shaded areas where grass has died or is dying. (Tip: curving borders look more professionally-designed than straight-line borders).
3. Fill area outside the "collar" and inside border with 2"-3" of quality soil. Do NOT exceed this depth.
4. Place 5"- to 6"-deep cylinders -- not pots with full bottoms -- randomly on top added soil. Easy route — use 8+" wide black nursery pots. Slice off bottoms. Set atop already-laid soil and then fill these with soil.
5. Plant in these cylinders.
6. Fill whole area with leaves, pine needles or mulch to keep soil below cooler, more moist, richer as they compost and help hide the cylinders.

New plants' roots will slowly learn to coexist with tree roots. If they don't, replace them. The extra soil in the pots will help keep them healthy & growing until this takes place.

Unless you're sure a specific plant will work, it's a much better idea to plant a few various potential choices in cylinders to see which ones you like but most important, which like you! You can always plant more successes.

Don't overlook shade-loving vines like bleeding heart



(pictured) and ivies. They make beautiful groundcovers and will spread happily around varieties planted in your cylinders. More thoughts:

- Beware of descriptions that say "part shade" or "light shade." Your grass might still be alive in high enough levels of these. Even our reflected sun is very strong. Part/light shade varieties are worth trying, just don't invest a ton of money before seeing if your shade is light/abundant enough.
- Nothing is more frustrating or time-wasting than searching plant shelves or online for plants only to find none on your list.
- Better idea — first consult your local nurseryman to see what he recommends and has in stock. Try one or two of each first. If they don't work, then expand your horizons online and at national chains.

Anyone have any other suggestions for shady-loving low growers you're growing successfully under trees?

* **PS** We'll be hearing more from Leslie Wong about League City's **SAT.**, **SEPT. 25, GARDEN TOUR, "Renaissance in the Garden,"** 10am-4pm, Tickets \$15, Nana's Attic, 501 E. Main, League City, leaguecitygardenclub.org.

* * *

*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*

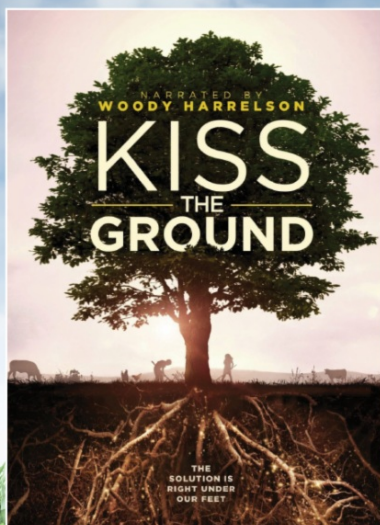
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COMING AUGUST 19TH

A free showing of an exciting new movie about
caring for our home, Earth:

KISS THE GROUND

Spectacular photography, exciting animation, great story telling, noted experts & very motivating. See Mother Earth like never before!



Brought to you by OHBA &
local Fayette county businesses.
A thrilling evening awaits you.

August 19TH • Historic Casino Hall
254 N. Jefferson La Grange, TX 78945

ITINERARY:

5–6 PM Social, Light Refreshments
& Visit Exhibitors

6–7:30 PM Movie Showing, Kiss the Ground

7:30–7:50 PM Panel Discussion with
local experts (optional)

Free but must Register Here as seating
is limited: ohbaonline.org/register

THANK YOU SPONSORS!!



For any event questions please contact Mike Serant mserant@sanjacsupply.com



John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 160

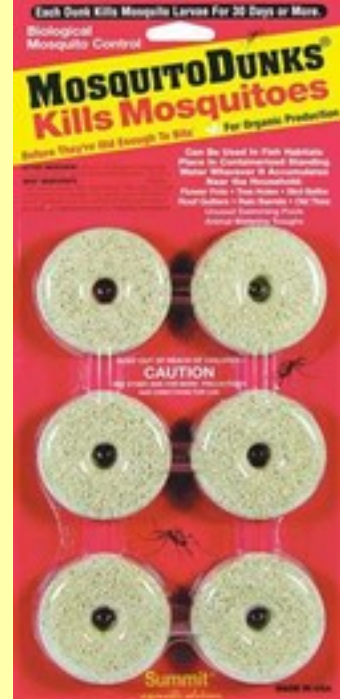
I was listening to a lecture the other day which included a very effective homemade mosquito trap. It works better than misting systems and does not have the environmental consequences. Best of all it is far less costly.

Take a bucket, pail, dishpan or whatever you have and fill with water. Add some old hay or even grass clippings and let sit for a few days.

It will quickly grow protozoa and algae which are food for mosquito larva. Hence it will act like a magnet and encourage all the nearby mosquitos to lay their eggs in it.

After a few days add a piece of a mosquito dunk, the active ingredient in Mosquito Dunks® is *Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies *israelensis* or B.t.i..

A Mosquito Dunk® looks like a small, beige donut which floats on standing water. As the Dunk® slowly dissolves, it releases a bacterium which is toxic to all species of mosquito larvae. Each dunk® covers up to 100 square feet of water, regardless of depth for 30 days or more, hence only a small piece is required for you trap. Periodically, empty the trap and repeat for maximum control.



This summer with all the rain we have had an explosion of slugs and snail in our gardens. On the same lecture it was mentioned that firefly larva eats baby snails and their eggs. They are also predators of several other pests. Spraying for mosquitos and mosquito misting systems kill far more beneficial insects like fire flies than mosquitos, hence increasing total problems in the garden and environment.

As gardeners we are learning how to become more ecologically active in our garden design and care. To encourage stewardship of our lawns and gardens we are seeing more and more incentives.

The same lecture stated that the state of Pennsylvania is offering grants of \$5,000 per acre to replace lawns with native plants. California is offering rebates of \$2 per square foot for every square foot of grass removed. Minnesota is offering homeowners \$400 each to replace lawns with wildflowers and lawn herbs.

The city of San Antonio has also offered residents incentives to plant low water use drought tolerant native plants. Even The Woodlands is offering residents a 50% rebate up to \$300 per home to plant drought tolerant natives.

Speaking of native plants, the Woodlands, Conroe, and Montgomery County area has a new Native Plant Society of Texas chapter called "Pines and Prairies", where one can learn more. www.npsot.org

The Ecological Landscaping Association had a post the other day that I found interesting and spot on titled, "Five Reasons Synthetics Are No Longer Considered Best Practices."

1. Stormwater runoff entrance to water bodies-rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, and the ocean
2. Groundwater contamination
3. Children's health
4. Human health
5. Nonproductive influence on the creation of healthy turf systems that include the plant, the soil, and most importantly, the soil biomass.

For the full article and explanation please see www.ecolandscaping.org

Another article stated that using toxic chemicals is causing \$3 trillion in environmental damage each year. We continue to destroy our soils, pollute our waterways, clear cut our forests, poison our food, etc. It just makes me think of a statement in the bible, "...the earth will wear out".

I have often talked about the importance of growing our own fruits and vegetables. A new study has found that eating meals away from home is significantly associated with increased risk of all-cause mortality. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (2021)

The book I reviewed a few weeks ago does a great job of explaining why this is true.

Metabolical – The Lure and Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition, and Modern Medicine by Robert H. Lustig, MD, MSL, Harper Collins Publisher, 2021, ISBN: 978-0063027718

Speaking of food quality and health, the Environmental Working Group has released their list of the most chemically contaminated foods for 2021, titled "[The Dirty Dozen](#)".

Researchers have discovered that genes from GMO cotton have escaped into the environment changing the DNA of native cotton plants.

One of the escaped genes makes cotton produce less nectar in their flowers hence it no longer attracts ants to protect the plant resulting in more pest issues. In other areas another escaped gene does the opposite causing excess nectar to be produced which causes lots of ants to be attracted preventing bees and other pollinators from doing their work.

These changes were found over a thousand miles away from where the nearest GE cotton was grown. Remember we were promised this could never happen by the USDA and EPA. Science News (2021). Now the same agencies are saying it is safe to modify our own RNA/DNA with vaccines.

The more I study, I understand why some government agencies have unflattering nick names that have showed up in the environmental literature:

FDA – Failure, Deception, and Abuse, or Federal Death Administration

EPA – Enhanced Profit Agency
CDC – Center for Deception & Corruption, or Cancer Development Corporation
or
GMO – God Move Over, you're not needed anymore

Speaking of GMO's, I was dismayed to read that Girl Scout cookies are made with GMO ingredients to increase their profit margins and they do not disclose that to customers. I sure will miss my chocolate Thin Mints.

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

All events in Houston unless otherwise specified.

ADULT GARDENING 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.

Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com.

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

**NOTE: IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT MASKING
POLICIES AT EVENTS, CHECK WITH CONTACTS LISTED**

MON., AUG. 9: GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS (virtual), 10-11:30am, free, Harris County Master Gardeners/Houston Community College event.
Register: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

THURS., AUG 12: "OH #!&* I DID IT TO MYSELF (AND HOW TO FIX IT IF YOU DID)" by **GAYE HAMMOND** (virtual), 7- 9pm, Houston Rose Society/Houston event. Free.
Meeting link on houstonrose.org/

FRI., AUG. 13: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4, 9am & 11am, [Mercer Botanic Gardens](https://www.mercerbogardens.org/). Free. Ages 60+ or anyone age 12+ with transportation needs. Register: 713-274-4160.

SAT., AUG. 14: VIRTUAL CACTI & SUCCULENT SALE, 8am-8pm,
[Themercersociety.square.site](https://themercersociety.square.site). 713-274-4166.

TUES., AUG. 17: GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS (virtual), 11am-noon, free. Harris County Master Gardeners/Harris County Public Library System event. Facebook Live: facebook.com/harriscountypylive

THURS., AUG. 19: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING (virtual) by **PAUL WINSKI**, 10am.
Register: [//homegrown2021Q3.eventbrite.com/](https://homegrown2021Q3.eventbrite.com/)

THURS., AUG. 25: MERCER BOTANIC GARDENS VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION, 6pm-7pm, Timber Lane Community Center. Free. Ages 16+ (12-15 w/adult). Register: 713-274-4160.

FRI., AUG. 27: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4, 9am & 11am, [Mercer Botanic Gardens](https://www.mercerbogardens.org/).

Free. Ages 60+ or anyone age 12+ with transportation needs. Register: 713-274-4160.

WED., SEPT. 1: LESSONS LEARNED FOLLOWING FEBRUARY 2021 FREEZE, 9:30-11am, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 NASA Pkwy, Webster. Free. Gardeners By The Bay event. gbtb.org

THURS., SEPT. 2: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENER TRAINING BEGINS (weekly, 10-month program), 9am-1pm, Fort Bend County Extension office, 1402 Band Rd, Rosenberg. Details/application: fbmg.org/become-a-master-gardener/; 281-633-7033 or mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu.

SAT.-SUN., SEPT. 11-12: HOUSTON CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY SHOW AND SALE, Sat: 9am-5pm; Sun: 9am-3pm. Free. Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. hcsstex.org/

SAT., SEPT. 25: FALL IS FOR PLANTING, 10am, Wabash Feed & Garden, 4537 N Shepherd Dr. Free. Register: 713-863-8322, wabashfeed.com/

SAT., SEPT. 25: LEAGUE CITY GARDEN CLUB'S GARDEN TOUR, "Renaissance in the Garden," 10am-4pm, Tickets \$15, Nana's Attic, 501 E. Main, League City, leaguecitygardenclub.org.

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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 -- 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 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.

