



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Aug-20-2021 | Issue 401

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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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SILVER LINING IN LAST WINTER'S FREEZE & BE NICE TO MORE THAN YOUR PLANTS!

*"Our neighbor insists we should weed / And refuses to even concede
That a weed can have beauty. / That gal is too snooty.
Methinks that her soul's gone to seed."*

— Limerick Ode to Flowering Weeds,"

by Madeleine Begun Kane (political satirist / humorist)

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

As we move into Fall -- and better planting weather! -- given the tremendous surge in habitat/pollinator/native plant gardens, Doreen Cubie's [2013 National Wildlife Federation \(NWF\) magazine article "Gardening With a Good-Nighbor Policy"](#) certainly bears repeating. Condensing a few of NWF's points:

1. Know your local laws and HOA/POA regulations. "Weed ordinances" may have legal weight and often prohibit certain types of plants.
2. Research plants before buying too many. Sometimes negatives are left out in the interest of sales. Sharing which butterflies flowers attract may change neighbors' negative perspectives.

3. Start slowly, expand gradually. Clusters are usually more attractive and attract more welcome wildlife than isolated plants scattered about.
4. Unfamiliarity often triggers concerns. Familiar flowers (eg., native mallows instead imported hibiscus) are easier to accept.
5. Don't over-use feeders. They can leave a mess underneath. Instead attract birds, etc., with native plants.
6. Advertise pro-ecology efforts with [official certifications](#). We have many.

P.S. Don't think native gardens are totally maintenance free. No "garden" is.



THE MORE GROUP PLANT SALES CARRY and ADVERTISE NATIVES, the sooner more natives will be available on local nursery shelves. Happy to give special note to these plants sales even if the event itself is not eligible for our calendar (*limited to gardening/plant events*). For example: mark your

calendar! A native plant sale will be included at : [Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center](#), 20634 Kenswick Dr., Humble, TX 77338 (click link for details):

- Sat., Oct. 30: Tricks & Treats Among the Trees, 3:30-7pm
- Sat., Nov.13: Pioneer Day - 35th Anniversary, 10am-4pm
- December (TBA): Old Fashioned Christmas.

PS. Jesse Jones Park has a neat live snake exhibit to which we have contributed two coral snakes. Want to draw lots of little boys out out of nowhere? Show up at a park with a covered garbage can in back of a pickup!

(Pictured: crimson clover blooming at Jesse Jones)

The Woodlands long led our area in encouraging not only planting natives but in lawn-less landscapes. Discouraging to see how many lawn-grass expanses now dominate various neighborhoods. But after this I-45 north development started so successfully, I tried for decades with no luck to find another such area actively recommending lawn-grass-free homesites. But these folks are still trying hard. If The Woodlands isn't still the only one. let me know. Will gladly spread the word.

George & Cynthia Mitchell, who encouraged use of natives in pocket plantings and natural falling pine needles and leaves to replace lawn grasses, at least made this approach a priority for The Woodlands, helping to set us all on the right path. Ironically, the same question this triggered back then is still being faced today by The Woodlands' Environment Education Specialist **AMBER BARNES**: "What native plants and pollinator plants can handle shade?"



Their recommendations (pictured above l to r): turk's cap, blue mistflower, fall obedient plant, Gulf Coast penstemon and spiderwort. In the meantime, native plants for sale will be abundant at:

- **SAT., SEPT. 25: 24th ANNUAL WOODLANDS LANDSCAPING**

SOLUTIONS by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am-noon. The Recreation Center at Rob Fleming Park, 6464 Creekside Forest Drive, The Woodlands. Free. thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/landscapingsolutions

- More into edibles? Sign up for the **SAT., AUG. 21: FALL ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDENING CLASS** (virtual) by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am-noon. Free. Register: thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/environment

AN UNUSUAL ABUNDANCE AND VARIETY OF BUTTERFLIES in their yards have gardeners **DALE PHILLIPS** (Friendswood) and **PAULA BAZAN** (Northwest Houston) wondering who or what they should thank for this wonderful surprise?

Retired Cockrell Butterfly Center Director **NANCY GREIG** and National Butterfly Center Executive Director **MARIANNA WRIGHT** totally agree on our unusual, wonderful bounty this year. Speaking from the National Butterfly Center in Mission, TX, Marianna credits this delight to another silver lining in the horrible freeze of 2021. She writes,

"After the freeze, it seems many plants were triggered to grow, flower and go to seed in a biological impulse to survive. As you know, the more host plants, the more butterflies! We're hoping for an outstanding fall, if rain continues to be abundant."



Among the many plants Nancy credits with being major butterfly attractors are (above, l to r) pipevine (*Aristolochia fimbriata* — host plant for pipevine swallowtail caterpillars), "Mystic Spires" salvia, partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciata*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*). Also on Nancy's list: *Tithonia rotundifolia* (Mexican sunflower).

Pictured is Dale's Mexican sunflower.



As long as you're watching and/or counting butterflies, enter the [National Butterfly Center's North American Photo Contest](http://www.NationalButterflyCenter.org/NorthAmericanPhotoContest). Fun project for kiddos. This is last year's winning photo, taken by Frank Model. Click on link for photo rules and more on the Oct. 30-Nov. 2 - 2021 Texas Butterfly Festival in Mission, TX

THE INSECTARY GARDEN IS BACK! Think you've never benefitted from Angela Chandler's Insectary Garden? Think again. This Houston horticulture treasure has been

one of my go-to gurus for decades. Now her "Insectory Garden" presentations are back. Enjoy [this episode](#) of Angela's return as she visits with Beverly Welch, owner of [The Arbor Gate](#), sponsors of the series. (PS. What's an "insectary"? A place for keeping living insects, of course!)



2021 WILDSCAPES WORKSHOP (DOUG TALLAMY!) & NATIVES SALE

— More on this great event later but [get your tickets today!](#) Wildscapes 2021 will be online again in late September & early October with 4 presentations over 4 evenings with an online plant & book sale held immediately afterwards. Also at the podiums so far: Artist Boat's Karla Klay, native plant nurseryman Mark Morgenstern.

* * *

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

* * *



OHBA Organic Gardening Workshop

Want to make this your most successful Fall?
Join Us for this Fantastic Workshop!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 26TH • 2 PM TO 6:15 PM
Plants for All Seasons 249 • 21328 TX-249, Houston, TX 77070

Stephen Duckett 2PM - 2:30PM Proven Native Plants for the Landscape Founder & Owner of Glenbrooke Ecologic	Carol Burton 2:45PM - 3:15PM Veggie Growing for Right Now, Fall & Winter Director of Garden Education	Sherri Harrah 3:30PM - 4PM How to prepare your lawns & gardens for ultimate success, NOW! Owner, Nursery Manager of Plants for All Seasons
		
Brad Phillips 5PM - 6:15PM Trees Talk Owner & Founder of Arbortrue		

REGISTER HERE TODAY:
ohbaonline.org/register

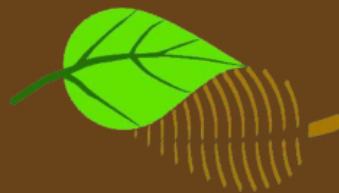
Ticket Prices
OHBA Members: \$20
Non- OHBA Members: \$40

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John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 161

A few times over the last couple weeks I have mentioned plants and their ability to help clean up problems or even mine elements out of soils and accumulate them. We have known for years that mercury (Hg) is toxic to many life forms and can accumulate in fish as one moves up the food chain where it may cause health issues.

Mercury is released into the atmosphere by burning of coal, mining, and other industrial processes. Researchers at the University of Massachusetts has found that plants absorb mercury from the atmosphere into their tissue. They found that 88% of mercury found in plants was absorbed from the atmosphere.

When the plants die, shed their leaves or roots, large amounts of mercury are transferred to the soil. This toxic metal is then leached into our waterways where it may affect wildlife. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* (2021).

A new study has found that artificial fertilizer utilization can have decades long negative lasting effects on soil biology. Soil microbiomes for soils with high fertility were insensitive to recent fertilizer usage. However, they found that previous land use had decades long lasting effects on soil microbial diversity. Soils *without* a history of artificial fertilizer usage exhibited higher soil microbial diversity. This study suggests that soils have an ecological memory and may take a long time to recover from chemical abuse. *Applied Soil Ecology* (2021)

Degradation of our soil is becoming a worldwide concern. A recent conference has defined soil health: "Soil health is the capacity of soil to function as a vital living system, within land-use boundaries, to sustain plant and animal productivity, maintain or enhance water and air quality, and promote plant and animal health." One of the tools used to measure soil health is the use of soil organisms as indicators of soil quality and health. *Applied Soil Ecology* (2021)

One of the best ways to improve soil health is to use cover crops (also known as Living Mulches). A study of 96 farms for a period of 3-5 years found that the use of cover crops significantly improved key soil health indicators. These include active carbon, soil organic matter, aggregate stability, available water capacity, respiration, and soil protein.

The effect and benefits of the cover crop increased with the amount of time cover crops had been used on a field. *ATTRA* (2021)

Other studies have found that the larger the diversity of species used in the

cover crop also increases the benefits.

The importance of microbes in our lives whether in the soil, on our plants, or our bodies continues to increase almost every day. Most of these good-essential microbes come from the soil. As we garden and work the soil or mulch we are continuously exposed to these unseen good guys.

Citrus canker is a bacterial disease common to many types of citruses. Researchers have discovered the fatty acid called hexanoic acid is effective in controlling this disease without the need for toxic chemicals. Journal of Applied Microbiology (2021)

This fatty acid is used by some plants as part of their immune system and it has been found to help treat several plant diseases.

Some people do not like spiders. Scientists at Canada's Simon Fraser University have discovered that several species of spiders avoid areas where fire ants had recently conjugated.

The ants apparently left behind a chemical trail that several species of spiders like the venomous black widow avoided. They hope to isolate these chemicals to form an effective spider deterrent. Royal Society Open Science (2021)

Excess nitrogen from artificial fertilizers, factory farms, etc. in the form of nitrate causes many forms of pollution in the drainage water. This toxic pollution causes algae blooms, fish kills, and the dead zone in our oceans.

Researchers found that simply running the polluted water through a bed of wood chips (often referred to as a bioreactor) reduces the amount of nitrate from 20-40%. Bacteria convert the nitrate into harm less nitrogen gas using energy derived from the carbon in the wood chips. Transactions of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (2021)

A study by Northern Arizona University has found that predatory bacteria (those that eat other bacteria) grow faster and consume more resources than non-predators.

For gardeners these predators play an important part in determining where nutrients go. We have known for a long time that when resources like grass and shrubs are added to an ecosystem, predators at the top of the food chain like wolves' benefit as the food web gets healthier.

Similarly, predation is important for soil health (which provides plant health). They found that when the resource carbon (like a native mulch or good compost) was added to the soil, the predators grew 36% faster and took up more over 200% more carbon than non-predators.

As bacteria eat each other plant nutrients are cycled and released into the soil which helps us have healthier plants. Journal mBio (2021)

Researchers at New York University have found seeds from the previously

extinct Judean date palms that lived 2,000 years ago. The seeds were recovered from archaeological sites in the Eastern Mediterranean. They were able to germinate the 2,000 year old seeds (*Phoenix dactylifera*) and sequence their genome. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (2021).

White rot fungi that gardeners frequently find in their gardens is very efficient in breaking down lignin found in plant material from grass to trees. All life in the soil needs energy and the primary source is from carbon atoms being combined with oxygen.

It was found that the white rot fungi can use energy from the carbon released as they biodegrade the lignin. In the process they store carbon in their bodies and in the soil. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (2021)

Note: I used to grow a lot of ferns in hanging baskets. When I used an aged (composted) native mulch as a potting medium and the and the Microloife 6-2-4 organic fertilizer, my ferns went crazy and were 30-50% larger than those grown in a soil medium.

When I would examine the root zones it was often filled with white rot fungi. I am not sure of the cause or the effect, but I know the ferns loved it.

I recently finished reading a book titled “Compost Utilization in Production of Horticultural Crops”, CRC Press 2021, ISBN: 978-0367691073. One of the items covered was the benefits of compost to turfgrass.

One item mentioned is the benefits of compost in clay soils that shrink-swell. Most likely over half the soils in our area are the black gumbo clay known as the Lake Charles or Beaumont clay that is notorious for its shrink swell properties and its stickiness when wet. This shrinking property damages grass roots often ripping them apart, which then stresses the plant (grass) making it more susceptible to insects (chinch bugs, web worms, etc.) and disease (brown path, take-all, etc.).

“When a good compost is used on clay soils it will improve the soil structure, reduce surface crusting and compaction, promote drainage and provide nutrients.” Compost reduces the shrink-swell hence the damage to out lawns.

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**

SAT., AUG. 21: FALL ORGANIC VEGETABLE GARDENING CLASS (virtual) by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am-noon. Free. Register: thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/environment

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](http://MercerBotanicGardens.com). 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.

SAT., SEPT. 25: 24th ANNUAL WOODLANDS LANDSCAPING SOLUTIONS by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am-noon, The Recreation Center at Rob Fleming Park, 6464 Creekside Forest Dr., The Woodlands. Free. thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/landscapingsolutions

SAT., OCT. 2: EASY PATH TO A BEAUTIFUL, HEALTHY LANDSCAPE by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am-noon. Free. The Woodlands Emergency Training Center, 16135 IH-45 South, The Woodlands. Register: thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/environment

SAT., OCT. 16: THE LAWN CARE: GREEN WITH ENVY (virtual) by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am - noon. Free. Register: thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/environment

SAT., NOV. 6: RAINWATER HARVESTING CLASS by **THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP**, 9am-noon., The Woodlands Emergency Training Center, 16135 IH-45 South, The Woodlands. Free. Register: thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/environment



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-project to reporting, 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.

