



# LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Aug-27-2021 | Issue 402

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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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## OUR DIVERSITY CREATES GARDENING CHALLENGES

*"Share ideas and plants, freely."*

— [Piet Oudolf](#), *Internationally-renowned Dutch Landscaper*  
by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

Dutch landscaper extraordinaire Piet Oudolf, designer of New York City's High Line Gardens, gives good advice above and also voiced another sentiment I truly love: *"My biggest inspiration is nature. I do not want to copy it, but to recreate the emotion."* Feels as if I've come close . . .

**A friend looking at my front flower beds said, "Wow, your garden looks great!"**

**Well aware of too-long-ignored tall weed stalks having love affairs with my bulb foliage, I scoffed: "What? With all those weeds in there?"**

**"Oh, are those weeds?" he asked. "I thought they were some of your native plants!"**

**Right," I said, "they're native plants."**

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**REMEMBER: A WEED IS JUST AN UNWANTED PLANT!** With that in mind, readers commented on on a couple of the [shade plantings touted last week for The Woodlands area](#) ([pdf download](#)).

- **ALICE STEELE** wrote that in her Clear Lake City-area garden, spiderwort proved not only invasive, but difficult to dig up. "Stems break off when you try to pull it up."
- **JANET JONES** in Beaumont was surprised at the obedient plant tout. This fast-spreading bloomer clogs ditches around her area. But it doesn't appear to be that invasive in The Woodlands area.

Although cross vine was not among touts last week, **LINDA DAY** sent in a two-lesson caution from her West University home. She planted it on her shaded fence. Her neighbor's fence side got good sun. Guess which side had flowers that bloomed! But it got worse. The vine spread via runners that obviously preferred Linda's shady side. It took her several years to eliminate it for good.



An outraged coworker once took me to task for recommending passionvine which enveloped her (and a neighbor's) backyard fence lines in Friendswood. Yet, in many of Houston's neighborhoods, passion vine is an easily controllable beauty.

Folks, you GOTTA do your own research on how any plant does in your area:

1. [Ask your county Master Gardeners](#).
2. Ask neighbors and your local independent nurseryman.
3. Try it. But hear what the plant is telling you! If multiplies too quickly or needs more pruning than you'd like, take it out before it gets totally out of hand, you are forewarned! Try something else.

Unlike most other areas of Texas, "Houston" is not a single uniform ecology. We have very different environments: forests, prairies, savannahs, bayous, bottomlands and coastlines — all with interwoven borders influencing gardens.



**AN INCREDIBLE GIFT TO TEXAS GARDENERS!** The free downloadable **Native Plant Society of Texas' "[Plant Lists by Region](#)."** has to be one the most comprehensive list of recommended landscape--friendly natives by city/locale that exists today. Best of all, it recognizes our internal diversity when it comes to native plants.

**LADY WITH TOO MANY FACES!** Even so, all Celosia's looks are among our most striking garden plants.

Eerie example: **PAULA BAZAN's** former 5' tall, Celosia Dragon's Breath in Northwest Houston was purchased 8-10 years ago at a Cockrell Butterfly Center sale. It lived a couple of years in full sun, then completely disappeared.

Suddenly this spring three little sleeping beauties appeared, grew and produced these beautiful wheat-like spikes on gorgeous red foliage, right where their deceased ancestor had been. She sees their miraculous return as a



silver lining in extreme freezing temperatures. "Talk about lazy," she joked, "I do nothing and three plants show up!"



In Pasadena, Tom's brand new celosia (pictured, also called cockscomb) was planted this past spring in a container. It's now shot up to 5+' with flowers that resemble brains.

Celosia like sunny and dry sites — perfect for Houston summers. But with our occasional monsoon rains, best to plant them where water won't stand for long after a rain.

LINDA GAY, to whom I turned in desperation trying to understand all these strange cousins, says her dragon's breath celosia (left below) reseeds every year in her Spring area home.



*L to r, Linda's dragon breath celosia's foliage, C. 'New Look' & C. 'Amigo.'*

Linda warns delightful variations can and often do occur in with same-type celosias, ironically often triggered by weather extremes as well as infections (bacteria, viruses, etc.). She recommends Celosia 'New Look' and C. 'Amigo' which have great "impress-the-neighbors" fall color so should be easy to find now in nurseries. Will these be perennial or reseed? Maybe. Maybe not. Mother Nature seldom carves anything in stone. She's also kept secret celosia's ancestry. Probably the Asian or African continent but . . . no one knows for sure!

**THINKING ABOUT FALL VEGETABLES?** Tired of fighting bugs, etc? Maybe the problem is you're planting the wrong varieties for your part of town. Survival of the fittest, you know? If plants are forced to struggle in a less-than-ideal environment, they grow weaker. Insects attack weak plants first. Almost all Greater Houston Master Gardener Associations have demonstration gardens where they experiment to find the best for your own area. Visit them! Free advice, fabulous plant sales. Tons of FREE gardening materials in adjacent Texas Agri-Life Extension Offices.

- **FIND YOUR MASTER GARDENERS:**

- URBAN HARVEST FALL PLANTING GUIDE

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## CALENDAR NOTES:

- We're happy to publish classes in Spanish. Just be sure this fact is noted as in this one in calendar below:

### **SAT., SEPT. 4: TOP TEN COOL WEATHER VEGETABLES**

(Zoom live class in Spanish) by **PILAR HERNANDEZ**,

10-11am. Urban Harvest event. [urbanharvest.org/education/classes/](http://urbanharvest.org/education/classes/)

- **FALL EVENTS ARE BEING CANCELLED DUE TO COVID.** Check sponsors' websites before attending. Please report all event cancellations to [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com). Latest one reported in;

**Cancelled — SAT.-SUN., SEPT. 11-12: HOUSTON CACTUS**

**& SUCCULENT SOCIETY SHOW & SALE, [hcsstex.org/](http://hcsstex.org/)**

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*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](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)*

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## John's Corner



## NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 163

Researchers have identified several plant pigments that help the body prevent macular degeneration. Lutein, zeaxanthin, meso-zeaxanthin, and astaxanthin can all help protect against age-related macular degeneration.

Folks with the highest intake of lutein and zeaxanthin have a 42% lower risk of advanced macular degeneration. For those already affected the extracts of the spice saffron have been shown to improve visual function.

Lutein and zeaxanthin are found in dark green leafy vegetables and colorful fruits. Other pigments like alpha-carotene a carotenoid, and vitamin A found in pumpkins and carrots, where they protect the retinal cells in our eyes from light induced damage. For the full article see Life Extension September 2021.

Fruits and vegetables grown organically on fertile mineral rich soils are high in these valuable nutrients.

Another study from the University Edith Cowan in Australia has found another factor on the importance of green leafy vegetables. They found that people



whom consumed a nitrate rich diet from leafy vegetables had significantly better muscle function and strength, independently of any physical exercise. Journal of Nutrition (2021)

I have found that as I get older, I am eating and enjoying kale, spinach, turnip greens, cabbage, etc. far more than when I was younger. I suspect my body is telling me that I need those nutrients more today than in the past.

Researchers have found that people whom consume diets rich in plant-based foods also encourage good gut microbes that are connected to a lower risk of heart disease, and type II diabetes. Nature Medicine 2021

Vegetables straight from one's garden will have the highest levels of these good microbes.

The authors also state that those whom consume processed foods have the most bad gut bacteria.

**R**esearchers from China have found that the insect pest called whiteflies have stolen a gene from plants and incorporated it into their genome. This gene breaks down natural plant toxins that plants produce to protect themselves from pest insects. Whiteflies have now evolved to attack at least 600 species of plants. Journal Cell (2021).

**A** study from the University of Wurzburg in Australia has found that plants have a memory. They found that plants have a signaling molecule that helps them remember how dry it was. Nature Communications (2021)

I often get asked "Why should I compost? A recent study by the United Nations has found that food waste in the world is near one Billion metric tons. This is 17% of all the food available to the world's population. Which is more than enough food to feed the 690 million people that face starvation each year.

To put it in perspective, this is 266 pounds of food waste per person! At the very least this waste needs to be captured, composted and returned to our soils.

It also accounts for over 10% of the world-wide greenhouse gas emissions. Science News (April 2021)

**S**ome old wife's tails have merit. I have heard for years that catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) repels mosquitos. Catnip repels insects by causing a common chemical receptor (TRPA1) found in insects to react. Studies suggest that catnip may be as effective as DEET in repelling insects. Current Biology 2021

**A**long with growing one's own fruits and vegetables, more and more folks are raising their own chickens. We have known for years that when chickens eat grass or weeds from our gardens (natural weed control), they are healthier for them and for us.

Many plants we call weeds have a role in nature. Many of them are used to correct nutritional deficiencies in our soil hence they often have higher levels of certain elements. When chickens, ducks, or other animals eat the weeds, the nutrients become concentrated and available in their meat.

In gardening many studies have shown that heirloom vegetables and fruits have a higher nutrient density than modern hybrids. A recent article in Mother Earth News 2021 reported that the same was found in chickens.

Heritage breeds have more protein and less bad fats than commercial breeds. If they are grass fed, they also do not have arsenic or antibiotics in them as do the commercial hybrids.

Gardeners have used chickens and ducks as a weed control method for hundreds of years. Ducks are also a voracious predator of snails and slugs that have been so abundant this year.

The field of study called "Senolytics" is related to anti-aging research. Compounds that are Senolytics, remove senescent cells from our bodies and can reverse certain aspects of aging. Nutrients like quercetin and theaflavins (from black tea) are widely used.

The flavonoid fisetin from plants is one of the most powerful natural Senolytics that increases life span in animal studies by 10%. Life Extension June 2021

Plants whether fruits or vegetables, that are grown organically, on mineral rich soil tend to have higher levels of these nutrients.

Another field of study related to health is called Nootropics. It is the study of nutrients and how they affect our brains. These molecules (compounds) are natural chemicals found in foods that protect or enhance cognition and facilitate learning. "They are often used by people whom want to improve their brains processing speed and mental alertness."

For example, the herb *Bacopa monnieri* has been used since ancient times to improve memory. The herb *Gotu kola* is native to Asia has been used for centuries to boost brain power.

By using new techniques like electroencephalography (EEG) researchers were able to actually measure the amount of improved brain performance. These included improved attention and reaction times in just one hour after supplementation. After two months short-term working memory, word recognition, spatial memory, picture recognition, and alertness all improved. Life Extension Collector's Edition 2021.

The newspaper Epoch Times, in the Mind & Body section, had a very nice article in the May 12-18, 2021 edition on nutrition and health titled "Food as Medicine".



In Doug Tallamy's book "The Nature of Oaks" he states the worst tree for the environment is the Callery pear (aka Bradford Pear) which are all over the Gulf coast.

Besides being known for kissing, another tid-bit of information from the book, is that the large Great Purple Hairstreak butterfly (*Atlides batesus*) uses mistletoe leaves as its only host plant.

The medical service Full Script has a good basic article on nutrition. They did not distinguish between nutrient density of organic or non-organic foods, or grass fed versus feedlot grown meat contaminated (dangers) of the associated chemicals like hormones and antibiotics used.



### **Best Protein Sources: Comparing Animal and Plant-Based...**

Adequate protein is essential for good health, but you may be wondering what the best protein sources are. With so much conflicting research on animal and plant-based protein, choosing the best options can be challenging.

[Read more](https://fullscript.com)  
fullscript.com

## **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](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com).

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

**\*\*\*NOTE: We are getting in covid cancellations for events\*\*\*  
Check contacts listed for changes and/or masking policies**

**FRI., AUG. 27: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4**, 9am & 11am, [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#). 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](http://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: [fbmq.org/become-a-master-gardener/](http://fbmq.org/become-a-master-gardener/); 281-633-7033 or [mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu).

**SAT., SEPT. 4: TOP TEN COOL WEATHER VEGETABLES (Zoom live class in Spanish)** by PILAR HERNANDEZ, 10-11am. Urban Harvest event. [urbanharvest.org/education/classes/](http://urbanharvest.org/education/classes/)

**SAT., SEPT. 25: FALL IS FOR PLANTING**, 10am, Wabash Feed & Garden, 4537 N Shepherd Dr. Free. Register: 713-863-8322, [wabashfeed.com/](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov/environment)

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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-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.

