



# 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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## TIME FOR CLIPPIN' & PLANTIN' & SNEAK PEEKS AT WHAT'S AHEAD

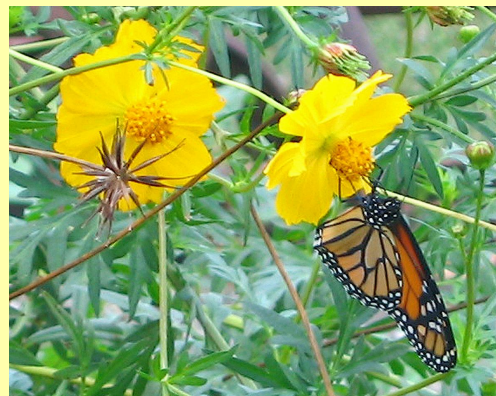
*"...but we garden-lovers are greedy folk, and  
always want to have more and more and more! ..."*

*-- Gertrude Jekyll, Home and Garden (1900)*

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

### TO DEHEAD OR NOT TO DEHEAD . . .

for most of my garden, flowers seem to be busy producing seed, a process I normally ignore with only one exception: cosmos (pictured with seed). These reseed so easily and produce such incredibly happy orange/yellow flowers, I pluck seeds to spread over bare spots. Doesn't take too long for at least a few new plants to appear and bloom.



Most flowers are now actively producing seed to reach their genetic goal before winter hits. When that goal is reached, flowering stops. Remove spent flowers and/or developing seeds so they'll flower for a longer period.

Increased flower production isn't the only benefit of deadheading. The act of pinching or snipping buds off can be quite therapeutic for relieving feelings of unrest or frustration in this day of such political and social upheaval triggered on so many different fronts!



Note: some newer varieties of popular plants are hybridized to continue blooming without deadheading. Profusion zinnias (*pictured*) are a good example. Mine are as covered with blooms now as they were all summer long. They don't seem to produce seed at all.

But it won't hurt to keep developing seed/pods picked off. Normally I don't bother. But my flowers were so set back by this past winter, overall bloom quantity is way down. I'd like to keep them blooming as long as possible.

More encouragement for seed removal comes from my longtime hort resource in El Campo, who just wrote in touching on one of my saddest hits last winter: no masses of yellow blooms on my normally 10'-12' esperanza (*Tacoma stans*, yellow bells). Not only have I had no flowers at all this summer, finally reappearing stalks are barely 2'-3' tall.



I may replace it with a 'Lydia' esperanza (*pictured*) which Leon declares has become his "All Time Favorite" esperanza. This one, he says, "blooms early, mid and late season with good foliage that supports continuous blooming." My kind of plant!

When it comes to buying these normally-reliable bloomers, Leon advises shopping where you can be sure you're getting named varieties, such as three other named esperanzas he also highly recommends:



- Left: 'Bells of Fire' — red-orange blooms
- Center: 'Orange Mahogany' — heavy bloom for 2-3 weeks, then rests for about a week before producing new flower buds on the old bloom stalk.  
(top two Leon Macha photos)
- Right: 'Gold Star' — a [Texas Superstar](#) found by Greg Grant, one of the earliest blooming esperanzas

Experienced gardeners know to look for specific named varieties. It DOES make a difference these day since often these have improved or new sizes, colors & performance levels from older versions. If there's just a "type" name (azalea, salvia, hibiscus, etc.), It becomes a gamble.



Stock of improved named varieties, especially at reputable nurseries, will have a specific variety name as well as the type of plant. But some less-reputable plant sale sites and/or growers may put new names on already-named plants, perhaps because they don't know the new variety name or to avoid having to pay extra for improved root stock. Or tags may be lost in transport, etc.

If the cost is low and you enjoy a gamble, give 'em a try. But before you make any significant investment in a particular plant, be sure you know exactly what you're buying or shop with a nurseryman you know you can trust, who will be counting on your satisfaction and repeat business.

When it comes to esperanzas with no variety name to guide you, Leon suggest selecting plants with already-visible heavy crops of buds and blooms. And, unless you want the seed, once the plant starts blooming, pluck off those seed pods as soon as they start appearing.

As Leon put it: *"We are not in the seed production business. We want flowers, flowers., flowers!!!!!!!"*

\* \* \*

## POTPOURRI

- **WOWS TO COME!** What to know what's coming down the pike? Leon also offered this link to what Texas A&M, Texas SuperStars and others are predicting will be garden winners, such as this *(pictured)* Canna Casanova series. Take a walk down these A&M demonstration gardens at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lLaid4BqVc>.



*(NOTE: Be patient, a bit of housekeeping talk at start. Rest of video is worth the wait if you're into being first in the neighborhood to grow new WOW! flowers, herbs, greenery, etc. Check out A&M's whole series of updates.)*

- **"ON-SITE" SALES RETURNING** Among these is the annual **Fort Bend County Fall Veggie-Herb Plant Sale**, Oct. 9, 9am-noon (or sell-out), 1402 Band Rd. Check for parking tips, etc: <https://fbmq.org/events/annual-sales/vegetable-herb-sale/>. Volunteers will be masked; customers are urged to do likewise. Please co-operate!
- **CEC TO THE RESCUE** The list of returning activities, not only for gardeners but for the ecology-minded across the entire Greater Houston area is so huge now, thank goodness for the free weekly Citizens Environmental Coalition's weekly news & events emailed report.



If you don't already subscribe, you're probably missing out on great activities in your own area. Sign up at [cechouston.org](http://cechouston.org), then take an extra minute to help support to this great nonprofit coalition of 100+ local ecology-minded groups, corporations and agencies, along with too many individuals to count. [Donate](#)

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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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## Hummingbird Habitats

with Abbie Ince-Hendrickson M.S.



@ Nature's Way Resources

9:00 AM - 10:30AM

on Saturday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Join us for a 45-minute talk about Hummingbird Ecology and Feeding behaviors, centered around native plants. After the presentation, a segment on Hummingbird Field ID will be taught, so bring your binoculars and a sugar rush! You will need it to keep up with the hummers!



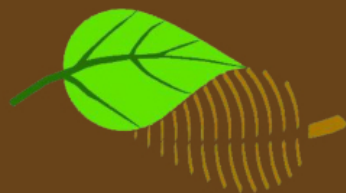
Please remember to bring water and sun protection!

Please RSVP, as class size is limited.

(936)-273-1200 or email us at [nwmnursery@gmail.com](mailto:nwmnursery@gmail.com)



## John's Corner



# NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 165

Last week we talked about the benefits of Native Mulches on earthworms and I want to continue our discussion on native mulches.

I often get asked "When is the best time to mulch?" My usual answer is "Whenever you can". Nature hates bare ground and if there is not a good thick layer of mulch, nature will cover it with something, which is usually the plants that we call weeds.

With that said, I will often ask "When does nature (God) mulch the soil?" Of course, the response is in the fall. Thus, for the large majority of our plants, shrubs and trees, fall is the best time.

To be a successful gardener in Texas one must mulch (and everywhere else also). Mulch comes from the German "*molsch*," meaning "soft," and refers to any loose, generally soft material that is laid down on top of the soil to protect a plant's roots or spread lightly over the plant itself. Mulch is not a soil amendment; it is a covering or surface layer used to protect the topsoil.

Nature does not allow bare ground, hence neither should we. *Mulching is considered to be the most important step in any gardening program and it is often the most overlooked!* All natural or organic mulches will improve the soil eventually, but like all things they vary in quality and effectiveness.

A good mulch lets air (oxygen) and water enter the soil and allows carbon dioxide to escape. A good mulch will readily decompose releasing the stored nutrients and will provide microorganisms, earthworms and beneficial insects a good home and food source.

For many years along the Gulf Coast, we only had pine and hardwood bark mulches available. When the green waste recycling programs started emerging to save landfill space, that began to change. I remember years ago when I had to petition the Texas Association of Nurserymen to even get it listed in their directory. The Texas Association of Nurserymen (TAN) recognized "Native Mulches" as a separate class of mulches from barks and other materials in their 1997 product directory. Note: TAN is now called TNLA (Texas and Nursery Landscape Association).

At the time, I called it Native Mulch but it would not sell even though I had dozens of research papers on the benefits and its superiority to other types of mulch. So, I changed the name to "Native Hardwood" since it had a lot of hardwood species in it, and it flew out the door (marketing!).

As the mulch industry has matured over the years since then, the hardwood has been dropped and Native Mulches are easily available from many suppliers. Native mulches are now available as fresh ground or aged (composted) and in many variations.

However, mulch (Native or otherwise) is just like any other product, some are very good and some are very bad. In general, just like everything else in life. A



few years ago in the newsletter, we had a series of over 30 articles on the Pros and Cons of the many different mulches that are available to gardeners. These are on the website [www.natureswayresources.com](http://www.natureswayresources.com) in the article section or in the archived newsletters.

So, what is Native mulch? "Native" mulch is made from recycled fresh green tree and brush material that was recently alive from hundreds of species of shrubs and trees, growing in a given environment, that have been ground up into mulch at a recycling facility. Native mulch is produced from a mix of native trees and brush with only a small amount of bark.

The better native mulches have a high percentage of buds, shoots, leaves, and cambium layers in them. These materials are rich in protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients which is the reason deer, beavers, squirrels, and other animals eat them as a food source. Hence, these native mulches are many times higher in nutrients and value than bark mulches.

Native mulches encourage the biodiversity of beneficial microbes and earthworms in the soil. They feed the plants naturally as they decompose, and they help prevent plant and soil diseases.

Some suppliers like Nature's Way Resources will compost their native mulch, further increasing its value and effectiveness. The heat of the composting process kills any pathogens and weed seeds that might have been present. The composting process concentrates the nutrients contained in the raw material and stabilizes nitrogen in a form beneficial to plants.

The composting process breaks down the cellulose contained in the raw material rendering it a far less attractive home for termites and fire ants after it is applied, compared to bark or other woody mulches (e.g. dyed mulches). The composting process also makes it one of the most fire-resistant mulches available. Remember the drought in 2011 when several homes caught fire from an ember that landed on the mulch in the flowerbeds from the forest fires, igniting it, which then trailed up the flowerbeds and spread to the house. Additionally, the composting process turns the material a rich beautiful deep chocolate brown color.

We make our native mulch in a way that it has a 50 % compost content. As I mentioned last week, earthworms get huge when living in our native mulch, many times larger than normal. The large amount of compost content explains why. Most earthworms eat microbes living on the organic matter. Earthworms can easily ingest the compost fines in the native mulch that are full of microbes. Since the microbes are feeding on a nutrient rich material, they are full of nutrients, hence one gets very large fat and healthy earthworms. A healthy earthworm does a better job of aerating the soil, eating weed seeds, and producing plant growth hormones.

Another benefit of Native Mulch the way we make it, is that the microbes that feed on it will also break apart heavy dense sticky clay and turn it into beautiful loamy soils that all plants love. Research funded for over 30 years by Canada's Department of Forestry at Lavelle University, provided data from studies all over the world that have found this type of mulch is the quickest and most cost effective to improve soil whether sand or clay.

When used on one's flowerbeds the composted mulch fines turns into rich humus that holds water, nutrients and minerals in the soil preventing them from leaching. The humus formed is a mixture of humates, fulmates, ulmates, humins, and other compounds that make the soil healthy. The humus particles (compost fines) attract water molecules and can actually absorb them from the humidity in the air and then store the water for plants to use later when they need it.

Many of the experts that host our local radio gardening shows, talk about putting down 1-2 inches of compost and then top dress with a couple inches of native mulch. The fines in the native mulch are much denser than the larger pieces, hence when it is applied to one's landscape beds they naturally settle to the bottom and the woodier pieces that are lighter float to the top. This recreates the mulch layers that God uses in nature. The soil is covered with 1-2 inches of dark brown to almost black crumbly organic matter (a compost layer) and then 1-3 inches of brown leaves, twigs, etc. the woody mulch layer.

When this type of composted native mulch is used it is significantly lower cost than purchasing separate products and requires less work to apply.

Our native mulch since it is composted is naturally stabilized with a low C:N ratio (carbon to nitrogen), preventing nitrogen tie-up when applied along with other elements.

Native mulches improve soil quality faster than any other method and at lower cost. They increase plant growth rates and increase yields of vegetables and fruits. Native mulches prevent soil compaction as they provide food for earthworms and food for trillions of microbes that create soil structure.

Native mulches made from tree materials that have a high percentage of buds, shoots, leaves, and cambium layers in them. These materials are rich in protein, vitamins, enzymes, minerals and other nutrients. Native mulches feed and fertilize the soil as they are many times higher in nutrients than traditional barks.

Studies at Tx A&M University has found that native mulches are the best at reducing erosion. The material tends to physically lock together and it is full of beneficial fungus fibers that produce a glue called glomalin's that bind the mulch fragments together and to the soil particles. Hence, they do not float off in a hard rain as easily as most barks do. Native mulch is also full of bacteria that also produce glues (polysaccharides) that glue the particle to each other and the soil.

Native mulches make an excellent potting medium or rooting medium for many species of plants. My potted ferns love to grow in it and when fertilized with Microlife™ they grow very large and beautiful.

The use of native mulches completes the recycling loop. It helps save valuable landfill space by recycling grass, leaves, tree limbs and other woody material that would have created large amount of greenhouse gasses in the landfill. As it turns into humus it sequesters carbon into the soil.

Many beneficial insects like to hide in the coarse screened native mulch during the day and come out at night to eat pest insects like aphids.

Native mulch also has good insulating properties as we learned this year. The winter storm Uri killed the tops of many plants, but roots under a thick native mulch layer survived, and the plants quickly came back this spring.

Native mulches are also a host to many species of soil life that help plants manage nitrogen (N) and phosphorous (P) in the soil.

I could go on and on as I have studied mulches for over 30 years and have collected boxes of research articles. Bottom line: Native mulches IF made properly are one of the best investments one can make in your landscape.

Note: For those interested, I have a good PowerPoint presentation on mulches (organic, inorganic and living) that takes about an hour or a little longer depending on discussion and questions.

\* \* \*

## LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

### ***SUBMITTING EVENTS? PLEASE READ EVENTS***

*Only events submitted specifically for publication in this calendar will be used.*

*SEE END OF CALENDAR FOR DETAILS.*

*Submit events to: [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com).*

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

**SAT., SEPT. 11: KLEB WOODS HUMMINGBIRD FESTIVAL**, 9am-3pm, Kleb Woods Nature Preserve, 20303 Draper Road, Tomball. [Details.](#)

**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 2: GROWING BLUEBERRIES** by ROBERT MARSHALL, 9-11am. Free. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Register: [galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/](http://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/)



**MON., OCT. 4: ONLINE ORDERING ENDS for OCT. 14-16 HOUSTON BULB & PLANT MART.** [store.galvestonmg.org](http://store.galvestonmg.org)

**SAT., OCT. 9: FALL FAVORITE VEGETABLES** by **GENE SPELLER**, 9-11. Free. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Pre-register: [galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/](http://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/)

**SAT., OCT. 9: FORT BEND COUNTY FALL VEGGIE-HERB PLANT SALE**, 9am-noon (or sell-out), 1402 Band Rd.: <https://fbmg.org/events/annual-sales/vegetable-herb-sale/>.

**THURS.-SAT., OCT. 14-16: HOUSTON 2021 BULB & PLANT MART**, St. John's Church 2450 River Oaks Blvd. [gchouston.org/bulb-plant-mart-info/](http://gchouston.org/bulb-plant-mart-info/)

**FRI.-SAT, OCT 15-OCT 16: GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FALL PLANT SALE** (Online only). Noon Fri. to noon Sat. Browse begins Fri, Oct 8. [store.galvestonmg.org](http://store.galvestonmg.org)

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

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

**SAT., OCT 30: KOKEDAMA** by **KAT TONDRE**, 9-11am. \$20. Galveston County master Gardener event. Register: [galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/](http://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/)

**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: [thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/environment](http://thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/environment)

*Check contacts listed for covid-triggered changes and/or masking policies  
Only events submitted specifically for publication in this calendar are used. -  
\* \* \**



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 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.

