



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Feb-18-2022 | Issue 424

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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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A FUN (GARDENING) RUN TO WATCH!

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

"Nature to be commanded must be obeyed."

Francis Bacon, English philosopher and statesman (1561-1626)

We're living in an incredible gardening era. Earth-friendly efforts of a few are suddenly being adopted by many and nowhere is that more evident than in the ideas shared this week by [Homegrown National Park](#) guru Doug Tallamy at the 2022 Nancy Stallworth Thomas Horticulture Lecture. I've shared [my total agreements](#) (pdf download) with him already. Below, John Ferguson adds his own perspectives. Three cheers to The Woodlands for continuing promotion of natives in their area! (Picture from ["Nature's Best Hope"](#) video with Doug Tallamy)



When I was assigned to write a gardening column 50+ years ago, I thought how-fun-but-strange for someone who was definitely more reporter than gardener (hence the name "lazy gardener"). But then I discovered Houston's

landscaping attitudes were just beginning a MAJOR change.

For decades, most of our retail plants came from the West or East Coasts — varieties popular across an imaginary sweep that extended the South's infamous Mason-Dixon line westward to the Pacific Ocean with gradual deeper swaths to the north and south. That's where the most gardening \$\$\$ were spent, as sales in this "swath" boomed early spring to late fall.

Above that line, growing periods were shorter, winters came too soon and left too late for the best profits. Below that line (us!) almost year-round growing periods meant fewer new plants sold. Many plants returned easily from roots. We've more of an 11-month to year-round growing period. Look how many plants survived last year!

On the downside, back then, among others, we in this subtropical (usually) Gulf Coast pocket used TONS of garden chemicals. By necessity. So many heavily-publicized plants were very susceptible to insect/diseases problems triggered by our short, usually-mild winters, monsoon rains and blasting hot summers. Climate change was not the headline it is today.

Gradually, as more was learned about downsides of long-term chemical use, a slowly-increasing number of gardeners began touting advantages of using our native plants. They had adapted to our crazy weather, co-existed easily with our bugs, ignoring migratory damage was not only painless, it was often mutually helpful. A whole new approach!

The problem? Few natives were commercially available or thought acceptable in more formal, cookie-cutter, mostly lawn-filled landscapes promoted in the explosion of suburbs — demanded, in fact, by deed restrictions, HOA/POAs.

Those who advocated more naturalistic landscapes with more "relaxed," nature-friendly plantings met with not only scorn but actual hostility. Fear of decreasing property values very real. Too little was known about which natives were best for home landscapes, and even fewer were commercially available.



Natives advocates were helped by growing evidence that loss of native habitat was seriously affecting treasured wildlife such as monarchs and other butterflies. The already-established Master Gardener groups and Texas A&M Extension Service began seriously promoting reduced use of chemicals.

Forward-thinking folks spread the word that many natives are beautiful bloomers, landscape-friendly, low care, no need for pesticides, easily tolerate our weather extremes, and so much more. Their numbers grew, helped by folks like Chris LaChance who promoted helpful mindsets like: "*Make it look 'Intended,' not 'Untended'.*"

Habitat/pollinator gardening, reducing chemical use and other nature-oriented trends gained momentum with the help of [Texas Master Naturalists](#), [Texas Native Prairies Association](#) and similarly-focused groups now operating with chapters in almost all Texas regions if not actual counties.

As the '70s Chiffon margarine commercial made clear: *It's not nice to mess with Mother Nature!*

I probably don't need to track this change further. Gardeners today can easily see the explosion of commercially-available native plantings, especially from local or statewide Texas growers.

Or . . . maybe not?

So many Texas natives are now among commonly-used plants in nurseries, many folks probably don't even realize they're indigenous! Did you know these popular garden plants are natives?

L to r, below, Turk's cap (Malvaviscus arboreus), American beautyberry (Callicarpa americana), rock rose (Pavonia lasiopetala), Esperanza (Tecoma stans), Texas sage/Cenzio (Leucophyllum frutescens), Gregg's mistflower (-)



New ones are constantly being introduced into retail trade, often without "Texas Native" tags. Thanks to our schools' quick grasp of using nature projects — and even actual gardens — to teach children even regular subjects, treasuring our native fauna and flora is becoming almost second nature. Even kindergarteners know words like Pollinator Garden, habitat, chrysalis, etc.

I have one friend whose very young children absolutely insisted he switch to only organic garden products, lest he harm butterflies, birds and other wildlife in their backyard! We're not all there yet. But these youngsters, as they grow up, are speeding up the process!



I gotta tell you, folks, this has been a fun run to watch!

***Brenda Beust Smith's column in the
LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER
is based on her 40+ years as Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener
Email: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com***

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John's Corner



**NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS
184**

Before I get started with my column, I want to give a round of applause to The Garden Club of Houston for bringing Dr. Doug Tallamy in for a lecture this past Wednesday.

Doug gave an outstanding talk and the auditorium was overflowing and extra chairs had to be brought in. The lecture was about why and how we need to continue to change our gardening habits.

Doug mentioned several states and cities that are paying folks from California to the Atlantic to remove the imported species and replace them with natives.

Plants we used to call weeds are now called lawn herbs and feed our pollinators. Locally, The Woodlands is paying 50% of the cost to purchase natives up to \$300 per household per year. San Antonio has been doing it for years.

Doug made a point that all the residential lots were added up (total acreage), and if only 20% were planted in natives, it would provide more habitat for pollinators, birds and other wildlife than all of our national parks combined! He calls it "Home grown National Park". His website homegrownnationalpark.org, is where one can register their yards and gardens or any other property they have and see the progress we are making.

He has written several great books that every serious gardener or homeowner should read.

"Bringing Nature Home - How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants" by Douglas W. Tallamy, Timber Press, 2014, Edith Printing, ISBN-13: 978-0-88192-992-8.

"Nature's Best Hope- A New Approach to Conservation That Starts In your Yard" by Douglas W. Tallamy, Timber Press, 2019, ISBN-13: 978-1-60469-900-5.

"The Nature of Oaks – The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees" by Douglas Tallamy, 2021, Timber Press, ISBN: 978-1-64326-044-0.

Personal Note from a previous newsletter: I am a big fan of Dr. Tallamy and his insight into the natural world that God has given us. However, this insight has cost me a lot of money.

After reading his first book ("Bringing Nature Home - How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants"), I was so inspired that my wife and I accelerated our plans to buy some land in the country near La Grange for our retirement home. Over the last six years since then, I have planted over 2,300 trees and shrubs (142 species) as part of a habitat restoration on the property. It has been very rewarding to watch the land heal and wildlife return.

Next, I read his book ("Nature's Best Hope- A New Approach to Conservation That Starts In your Yard") a few years ago. This caused me to start replacing many imported plants with native plants in both my yard and at our nursery (we now specialize in native plants as much as possible).

After the big freeze a couple months ago (Uri), I am even more interested in

hardy native trees and plants. Many of the native plants at the nursery were in full bloom the day after the freeze lifted and just laughed off the cold.

Now he has done it to me again! As soon as I heard about his new book above (Nature of Oaks), I ordered it and it arrived last Friday afternoon. I was fascinated by his description of Oaks and what they do for us hence I finished it on Tuesday of this week (only 4 days). Now again he is going to cost me a lot of money. I learned that of the many oaks species I planted as singles for diversity, they are more effective when planted in groves of at least 3-5 trees each. Now I will have to purchase a few dozen more trees of each of the species previously planted, as I want the restoration to be as effective as possible.

Over the last couple years there is more and more research coming out on the benefits of plants and our health, especially with herbs. The magazine Life Extension (December 2021) talked about a few of these a couple months ago.

The herb Bacopa (*Bacopa monnieri*) is traditionally used in Ayurvedic medicine to treat inflammation, pain, asthma, and dementia. Ancient texts state this herb was used to enhance memory and sharpen the intellect. Recent studies have shown this herb can improve cognitive performance.

Another herb to boost brain function is Gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*). As one can guess from its botanical name, it is a flowering plant from Asia. In addition to its cognitive properties, it has also been found to stimulate the growth of new nerve cells in the hippocampus.

Green tea (*Camellia sinensis*) has been found to provide several health benefits including a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. Journal of Clinical Nutrition 2021.

Researchers in Europe have identified a specific strain of Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) which is another herb being studied for its brain boosting effects. They found that sage extracts from this particular strain they identified provided 60% better cognitive performance of memory and 2.5-fold improvement of attention in the test subjects. Life Extension November 2021.

French maritime pine bark (*Pinus pinaster*, *Pinus maritima*) has been studied for over 50 years for its beneficial antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compounds that promote arterial health. Life Extension November 2021.

As mentioned above a common lawn herb is common Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) often seen growing in cracks in concrete and other tough places. This lawn herb has been found useful in treating spastic paraplegia. It is also an extremely rich source of essential Omega 3 fatty acids, and is considered a delicacy in Mexico. Useful Wild Plants, Fall 2021

A new area of research is using scents as an insect pest control. Many predator insects that feed on the pest herbivorous insects, produce odors that pests can sense. When pests smell these odors, it changes their behavior and sometimes their physiology in an effort to prevent being eaten. (American Chemical Society 2021).

Gardeners have already seen the benefits of using garlic oils to get rid of mosquitoes (highly effective) and it does not kill all our butterflies and other beneficial insects or the birds whom eat the poisoned insects as the mosquito spray systems do.

With spring right around the corner many of us are thinking about mulching our gardens.

A few things to remember, while pine needles make a good mulch most of the time, the chemicals called terpenes in them inhibit the seed germination of many species.

Wood products that have not been composted like raw wood or dyed mulches can cause a nutrient tie up problem hurting the plant as shown in the pictures below.



Odors are another warning sign of low quality and potentially dangerous mulches and composts.

1) Anaerobic organic acids have a strong odor from putrefying organic matter. The odor varies depending on feedstock or material and what is going on, however they are all very bad. These type organic acids form under conditions without oxygen (fermentation) which also produce alcohols. Plant roots are very sensitive to alcohols ***as little as 1 ppm will kill most plant roots.***

Acetic acid - vinegar smell, loss of N_2 and P, alcohols present

Butyric acid - sour milk smell, alcohols present

Valeric acid - vomit smell, alcohols present

Putrescine - rotting meat smell, alcohols present

2) Ammonia – implies an immature mulch or compost (phytotoxic) and a loss of nitrogen.

3) Rotten egg (H_2S) - implies an immature mulch or compost (phytotoxic) and a loss of sulfur.

4) Color: Is often an indicator of potential problems with mulch or compost and

other organic materials. A true black color does not occur naturally in mulches or compost under good and healthy conditions, only a deep chocolate brown color. However, many people believe black is good and some unscrupulous vendors like to take advantage of this idea.

Black organic materials in nature occur when materials decompose under anaerobic conditions (without oxygen). These conditions favor disease and other pathogens and use a different set of microbes to decompose the material. As a result, pure “black” compost or mulch does not have good fertility, indicates anaerobic decomposition with its pathogens and other problems. The sulfur is gone (out gassed as H_2S), nitrogen is gone (NH_3) or in wrong form, and alcohols are usually present (1 ppm kills roots). Good composted mulch is a deep chocolate brown when dry and has a wonderful rich earthy fragrance.

Industrial wastes are often used to blacken products for marketing purposes. For example, some companies grind up old railroad ties to help darken material (Illegal in some states). The creosote used as a preservative is a known carcinogen.

Smelter wastes are sometimes used as feedstock to blacken products. Copper sulfate ($CuSO_4$) or other sulfur compounds may be present. As they breakdown elemental sulfur (S) may be produced which is a natural fungicide that kills the beneficial fungus that helps plants grow and prevents disease.

Boiler ash (bottom ash) is another industrial waste product used to color or blacken products. Boiler ash tends to be high in salts and extremely alkaline and comes from the burning of coal. The alkalinity is so strong that it will chemically burn raw wood black in a couple days. The black mulches produced using these toxic chemicals tend to be very alkaline with high levels of salt, with very high carbon to nitrogen ratios. Some ashes may contain large amounts of heavy metals that contaminate the mulch exceeding federal regulatory levels for safety. These mulch products will often turn a bleached grayish color in a few weeks after exposure to sunlight. These type products are very common in many areas.

Many of the waste chemicals used to make mulches dark (black) are carcinogenic. As our pets roll around in them guess what happens, cancer in dogs and cats have increased greatly.

Gardeners need to be careful as there are often more bad products than good, as most vendors just want your money and do not care if you get hurt or have bad results.

This picture is from an advertisement for making colored mulch.

COLORFUL MULCH = INCREASED PROFITS



Broad range of Colorfast colorants

- ▶ Mold and fungus resistance available
- ▶ Can color in any grinder
- ▶ Most cost-effective coloring unit

Visit our website – mulchcolorjet.com



As you can see by the photo above dyed mulches are often made from trash wood. If any soil yard is selling dyed mulches, they do not care about you the customer, your health or safety.

The same applies to landscapers and yard service companies whom use these mulches, they are very ignorant or do not care and just want your money.

As the old gardening proverb states: "*I have no quarrel with a man whom has a lower price, whom better knows what his product is really worth.*"

Or in other words, one gets what they pay for.

* * *

NWR NOW CARRIES SEEDS FROM

NATIVE AMERICAN SEED COMPANY

\$3.00 EACH !

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

SUBMITTING EVENTS? PLEASE READ!

- Only events submitted specifically for LG&F calendar are used
- Put sponsor's FULL name in email subject.
- Very long links will be shortened, but full link activated when clicked
- Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

EVENTS ARE ON-SITE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

--- COVID IS STILL IMPACTING ON-SITE GARDENING EVENTS ---

FRI., FEB. 18: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4,9am & 11am, [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#). Free. Ages 60+ or anyone age 12+ with mobility needs. Register: hcp4.net/parks/mercer/events/. 713-274-4160.

SAT., FEB. 19: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER SALE: TOMATO PLANTS, 9am-1pm, Genoa Friendship Garden, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road. hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/

SAT., FEB 19: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDEN CLASS(virtual) by THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP, 9am-noon. Free. Online. Register: thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/Calendar.aspx?EID=9233

SAT., FEB 19: INVASIVE SPECIES TRAINING by THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP, 8:30am-3:30pm. The Woodlands Emergency Training Center. Register: thewoodlandstowship-tx.gov/Calendar.aspx?EID=9217

MON., FEB. 21: GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN OPEN GARDEN DAY, 8:30-11AM, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road. Free. Plant sale. hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/

WED., FEB. 23: TREE-RIFIC VOLUNTEERS, 9am. Mercer Botanic Gardens Horticultural Propagation Center. Free. Register: [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#). 281-353-8100.

THURS., FEB. 24: HEALTH CARE IN THE GARDEN (SOILS & FERTILIZER) by LONS GARRETT, 7-9pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Houston Hemerocallis Society event. ofts.com/hhs/

SAT., FEB. 26: URBAN FOOD & HABITAT CRATION by KEVIN TOPEK, 10:30am, Wabash Feed and Garden, 4537 N. Shepherd. Register: <https://bit.ly/3uYC8mn253723372437>, wabashfeed.com

WED., MAR. 2: GROWING VANILLA ORCHID: 9:30-11am, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 NASA Pkwy, Webster. Free. Gardeners By The Bay event. www.gbtb.org

THUR., MAR. 3: SUCCESSFUL GARDENING TIPS by MARY KARISH, 6pm, Waller County Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. Waller County Master Gardeners event. Register: 979-826-7651/.

SAT., MAR. 5: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ANNUAL VEGETABLE AND HERB SALE. 9am-1pm, Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. txmg.org/wallermg.

SAT., MAR. 5: BRAZORIA MASTER GARDENER VEGETABLE SEEDLING SALE, 9am - Noon (no cash sales), Brazoria Environmental Education Station, 583 CR 443, Angleton. txmg.org/brazoria/, 979-864-1558

SAT., MARCH 5: MISSOURI CITY GREEN "POP UP" NATIVE PLANT WORKSHOP & SALE. Educational Workshop: 9-11am; Sale:9am-1pm,

Missouri City Farmer's Market. missouricitygreen.org

THURS., MAR. 10: ART OF FERTILIZATION: RIGHT PRODUCT, RIGHT TIME, RIGHT REASON by **GAYE HAMMOND** (virtual & in-person), 7-9pm, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 1819 Heights Blvd. Free. Houston Rose Society event. Link: houstonrose.org/

FRI., MAR. 11: THINGS I WISH I HAD LEARNED SOONER by **BAXTER & PATSY WILLIAMS**, 10AM, Trinity Episcopal Church, 1015 Holman St., Free. Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org.

SAT. MAR 12: TOMATO STRESS MANAGEMENT by **IRA GERVAIS**, 9-11:30am. **GARDENING FOR JEWELS—HUMMINGBIRDS**, by **DEBORAH REPASZ**, 1-3pm. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/

FRI-SAT., MARCH 18-19: HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA PIONEER UNIT 27TH ANNUAL HERB AND PLANT SALE 9am-5pm, Round Top Festival Institute, 248 Jaster Road, Round Top. herbsocietypioneer.org/events

SAT. MAR 19: CUCURBITS—SQUASH & CUCUMBER FAMILY by **KEVIN LANCON**, 9-11:30am. **SUCCESSFUL CONTAINER GARDENING** by **KAROLYN GEPHART**, 1-3. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/

SAT., MAR. 19: THE JOHN FAIREY GARDEN BUDDING OUT PLANT SALE & FESTIVAL, 10am-4pm, 20559 FM 259 Rd., Hempstead. 979-826-3232

SAT., MAR. 26: BRAZORIA MASTER GARDENER CITRUS SPRING PLANT SALE, 9am - noon (no cash sales), Brazoria Environmental Education Station, 583 CR 443, Angleton. txmg.org/brazoria/, 979-864-1558

SAT., MAR. 26, HERB FESTIVAL AT THE WYNNE HOME 8am-2pm. Wynne Home Arts Center, 1428 11th St., Huntsville. The Herb Society of America/Thyme Unit event. texasthymeunit.org; 936-891-5024

SAT. MAR 26: IRISES FOR THE GULF COAST GARDEN by **MONICA MARTENS**, 9-11:30am. **RAINWATER HARVESTING** by **NAT GREUSEN**, 1-3pm. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/

SAT., MAR. 26-APR. 3: NEAR NORTHWEST MANAGEMENT DISTRICT VIRTUAL SPRING PLANT SALE, Presentation by **HEIDI SHEESLEY**, White Oak Conference Center. Pickup: Treesearch Farms. nnmd.org

WED., APRIL 6: GARDENERS BY THE BAY PLANT SALE 9:am-noon, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 NASA Pkwy, Webster. 281-935-6442, leslie.j.wong@gmail.com

FRI., APRIL 14: MAKE GARDENING EASIER by **DR. JOSEPH R. NOVAK**, 10am Trinity Episcopal Church, 1015 Holman. Free. Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org.

SAT. APR. 30: BROMELIAD SOCIETY/HOUSTON SPRING BROMELIAD SALE, 9am-4pm, Metropolitan Multi-services Center, 1475 W. Gray. Free. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

FRI. MAY 13: NATURE'S BURIAL, LEAVING A NATURAL LANDSCAPE AS YOUR LEGACY, by **THE KATY PRAIRIE CONSERVANCY**, 10am, Trinity Episcopal Church. 1015 Holman. Free. Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org.

SAT.-SUN., MAY 21-22: BROMELIAD SOCIETY/HOUSTON ANNUAL SHOW-SALE, 9am-5pm Sat.; 11am-4pm Sun., Judson Robinson, Jr. Community Center, 2020 Hermann Drive. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

— **Check contacts for changes and/or masking policies** —

NOTE! Only events submitted specifically for this calendar publication will be used. We do not pick up events from other newsletter or mass emails. Links will be fully linked if clicked but word-shortened if too long.

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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 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.

