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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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(UPDATE & CAUTION FROM BRENDA -- This repeat column below is one of my favorites. I'm a little out of pocket now. My husband Bill has been diagnosed with West Nile Virus (transferred to humans by a mosquito, picked it up from a bird, probably a blue jay). It has affected his legs. Be informed! (houstontx.gov/health/Epidemiology/WestNile/index.html))

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HIGH RISE HORTICULTURAL HEADACHES . . . TWO TALES

By **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

In decades of writing gardening columns, I've only talked with two folks who really achieved success with balcony plantings on a tiny high rise open "porch."

One was the late Joan Murray, a delightful woman who treasured Lois L. Kaufman's famous quote: "***Plant a seed of friendship; reap a bouquet of happiness.***" The other is one of my longtime hibiscus gurus, Pat Merritt. First: Joan Murray:

Joan's son Steve emailed me several years ago asking for advice for his mother who had moved to a 6th floor apartment in The Woodlands. A Master Gardener, Joan was determined to "keep growing." Her balcony had a strong southern/western exposure.



My advice was based on common sense, since my search for long term, successful balcony gardens was "*nil & none*." I knew the main reason why these gardens fail. Sun's a major challenge but wind is the real killer.

Something to provide shade to protect soil moisture or at least help shield the plant while young is almost essential. Joan and Steve used solar/wind fabric along the handrail, anchored tightly with zip-ties to stop flapping. (See photo above left.) Not a total fix, Steve recalls, but certainly a help.

Self-watering pots are helpful as is first starting with sun-/drought-loving plants such as bougainvillea, succulents, cacti, etc. Tip: try only one or two of a variety of plants. See which you like and, more importantly, which like you.

When it comes to vegetables, Joan — helped by her screen — harvested tomatoes, cucumbers, and bell peppers. Cherry tomatoes did best, especially in planter boxes with water-trough base and a side (indirect) watering tube. Spider mites were a major problem with larger tomatoes.



Joan's successful decoratives included Asian jasmine which got a little "too happy" in its shady corner. It needed trimming which Joan didn't mind since she felt it helped "cool" the area, benefitting other plants.

Heavy, glazed clay planter pots became too hot to touch, probably baking soil inside. Foam faux pots worked better. Also helpful was keeping plants in black nursery pots slipped inside larger decorative planter pots. Not only did this provide some air circulation inside the decorative pot, it made the plant easier to move or replaced. Crowding pots close together really cuts down on needed

air circulation. Space them if you can or use a variety of sizes in groupings.

If you don't have self-watering pots, daily watering is essential. Steve recalls Joan's greatest successes were directly related to how cool they could keep the pots. The jasmine had the coolest soil due to location. Even diligent watering didn't help things in clay pots.

Joan expected veggies to be the most vulnerable, but overall they did pretty well in small plastic planters with water basins. Medium size plants, in plastic pots or the large foam planters, did ok. Plants in soils with a heavier portion of clay, rather than the lighter vermiculite, also fared better.

Summer always took some toll. Plants that started out thriving -- like russellia, Mexican cacti, bougainvillea and Meyer lemon -- did suffer in June-July. But all started recovering in August with steady watering. Gayfeather and vinca seemed more summer-hardy, but eventually heat took its toll. Sweet potato vine was a delightful success.

Below, l to r, bougainvillea, gayfeather, russellia, sweet potato vine and vinca



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HIGH-RISE HIBISCUS. After internationally-recognized hibiscus expert Pat Merritt lost her husband Roz, she decided to give up the hundreds of hibiscus plants they had collected over the years at their Southwest Houston suburban home.

Pat moved to a high rise apartment with a balcony and -- can you imagine? -- had to decide of that huge collection to take with her.

When Pat speaks on hibiscus, I listen. For decades, Roz and Pat have been stalwarts of the international hibiscus scene, especially the American Hibiscus Society and our local AHS/Lone Star Chapter. AHS President was one of many offices Roz held, at the same time as he was hybridizing new delights for our gardens. Pat oversaw the revision of the [American Hibiscus Society's Tropical Hibiscus Handbook](#) as Image Editor, with the late Barry Schlueter handling the text.



Two magnificent hibiscus hybrids were named in their honor:

Hibiscus *rosa-sinensis* ' **Roz Merritt** ' (left above) & *H. rosa-sinensis* 'Patricia Merritt' (center), both by renowned Houston area hybridizer Barry Schlueter.

Pat now has a deep, narrow, east-facing balcony. Naturally her first two choices were her and Roz's namesakes above. Then, just for great color, she added a garden variety, 'Sunny Wind,' below left, a yellow with a red center that blooms constantly.

Pat wanted "texture," so picked 'Snow Queen' for its green and white variegated foliage. But even experts are still learning, and sometimes it takes time to see if a plant is the. Pat admits, *"I soon discovered that I didn't have enough sun to keep the foliage from turning all green so this one may be donated."*

Pat loves white hibiscus, so brought over 'Dainty White,' an ever-blooming tall, skinny variety that doesn't take up much room.



Above l to r, 'Sunny Wind,' 'Snow Queen,' 'Dainty White' and 'Red Wave'

Pat's sixth hibiscus is 'Red Wave,' another textured one that has red in its leaves. It, too, may be donated for the same reason as 'Snow Queen' . . . not enough sun to keep it variegated.

Pat says she will probably replace 'Snow Queen' with a Plumeria named 'Grapette' (right) that is a clone of one Roz purchased from Bear Creek Farms about 30 years ago.



The best place to learn about growing hibiscus in the Greater Houston area? [The American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star Chapter.](#)

FAVOR? IF YOU HAVE A BALCONY GARDEN with successful longtime

plantings, do share! What are you growing, what advice can you share and, even better, send pictures! Email me at lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

*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*



John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 210

A question I often get asked when giving tours of my facility is: "What happens if a herbicide is present in the feedstock?"

Several years ago, a few composting operations around the country were forced to close due to herbicide residuals in the compost, causing the compost to kill plants.

At Nature's Way Resources, TCEQ tested our compost and found no detectable herbicides or residual breakdown products. As a result, I wrote a paper summarizing all the data on this issue. It can be found at:

www.natureswayresources.com

Another study was recently published in the Journal of Environmental Quality (2022) on glyphosate. They found that even in conventional composting (windrow methods) glyphosate was broken down after only 112 days. However, most composters using windrow methods only compost for 30-60 days or less.

We avoid many problems by not accepting any feedstock believed to have chemical contamination to begin with. Then at NWR we use static pile methods with very long-time frame composting. This ensures even larger levels of biodegradation of any complex chemical (pesticides, herbicides, etc.) that might have been present in the feedstock (if any). This is the reason we had no detectable residuals.

We often hear a lot about climate change these days. A study from Duke University published in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Science journal (2022) confirms a lot of other published research.

One of the largest contributors to global warming is the chemical methane (CH_4). When we place organic material into a landfill it produces large amounts of methane. Landfill companies often boast about capturing the methane produced, however what they do not tell you is that 80-90% of all the

greenhouse gasses including methane are released to the atmosphere before the landfill is closed, capped, and methane recovery systems installed.

When a gardener uses compost or native mulch made from organic waste diverted from landfills, you are being part of the solution to avoid climate change.

Additionally, these amendments can provide the nutrients plants need, eliminating the need for artificial fertilizers. They also feed the microbes required for good plant health.

Artificial fertilizers both in their production and, usage generate extremely large amounts of greenhouse gasses like ammonia, nitrous oxides, etc. which are hundreds of times more damaging than carbon dioxide to global climate.

Hence by using compost, native mulches and organic fertilizers, one gets better results, at lower costs, use less water, AND reduce greenhouse gasses! Also, when one uses re-mineralizer for trace elements, numerous studies have shown that the basalt rock dust greatly increases the rate and amount of carbon (humus) stored in the soil by microbes and other soil life.

Talking about the health and environmental damage caused by toxic agricultural chemicals, the non-profit organization GMOFREEUSA had a good summary of all the highly dangerous chemicals produced by Bayer-Monsanto, besides the herbicide glyphosate. The report was titled "Bayer-Monsanto's Sinister Seventeen".



www.gmofreeusa.org

Another reason to grow our own food (especially organically) is all the toxic chemicals found in food packaging (thousands of dangerous chemicals).

The non-profit organization "EcoWatch" had a recent article in their newsletter on toxic chemicals in food packaging titled:

“3,240 Potentially Harmful Chemicals Found in Food Packaging” which can be found at www.ecowatch.com



A lot of the data was from a study published in the journal Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition (2022)

With fall around the corner, it is time to start thinking about our fall vegetable garden. Some of the vegetables that do better in the cool damp weather of fall are the cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, brussels sprouts, collard greens, Bok choy, Arugula, Watercress, and radishes.

This group of vegetables produce chemicals called sulforaphane and DIM which are the cancer fighting chemicals we get when we eat the raw vegetables. There is a nice summary of the benefits of cruciferous vegetables in the health magazine “Life Extension”, (August 2022).

When these vegetables are organically grown in fertile microbially rich soil they have higher levels of these important nutrients.

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LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

SUBMITTING EVENTS? PLEASE READ!

- *Only events submitted specifically to LG&F calendar are used*
- *Use our exact format, type into email, no pdfs/jpgs/flyers*
- *3 lines max per entry. We will edit down if you don't.*
- *Too long links activated by word "Details."*
- *Submit: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com. Check your published entry!*

EVENTS ARE ON-SITE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

THUR., SEPT.1: ALL ABOUT MINT (virtual) by **BRANDI KELLER**, 10-11am. Texas A&M Free. Register: homegrown2022.eventbrite.com

TUES., SEPT. 6: BASIC ORGANIC GARDENING CLASS 1 (Zoom, 4-part series), by UHI GARDEN EDU, 6-7:30pm, Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

THURS., SEPT. 8: TREATMENT SAFETY by **MARK WINDHAM, Ph.D.**, (virtual) , 7-9pm, Houston Rose Society/Houston event. Free. meet.goto.com/614327597

FRI-SAT, SEPT. 9-10: GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER SUNDOWN SALE. Online. Details/Shop: store.galvestonmg.org

FRI-SAT, SEP 9-10: SUMMER SUNDOWN SALE by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, Noon-Noon. Online. Details and shop: store.galvestonmg.org or 281-786-6834.

SAT., SEPT. 10: INSECTARY GARDENS, HOW TO ATTRACT THE GOOD GUYS by **ANGELA CHANDLER**, 9:30-11:30 AM. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT, SEP 10: ONIONS & GARLIC by **KEVIN LANCON**, 9-11 am., AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4012-B, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener events. Free. Register: txmg.org/galveston; 281-309-4065

SAT, SEP 10: HERBS FOR GULF COAST by **BRIANA ETIE & NANCY LANGSTON-NOH**, 1-3 pm. AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4012-B, La Marque. Galveston Cty Master Gardeners. Free. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/event/; 281-309-4065

MON., SEPT. 12, PLANT PROPAGATION, (virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10-11:30am. Free. Houston Community College event. Register: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

SAT., SEPT. 17: WILDSAPES WORKSHOP & EXTRAVAGANZA SALE. Native Plant Society of Texas/Houston Chapter. Register/sale inventory: npsot.org/wp/houston/wildscapes-workshop-2022

SAT., SEPT. 17 (& 24): XTREME HUMMINGBIRD XTRAVAGANZA!, 8am-noon, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, 299 Hwy 332 W. Lake Jackson. info@gcbo.org

SAT., SEPT. 17, MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDNERS FALL FLORAL SALE. 9am-noon, County Texas AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Road Conroe. 936-539-7824. Register: MCMGA.com

MON., SEPT. 19, GENOA FRIENDSHIP OPEN GARDEN DAY, 8:30-11am, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Harris County Master Gardener event.

TUES., SEPT. 20, PLANT PROPAGATION (virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 11am-noon, free. Harris County Public Library event via Facebook Live: facebook.com/harriscountyppl/events/

SAT, SEPT. 24: T-BUD GRAFTING, HANDS-ON, by **HAZEL LAMPTON**, 9-11:30am. AgriLife Extension, Carbide Park, 4012-B, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Register: txmg.org/galveston; 281-309-4065

SAT., SEPT 24, TRANQUILITY TREASURES, A GARDEN WALK, 10-4 pm. League City Garden Club. \$15, leaguecitygardenclub.org.

SAT., SEPT. 24: XTREME HUMMINGBIRD XTRAVAGANZA!, 8am-noon, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, 299 Hwy 332 W. Lake Jackson. info@gcbo.org

SUN., SEPT. 25: SUSTAINABLE LIVING THROUGH PERMACULTURE 1, Southwest Houston), 1-5pm. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

FRI., SEPT. 30, THE FUTURE OF URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT by AGRILIFE EXTENSION, 9am-3pm. University of Houston Downtown, 315 N. Main St., Houston, TX 77002. \$50 fee. Register: <https://fufss2022.eventbrite.com/>

SAT., OCT. 1: FRIENDS OF MERCER BOTANIC GARDEN AUTUMN PLANT SALE, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble. themercersociety.org/

SAT., OCT 1: MEMBER-GROWN PLANT SALE AND GARDENING DEMOS, 8am-1pm, Shepherd Community Center, 10251 TX-150. Shepherd. <https://txmg.org/simg/event/plant-sale-10-22/>

TUES., OCT. 4: IN THE GARDEN: FALL VEGETABLE PLANTING DEMONSTRATIONS by SHARON STINSON, 5:30-6:30pm, Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT., OCT. 8: FALL GARDENING AND NUTRITION WORKSHOP by CAROL BURTON, 9am-1pm. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT, OCT. 8: GALVESTON COUNTY AGRILIFE FALL FESTIVAL, 9am-1pm., Carbide Park, 4012-B, La Marque. Master Gardener event. galveston.agrilife.org/

SAT., OCT. 8: INDOOR & CONTAINER GARDENING, 9-11am, Montgomery County Texas AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Road Conroe. 936-539-7824. Register: MCMGA.com

SAT., OCT. 8: COMPOSTING (Zoom) by ANGELA CHANDLER, 9:30-11:30. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT., OCT. 8: FALL GARDENING WORKSHOP by CAROL BURTON, 9am-1pm. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

TUES., OCT. 11: GROWING PLUMERIAS, (Zoom & in-person), 7pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org; 281-796-7185

TUES., OCT. 11: ALL ABOUT STRAWBERRIES, BLACKBERRIES AND BLUEBERRIES (Zoom) by JUSTIN DUNCAN, 6-7pm. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

THURS., OCT. 13: ROSE PROPAGATION by DEANNA KRAUSE, (virtual & on-site), 7-9pm, St. Andrews Episcopal Church, 1819 Heights Blvd. Free. Houston Rose Society/Houston event. meet.goto.com/957814789

FRI.-SAT., OCT 14-15: GARDEN CLUB OF HOUSTON 80th BULB AND PLANT MART, Fri., 9am-5pm; Sat., 10am-2pm, St. John the Divine Church 2450 River Oaks Blvd.. Free. Preview party Thurs., Oct. 12, & inventory: GCHOUSTON.ORG

SAT., OCT. 15: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS FALL VEGGIES, HERBS & SUCCULENTS SALE. 9am-Noon, Texas AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Road, Conroe. 936-539-7824; MCMGA.com

SAT., OCT. 15: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS OPEN GARDEN DAYS. 9am-noon, Texas AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Road, Conroe. 936-539-7824. MCMGA.com

MON., OCT. 17, GENOA FRIENDSHIP OPEN GARDEN DAY, 8:30-11am, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Harris County Master Gardener event.

TUES., OCT. 25: GROWING HERBS FOR HEALTH AND THE HOLIDAYS (Zoom) by SHERRY CRUSE, 7:00-8:30pm. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT., NOV. 12: FRIENDS OF MERCER BOTANIC GARDENS CAMELLIA & WINTER COLOR SALE (virtual), themercersociety.org/

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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. The name, she says, is not just fun, it's true.

Brenda's gradual sideways step from reporter into gardening writing 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.

Brenda became a Harris County Master Gardener and, over the years, served on the boards of many Greater Houston area horticulture organizations. She 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 Assistant 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.



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