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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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This is one of my favorite columns. It is mainly a repeat (with updates) while I take a break to help my husband recover from West Nile Virus.



Left, Joan Murray, right, gets a helping hand from her daughter-in-law Lisa Murray. Center, bougainvillea. Right Meyer lemon with bloom & fruit insert.

Autumn is the hush before winter.

~ French Proverb

CONQUERING PLANTS' HIGH RISE HEADACHES

BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH

*Update note: Unfortunately Joan Murray passed away several years ago.
 But the tips she shared, worked and are well worth sharing again.*

I've been writing the Lazy Gardener column-turned blog-turned LG&F

newsletter since the mid-1970s. Every since then, kept my eye out for a surviving Houston balcony garden -- with no success until . . .

Steve Murray wrote:

"My mother, Joan Murray, moved from the Midwest to a mid-rise apartment in The Woodlands. Her balcony has strong southern and western exposure and it's on the 6th floor so it has strong winds. We'd appreciate any ideas on grows well in containers with these extreme exposures."

My answer, *"Our biggest problem is the wind. Wind dries soil very quickly. Sun doesn't help, but keep in mind it's wind primarily. If you can rig up protection that shields the plant, that will help."*

Also good: self-watering pots that hold water in a separate compartment with wicking action. The old fashioned way is a bucket of water next to the pot. Poke one end of a stocking, shoestring or other thick wicking material all the way to the bottom of the pot. Weight the other end and drop it into bucket of water so it falls to the bottom. Soil will wick water as it needs it without keeping it so wet roots rot.

Invest in just a few of a wide variety of drought-tolerant plants for sun and shade to use in appropriate areas. Remember, morning>noon sun here is the same as full sun in the Midwest. See which survive. You can always get more of those. Don't invest too much in any one plant until you experiment.

Good luck, take pictures and remember me if any of those plants succeed. I want to know!

I couldn't possibly report their results better than Steve just did on his mother's 6th floor west- & south-facing, wrap-around balcony garden at The Villages at Woodlands Parkway. Here's his update (several years ago):

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.

UPDATE: Will be reporting on other balcony successes so if you have thoughts to share, please do! lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

* * *

If you don't see your submitted event in the Calendar below, email me!

*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 # 215

This time of year, most of the Monarch butterflies are migrating back to Mexico for their winter rest. This process takes several generations of butterflies.

Below is a short video on life cycle of Monarch Butterfly:

[SAVE THE MONARCH BUTTERFLIES](#)

The October issue of Texas Wildlife had a nice article on one of our wildflowers called the “Cat Claw Sensitive Briar” botanically known as *Mimosa nuttallii*. This plant is a highly nutritious native forb eaten by many animals (deer, quail, turkey, doves, and many other song birds).



This plant is a legume with deep roots which helps it be very drought tolerant. It runs along the ground and makes a nice filler between other plants. It even grows well on poor gravelly soils and disturbed sites.

It normally blooms from May to September, however I saw some blooming a few days ago in a field near La Grange. It has fragrant, light pink, powder puff flowers that many pollinators love. I noticed several swallow tails enjoying the nectar and pollen while I was watching.

As a boy I loved to touch the leaves and watch them fold up, hence one of the common names like “Touch-Me-Not”.

One of the new products I am excited to see are biodegradable pots for plants that are becoming more available. There are several types now available for gardeners and nurseries to use.

Some like Proven Winners Eco pots are made out of PLA (polylactic acid) that is derived from corn, switchgrass and sugar beets (selfecogarden.com)

Other materials being used are rice hulls, bagasse from sugarcane, cow manure, starch, feathers, newspaper, other fibers like recycled fabric like (smartpots.com), bamboo or coconut, etc.

Some manufactures are blending in fertilizer into the pot materials. This helps the pot breakdown faster in the soil and allow the roots to spread quicker and the nutrients eventually get released to the soil.

One of the benefits is that plants often grow faster in the biodegradable pots. Another advantage is that one plants the pot and its plant, there is no transplant shock. Lastly root circling is reduced as the roots often grow into and through the pot walls.

The bottom-line is that gardener get healthier plants that are less work to plant and no plastic waste to dispose of.

Another research paper published in the journal Neurotoxicity (2022) has found that synthetic pyrethroid insecticides cause developmental delays in toddlers. In 2019 the EPA removed a “safety factor” intended to protect children’s health from these toxic chemicals which allowed them to sprayed on food, in homes, and sports fields around the country.

Along the same lines, investigative journalist Carey Gillam and the Guardian Newspaper, has uncovered hundreds of pages of internal documents that show the chemical company Syngenta knew the herbicide paraquat could cause Parkinson's disease. Published in "The New Lede"

Carey Gillam was also the author of the book, **WHITE WASH** - The Story of a Weed Killer, Cancer, and the Corruption of Science", that exposed the cover up on the dangers of the herbicide glyphosate (Round Up). ISBN-13: 978-1610918329

Recently, the FDA found pesticides in 59% of the food samples tested. For domestic fruits it was 77% and for vegetables 60%. As noted above the EPA has steadily approved increases in the amounts of pesticides allowed on foods at the request of companies that sell the pesticides. Their nickname of the "Enhanced Profit Agency" is well deserved.

As consumers, to protect our families we need to demand organically grown food and grow as much of our own vegetables and fruits as possible using the modern biological methods known as "organic". Purchasing organically grown food from local farmers markets is another good option to protect one's health.

Below is a link to a new video from the Organic Consumers Association and other environmental groups on how to protect the health of your families.

GMOs, Chemicals, and the Foods Affecting Your Health

Watch this informative and alarming two-hour video featuring panelists Stephanie Seneff, Jeffrey Smith, Andre Leu, Julian Cribb, Ronnie Cummins, and Joanna Malaczyski-Moore. The all-out assault on our health and environment has reached a crucial turning point.

Learn about what's going on and what we can do about it: GMO's, Chemicals, And The Food System And How They Directly Affect Your Health



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A lot of folks have asked for heirloom and non-GMO seeds. We listened, and now we offer Bentley seeds!



VEGETABLE/HERB/FLOWER SEEDS

NON-GMO, HEIRLOOM, OPEN POLLINATED

Forget Me Not-Firmament-Cynoglossum amabile	Eggplant, Black Beauty Seed Packets - 22
Marigold-Crackerjack Mixed-Tagetes erecta	Kale, Dwarf Siberian Seed Packets - 594
Morning Glory Mixed Colors-Ipomoea	Lettuce, Simpson's Curled Seed Packets - 29
Sunflower-Mammoth-Helianthus annuus	Lettuce, Parris Island Romaine Seed Packets - 452
Sunflower, All Sorts Mix	Lettuce, Buttercrunch Seed Packets - 24
Zinnia-Lilliput Mixed Colors-Zinnia elegans	Mustard, Southern Giant Curled Seed Packets - 30
Basil, Genovese Seed Packets - 5	Onion, Evergreen Bunching Seed Packets - 32
Catnip Seed Packets - 63	Onion, Sweet Yellow Seed Packets - 589
Garlic Chives Seed Packets - 556	Pepper, Long Red Cayenne Seed Packets - 38
Cilantro, Coriander Seed Packets - 66	Pepper, California Wonder Seed Packets - 37
Dill, Long Island Mammoth Seed Packets - 68	Peas, Sugar Ann Snap Seed Packets - 36
Parsley, Plain Italian Seed Packets - 73	Pumpkin, Jack O'Lantern Seed Packets - 40
Arugula, Rouquette Seed Packets - 567	Pumpkin, Small Sugar 'NEW'
Beans, Provider Seed Packets - 5	Radish, Cherry Belle Seed Packets - 41
Beets, Detroit Seed Packets - 8	Radish, Sparkler Seed Packets - 43
Brussel Sprouts-Long Island Improved	Spinach, Bloomsdale Savoy Seed Packets - 44
Cabbage, Pak Choi 'NEW'	Squash, Acorn Seed Packets - 45
Cabbage, Copenhagen Market Seed Packets - 10	Squash, Yellow Crookneck Seed Packets - 48
Cantaloupe, Hale's Best Seed Packets - 12	Squash, Zucchini Seed Packets - 49
Carrot, Nantes Seed Packets - 14	Tomato, Ace
Celery, Tall Utah 'NEW'	Tomato, Cherry
Corn-Golden Bantam 8 Row	Turnip, Purple White Globe Seed Packets - 57
Corn, Pearls & Gold Seed Packets - 18	Watermelon, Sugar Baby Seed Packets - 60
Cucumber, Boston Pickling Seed Packets - 19	
Cucumber, Marketmore 76 Seed Packets - 20	

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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!
 - Always check to make sure your event is listed. if not let Brenda know
- EVENTS ARE ON-SITE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED**

SAT., OCT. 22: MAINTAINING YOUR GARDEN, 10-11am, Beauty's Community Garden, 3201 Airline Dr. Free but register: <https://bit.ly/3RSTppZ>

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/

WED., OCT 26: PHOENIX'S BOTANICAL GARDEN & ARIZONA'S SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK by **DR. ANDREA VARESIC**, 7pm. Metropolitan Multi-Service Center,

1475 West Gray St. Houston Cactus and Succulent Society event. hcsstex.org

FRI.-SAT., OCT., 28-29: TEXAS COASTAL PRAIRIE CONFERENCE: PRESERVING LANDS & LEGACIES. University of Houston Clear Lake Bayou Building, <https://www.prairiepartner.org/conference>

WED., NOV. 2: BEES AND THE ENVIRONMENT by **ED BOYER**, 9:30-11am, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 NASA Pkwy, Webster. Gardeners By The Bay event. gbtb.org

SAT., NOV. 5: 49th ANNUAL HERB FAIR by **THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA, SOUTH TEXAS UNIT**, 9am-2pm, Southside Place Clubhouse, 3743 Garnet St. Free. herbsociety-stu.org

SAT., NOV. 5: DISEASES AND INSECTS, 10-11am, Beauty's Community Garden, 3201 Airline Dr. Free but register: <https://bit.ly/3RSTppZ>

SAT., NOV. 5: NATIVE TEXAS PLANTS by **MARK BOWEN**, 10:30, Wabash Feed and Garden, 4537 N. Shepherd, \$10. Register here <https://bit.ly/3VbBD3m>, wabashfeed.com

THURS., NOV. 10: PEST FREE ORGANICALLY by **JAY WHITE**, 7-9pm, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 1819 Heights Blvd. Houston Rose Society/Houston event. Free. Virtual: meet.goto.com/475926661

SAT., NOV. 11: HARVEST, HANDLING & STORAGE, 10-11am, Beauty's Community Garden, 3201 Airline Dr. Free but register: <https://bit.ly/3RSTppZ>

SAT., NOV. 12: FRIENDS OF MERCER BOTANIC GARDENS CAMELLIA & WINTER COLOR SALE (virtual), friendsofmercer.com

WED., DEC. 7: HOW TO GROW AMARYLLIS by **PATTY CORDRAY**, 9:30-11am Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 NASA Parkway, Webster. Gardeners By The Bay event.gbtb.org

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Saturdays 7-9am • SportsRadio 610



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 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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