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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.*



## ROOTING FOR — AND WITH — WINTER COLOR!

*"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow."*— Audrey Hepburn

**BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

Most of the country is thinking about putting gardens to bed for the winter. It's okay to smile. We still have a good two months (at least) of growing time, even more if January and February don't bring prolonged subfreezing temperatures.

With our extreme weather changes, there's no predicting for sure. But normally many shrubs blooming now may well produce color through December and maybe even into January.

To hedge our bets, in today's Spotlight Article, one of our great gardening teachers, the late Linda Gay, gives us hope! Linda is best known as former longtime director of Mercer Botanic Garden, an incredibly informed/delightful gardening presenter and for legacy contributions to the McGovern Centennial Gardens in Hermann Park, among many other public sites & venues.

If we do have early intense cold spells, the mostly-annuals Linda enjoyed recommending will make not only beautiful pockets of color, but also great cold-weather blooming fill-ins for those wimps who decide to conserve energy by dropping their flowers and maybe leaves as well.

It never hurts to have impressive color when visitors arrive for Thanksgiving, Christmas and other upcoming celebrations!

And, always on target, Linda threw in suggestions to help folks create garden cheers for their favorite college teams!

\* \* \*



Before we get to Linda's pearls of wisdom, I've had two "what-are-these?" queries about interesting plants around town:

- **PEACHY-PINK BLOOMERS** -- Those gorgeous pinkish "blooming" trees are golden raintrees. The one at left above belongs to Sam & Mary Jo Kruse. Those aren't flowers, they're seed pods. "Golden" refers to the beautiful yellow flowers that preceded these pods. As with so many of our beautifully blooming trees, they're proving a little too happy - aka: invasive -- as they enjoy our changing climate.
- **INTERESTING GRAY BALLS** -- The soft, feathery-looking medium-sized trees with the interesting gray balls (right above) — that can be seen blooming on OST where it ties into South Main — are hybrids off our native bald cypress. Dr. David Creech at [Stephen F. Austin Mast Arboretum](#) in Nacogdoches has consulted on some fascinating work in China with our native bald cypress. I expect these might be the result of his efforts.

*(Must give credit. Linda Gay identified this tree for me! I've never seen a bald cypress so perfect for a suburban home landscape. How nice I can just now turn the rest of this column over to her!)*



## QUICK BREAK FOR 2022 UPDATES . . . .

### 2022 LAZARUS PLANTS UPDATES:

- **JEANNE STREET** thought her cassia was lost in the freeze two years ago. "No sign of it that entire year," she reports. But this year "babies" appeared in numerous spots throughout the garden! This Cleveland airport site is a very exposed west-facing bed. PS. no sprouts have appeared from original plant site! *(File photo for ID only. )*



- **MAKING EXCEPTION FOR LAZARUS**  
Normally I don't use reports from outside the Greater Houston area (we're such a unique subtropical pocket!) But so many of us grow Sabals, here's hope from Dallas' Peter Schaar. The 2021 Feb. freeze's 2-degree nights completely defoliated his 15' *Sabal mexicana*. After 2 months of no growth in sight, he arranged for removal. It suddenly "rose from the dead." Now is big, healthy with a full crown of foliage, it even flowered and fruited this year. Never say never!



- **NEVER SAY DIE ON BULBS! SUZZANNE LYONS** reminds us many bulbs are incredibly hardy, almost no matter what havoc they endure or damage inflicted. Squirrels dug up this poor amaryllis bulb, "leaving it naked as a jay bird, with no roots," she writes. Suzzanne potted it with good soil, kept it moist and, she reports: *"Look what's happening...another rescue...very rewarding!"*



**AND NOW, A PAST SPOTLIGHT ARTICLE** *featuring the late LINDA GAY, Mercer Botanic Garden Director and horticultural educator. Her legacy lives forever in gardens of all of us she influenced over the years*

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*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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# Spotlighting our . . . **Local Experts**

*Lazy Gardener and Friends Newsletter*



*L to r, red & white cyclamen, cyclamen with alyssum border, expanded shale, Clivia miniata and COUGAR RED bluebonnets*

## **FALL INTO WINTER (& FOOTBALL) WITH LOTS OF COLOR IN THE YARD!**

**By (the late) LINDA GAY**

Nothing says Christmas like red and white cyclamen. In the shade container, I like to use mixed red and white cyclamen - not straight-line bands (this point would be in flower beds not containers) -- with white alyssum and add dark green English ivy in between the alyssum.

Miniature cyclamen get 6-8" tall and have a smaller habit than the larger growing ones. Cyclamen are bulbs. When planting, take care not to bury the bulb (where the leaves and flowers arise from the top, see below). Don't cover the crown when mulching. Plant the "crown" high to keep disease from attacking and killing the plant. Do not keep the soil too wet, let the soil dry out in between waterings.



***Miniature cyclamen bloom and sprouting bulb***

If predictions indicate we're going to have a cold wet winter, before planting, add expanded shale to those areas that do not drain well. Keep frost cloth handy to cover plants when temperatures drop to freezing so you won't lose



flowers on cyclamen or snapdragons.

*Clivia miniata* is a fantastic winter bloomer in the shade garden and the cluster of orange flowers is very long lasting when protected from frost.

I love violas; they bloom so much better than pansies and have twice the number of flowers per plant! Houston is so cloudy in the winter, pansies don't bloom well, as they like 6 hours of sun daily. Those cute little Johnny Jump-Ups jump right into your face, bloom in shade, sun and cloudy weather. They are the best performers through the winter and into the spring.



*L to r, Violas - Admire 'Orange and Purple', Flora Power ' Gold Purple Wing', Sorbet 'Citrus Mix' and Sorbet 'Penny Orange'*

**AND FOR THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL FANS** - Many new varieties and bi-colors have been added to the trade. Above, left to right . . .

- Admire series 'Orange and Purple' SCREAM "FALL IS HERE!" or when will it be here?
- Floral Power series 'Gold Purple Wing' is the Viola for LSU, guaranteed to bring out the Bengal in the Tiger.
- Sorbet 'Citrus Mix' or 'Penny Orange' certainly "Hook Those UT Horns!"

And below, l to r . . .



- A combo planting that literally bleeds red for the UH Coogs would be *Dianthus chinensis* 'Telstar Crimson' interspersed with 'Telstar White'.
- Penny series (closer to maroon) 'Red Blotch' with Penny 'White' "GIGS THOSE AGGIES"!

**NO LUCK WITH SNAPS?** I also want to offer a little advice to those gardeners who think they cannot grow snapdragons. You are keeping them TOO WET.

Snapdragons like to dry out completely in between watering. If soil is too heavy add some expanded shale (see top of article) to improve drainage and aerate the soil permanently. Shale is porous and will absorb excess water until the soil dries out, then the water is released from the shale.

- Snapdragons have been hybridized to flower all winter instead of growing all winter and flowering in the spring. Some of my favorite series are:
- DWARF: Montego 'Orange Bicolor', 6-8". Snapshot and Snaptastic are two new series of dwarf snapdragons
- MEDIUM: Solstice or Liberty, 16-20"
- TALL: Rocket snaps get 4' tall and do not bloom until spring!



*L to r, Great snapdragons: 'Liberty' Linda photographed during a past dry spring, Montego 'Orange Bicolor.' 'Snapshot' dwarf, 'Snaptastic' dwarf and 'Solstice' medium.*

\* \* \*

#### **BRENDA UPDATE NOTES:**

- Looking for winter-blooming color ideas, visit Mercer Botanic Garden and other gardens around town, including your County Master Gardeners' demonstration gardens. See what's blooming for them now and when it gets REALLY COLD! <https://mastergardener.tamu.edu/county-programs/>
- Don't send me pictures of so-called maroon bluebonnets. Those are Cougar red bluebonnets! True natives, as are white bluebonnets. (Pictured at top of column)

\* \* \*



## **NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 219**

**A** question I often get asked is "What is humus?" Simply -*Humus is the most important part of a healthy fertile soil!*



Humus (humic substances) come from organic matter that has decayed (composted native mulches, leaf mold compost, humates, and even some types of coal).

A healthy soil should contain 4-8% organic matter by weight (8% by weight is about 25% by volume). Most gardeners have soil organic matter less than 2% and this is one of the reasons they experience poor growth, diseases, insect problems, drought problems, weeds, less heat, and cold tolerance, etc.

Humus is composed of chains of carbon atoms linked together into complex structures. The material we call humus is composed of several components; humic acid, fulmic acid, ulmic acid and humins. These are very weak organic acids chemically speaking.

These components are all similar but distinguished by their solubility in water and the length of their carbon chains that form the individual molecules. Humate is the solid form of humic acid, fulmate is the solid form of fulmic acid, etc. and humins are the longest carbon chains and most resistant to further decomposition.

Humus can be obtained from several sources, compost, composted native mulches and humates.

Humates are mined from ancient plant deposits that never became coal or oil, and the best humates come from areas with volcanic activity nearby when they were formed as this allows extra elements to be captured and held by the humus.

All life requires energy. Soil microorganisms get their energy from eating (combining carbon atoms with oxygen thus releasing energy just like when wood is burned in a fireplace). By eating carbon containing molecules found in humic substances, microbes get the energy for various metabolic processes from growing and reproducing, creating soil structure to fighting disease and pathogens.

All forms of humic substances improve a soils water holding capacity and the efficiency of how plants use the water. They also create soil structure that allows water and air to enter the soil holding the water in the root zone where plants can use it. Humic substances can easily hold over seven times their weight in water and some types up to 15X.

A question I often get asked is what is the difference between compost and humates? While a good product, humates are not compost.

A few years ago, I looked at some data on compost on the USDA website and it showed that even an average compost will contain over 350 pounds of humic substances (humus) per cubic yard of compost. These humic substances will contain humic acid, fulmic acid, ulmic acid and humin just like humates.

Compost has more long chain and extremely long chain carbon atoms than humates which is why good compost provides benefits over several years even from one application. As one can see there is an overlap in function of compost and humates. However, a good compost also has complex sugars,

carbohydrates, growth hormones, and many other compounds that are required by microbes and plants that are not in humates.

The biggest difference is that compost is alive with billions of beneficial microbes per pound of compost and tens of thousands of species. Humates work best when used with a good compost to provide the diversity and quantity of microbes need to best utilize the resources contained in humates.

For those that want a little more technical explanation on the chemistry of humates see the paper: "Organic Matter, Humus, Humate, Humic Acid, Fulmic Acid and Humin: Their Importance in Soil Fertility and Plant Health" by Robert Pettit, PhD, Emeritus Associate Professor Texas A&M University.

For those that want a detailed technical discussion see the book: "Humus Chemistry - Genesis, Composition, Reactions by F. J. Stevenson, ISBN 0-471-59474-1.

Note: As readers of this newsletter know, there are a lot of garbage compost products being sold in our area since Texas does not have labeling laws. Similarly, the same applies to humates.

In Houston we are lucky that San Jacinto Environmental Supply distributes a high quality humate product called "Microlife Humates Plus" in bags to the better area retailers. These are the same folks who make the best organic fertilizer (Microlife™) I have ever tested and the one I use personally.

One of the environmental problems we are facing is a shortage of phosphate for use in fertilizers that our plants and all life require. Most clean safe phosphate deposits have already been mined out. Several years ago, the USGS has warned that the remaining deposits are contaminated with heavy metals like cadmium to radioactive elements.

Another reason to only use organic fertilizers is that cadmium is highly toxic if we have too much, where it will damage kidneys and other organs (in high levels it is also toxic to plant tissue).

The human body tries to remove cadmium from our bodies by transporting it to our kidneys in an attempt for it to be eliminated. However, it binds tightly to many enzymes and can be stored for over 30 years! Cadmium replaces zinc and binds over 300 times tighter to the enzymes. Therefore, having sufficient zinc in our diets is very important as it prevents most cadmium from being absorbed. For a more detailed discussion, see page 90-91 in "Nature's Building Blocks - An A-Z Guide to the Elements, John Emsley, Oxford University Press, 2011, ISBN 978-0-19-960563-7".

Sewage and the waste water produced, has a lot of phosphates in it. Researchers at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore has discovered a bacterium (*Candidatus accumulibacter*) that absorbs and hyperaccumulates phosphorous from waste water at very warm temperatures. The bacteria can then be filtered from the water and processed to recover the phosphorus. Journal Water Research, 2022.



Speaking of toxic water from waste water treatment plants, the city of Los Angeles has proposed filtering it and adding it back to the public water supply.

\* \* \*

**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 - 3	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 8 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 for 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](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com). Check published entry!**
- **Always check to make sure event is listed. if not let Brenda know**

**EVENTS ARE ON-SITE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED**

**NOW-DEC. 2: 2022 GALVESTON COUNTY PECAN SHOW SUBMISSIONS**, 3pm.  
4102-B Main St, La Marque. Galveston County AgriLife Extension event.  
<https://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/>

**SAT., DEC. 10: GROWING TOMATOES FROM SEED**, 9-11:30am, Galveston  
County AgriLife Extension, 4102-B Main St, La Marque. Free but register:  
<https://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/>

**SAT., DEC. 10: GOING NUTS FOR PECANS!**, 2-4Pm, Galveston County AgriLife  
Extension, 4102-B Main St, La Marque. Free but register:  
<https://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/>

**THUR., DEC. 1, PLANTABLE CHRISTMAS TREE ALTERNATIVES** (virtual)  
by **BRANDI KELLER**, 10-11am. Free. Register: [homegrown2022.eventbrite.com](https://homegrown2022.eventbrite.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](https://event.gbtb.org)

**SAT., DEC. 10: GROWING TOMATOES FROM SEED**, 9-11:30am, Galveston  
County AgriLife Extension, 4102-B Main St, La Marque. Free but register:  
[galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/](https://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/)

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[galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/](https://galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/)

## 2023

**WED., JAN.4: "NATIVE PLANTS AND HOW TO KNOW THEM"** by **DIANE  
HUMES**/ 9:30-11:00am, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 NASA pkwy,  
Webster. Gardeners By The Bay event. [gbtb.org](https://gbtb.org)

**TUES., FEB. 14: NCARBON'S NATURE BASED CREDIT PROGRAM: AN EARTH  
BASED, EARTH CHANGING CONCEPT** by **JIM BLACKBURN**, 1-2pm, United Way  
of Greater Houston 50 Waugh Dr. Free. Crestwood Garden Club event.

**SAT.-SUN., MAY 5-7: ANNUAL SPRING BROMELIAD SOCIETY/HOUSTON  
SALE**, 8am, Judson Robinson, Jr Community Center, 2020 Herman Dr. Free.

**SAT, & SUN., OCT 14&15: 2023 SOUTHWEST BROMELIAD GUILD SHOW &  
SALE**, 8am, Holiday Inn 18530 State Highway 249. Free.

**NOTE: We do NOT pick up events from other newsletters or  
general PR releases. See submission policy above calendar.**

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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. 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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