

LAZY GARDENER AND FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

HOUSTON GARDEN
NEWSLETTER

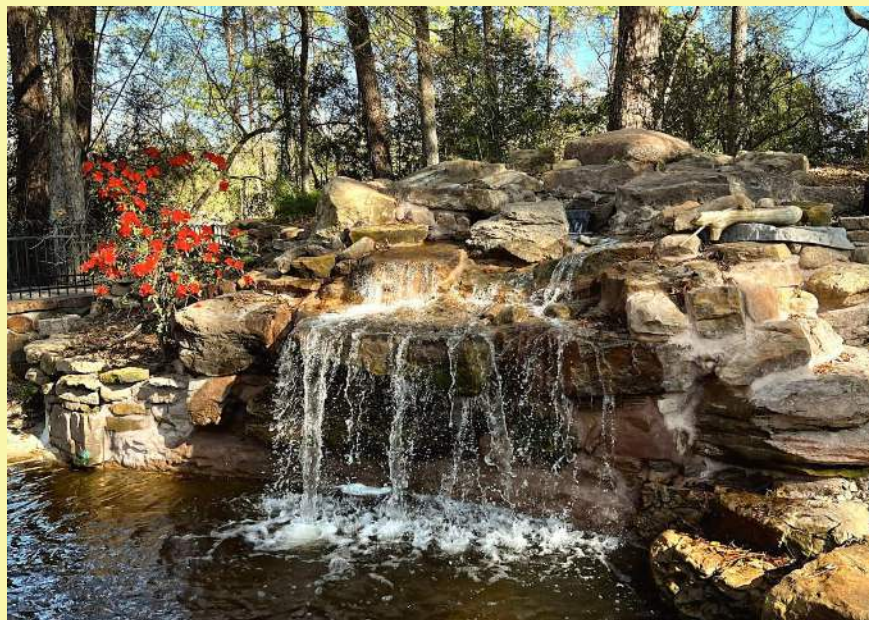


Jan-5-2024 | Issue 520

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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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***Mercer Botanic Gardens' Forest Floor Waterfall**
will help transition into next 50 years! -- Christy Jones photo*

KICK OFF '24 IN GRAND GARDENING STYLE AT MERCER'S 50th ANNY!

By **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

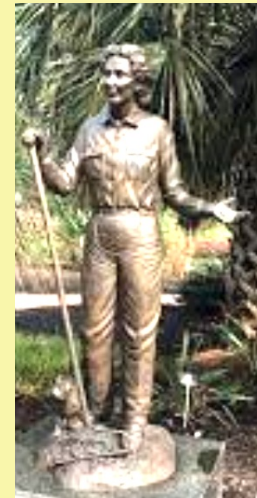
If the picture above of Mercer Botanic Garden's new renovated Forest Floor pond and waterfall with its now-blooming Encore azalea isn't enough to pop your eyes, how about this below? Another of Mercer's Encore azaleas . . .

. . . This one is 'Autumn Twist' by name, roughly 10'-12' high now, planted in 2008 and trained into a small tree. Yes, all those colors are on one single plant!



Mercer's Encores are really strutting their stuff right now at this free, north Harris County garden. The Encores are obviously trying to keep up with the 20,000 new plants Mercer's been installing in preparation for its free 50th Anniversary celebration Monday, Jan. 8, starting at 9am.

This lovely, free-to-public-space that visionaries Charles & Thelma perpetuated and Precincts 3 and 4 continue on Cypress Creek banks, encompasses not only the original Mercer homestead, but additional lands purchased by Harris County. "Thelma" (right) still greets visitors at the North Harris County entrance, [22306 Aldine Westfield Road Humble, Texas 77338-1071](https://www.harriscountytx.gov/23306). (Hope to see you there!)



Looking for winter bloomers? Mercer's winter color gardens are ALWAYS a floral education of often-overlooked plants that do well in our area, including (often specific variety-named) snapdragons, wallflowers, Swiss chard, flowering kale and more. Also (*l to r below*): Brazilian Blue Buttonbush ('seeds out well and sprouts up in random places'), 'Friendship' Salvia ('Amistad' Salvia) and Drift Rose (*Rosa x 'Pink Drift'*) in front of the large planting urn.



Free refreshments and garden tours (*unless lightning*) will follow opening celebrations. While you're there, visit Precinct 1's Arboretum on the west side of Aldine-Westfield, adding 200+/- acres to the 180-acres of Mercer Botanic Garden on the East side. Everything's free!

* * *

Meanwhile . . . This is HOUSTON, folks. We have/expect to have at least some year-round blooms & harvests -- despite floods, hurricanes, scorching heat, drought, freezes, ice & snow (not to mention insects!). Pick the **right** flowers/crops and at least some should always breeze right through (albeit maybe with short recovery periods). But YOU have to stay informed about new, hardier varieties and our two botanical gardens are great places to learn. Across town from Mercer, in our SE quadrant, an equally great place to see winter gardening stars — [Houston Botanic Garden](https://www.houstonbotanic.org/) — is gearing UP for it's array of plants & activities. Check HBC calendar of events on above link.

* * *

Potpourri

- **'BULLYING' PLANTS?** In **IKEA's** United Arab Emirates stores, a unique display of two identical healthy plants invited children to "bully" one and compliment the another! After 30 days, complimented plants were healthy and thriving. Insulted ones were noticeably wilted and very sad looking
- [youtube.com/watch?v=Yx6UgfQreYY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yx6UgfQreYY)



- **WE'RE LEADING AGAIN!** 50+ years ago, when my **Lazy Gardener** column began in the Houston Chronicle, we ranked as the nation's **LEADING** lawn/garden chemical purchasers. Our non-native lawns & mostly imported flowers were gourmet delights for our subtropical climate's abundant insects and diseases. This has changed (somewhat) for the better, thanks to Texas Native Plant Society and more Houston-insect-resistant cultivars of imported plants, developed by our wonderful plant societies and local growers like Treeseach Farms. Unfortunately, however . . .



... WE'RE BACK ON TOP! Folks here still insist on huge St. Augustine lawns! As a result: [harris-county-tops-country-in-gasoline-powered-lawn-equipment-pollution](#).

IF YOU MUST HAVE/MOW A LAWN, do know that while dandelions are a good nutrition source for bees (**DON'T MOW DOWN!**), they're far from the only sources (as oft-publicized). Valuable late winter/early spring resources, especially for native bees > wildflower.org/expert/show.php?id=6723.
Above, even mowed dandelions usually continue blooming, albeit on shorter stems!

* * *

Brenda Beust Smith's column is based on her 40+ years as
Houston Chronicle's *Lazy Gardener* --- Email: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com
Note: This column focuses ONLY on the Greater Houston area.

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ORGANIC SCIENCE DAY 2024

**UNITED WAY OF
GREATER HOUSTON**
50 Waugh Drive
Houston, TX 77007



8AM-3:30PM



Friday, January 26, 2024



Learn More Online:
ohbaonline.org/register

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\$125 Non-Members

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*Join us for a day of Organic education,
networking, & unlock the secrets to elevate
your business. Don't miss the chance to
shape a successful future with us!*

SPEAKER LINE UP



JEFF LOWENFELS

Author of the Teaming Series
Quadrilogy: Teaming with Microbes,
Teaming with Bacteria, & More!

**TOPIC: The New, Updated
Soil Food Web**



LISA MORANO, Ph. D.

A professor of Biology &
Microbiology at the University
of Houston - Downtown.

**TOPIC: Shifting Microbial
Communities from
Antagonistic to Friendly**



JASON OSTERMAYER

Seventeen years of Organic gardening
& lawn care, 10 years as a brand owner
+ marketing consultant, and Co-Owner
of Healthy Soil Organics.

**TOPIC: The Science of Organic
Sales; Marketing Strategies for
a Sustainable Future**



MOLLY PIKARSKY

A lifelong participant in the world
of Organics, Molly is the founder of
Horticulture Science Studio and part of
the land restoration team of Maas Verde.

**TOPIC: The Economics
of Organics**



JOHN O'DONNELL

As Vice-President of Technology for Water
Logic, John is one of the most respected
educators in irrigation technology and
water conservation with over
40 years' experience.

**TOPIC: Improving Soil to Improve
Water Conservation**

ORGANIC SCIENCE DAY '24 EVENT AGENDA

8-9AM Breakfast, Coffee, Registration

9-9:30 AM Introduction by Mike Serant

9:30-10:20 AM Jeff Lowenfels



Author of the Teaming Series Quadriology: Teaming with Microbes, Teaming with Bacteria, Teaming with Fungi, Teaming with Nutrients.

TOPIC: The New, Updated Soil Food Web

New discoveries are changing our understanding of how the soil food web works. Learn the latest, it is a whole new soil food web!

10:30-11:20 AM Lisa Morano, Ph.D.



A professor of Biology & Microbiology at the University of Houston - Downtown.

TOPIC: Shifting Microbial Communities from Antagonistic to Friendly

To modify from William Shakespeare, there are not good microbes and bad microbes - it is thinking that makes them so. The idea that we can separate all microbes into good or bad is over simplistic. Whether something is bad often depends on other conditions in the system. These conditions may be the evolutionary history of the organism in question, the current environmental variables or community interactions. This talk will review how shifts in microbial communities impact plant health and review some particular microbial players that have shown to protect plants from disease.

11:20 - 11:40 AM Networking



11:40 - 12:30 PM Jason Ostermayer



Seventeen years of Organic gardening & lawn care, 10 years as a brand owner + marketing consultant, and Co-Owner of Healthy Soil Organics.

TOPIC: The Science of Organic Sales; Marketing Strategies for a Sustainable Future

Discover how to build meaningful connections in the organic horticulture market, emphasizing trust, purpose, and community. Learn practical strategies for online marketing, brand cohesion, and consumer engagement tailored to organic products / practices, and much more! Don't miss this opportunity to revolutionize your approach to organic horticulture marketing.

12:30 - 1:30PM Lunch

1:30 - 2:20 PM Molly Pikarsky



A lifelong participant in the world of Organics, Molly is the founder of Horticulture Science Studio and part of the land restoration team of Maas Verde.

TOPIC: The Economics of Organics

Bottom line, Organics are cheaper than chemicals and yield better results. You will learn how Organic products and practices cost less save money through plant resilience and water conservation and lessen maintenance expenses. The proof is in the math! It's a win-win.

2:20-2:40 PM Networking + Coffee

2:40-3:30 PM John O'Donnell



John is one of the most respected educators in irrigation technology and water conservation with over 40 years' experience. John also serves as Vice-President of Technology for Water Logic.

TOPIC: Improving Soil to Improve Water Conservation

Water is critical for our industry. Learn the future of available Texas water and how you maximize efficiency and save money by applying Organics to your soils and having at least a moderately efficient irrigation system.

3:30 PM Adjournment



THANK YOU EVENT SPONSORS!



John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 268

Subject: Christmas tree mulch Music video on Prairies

We hear a lot on the news about recycling your Christmas tree and getting some free mulch. So, let us look at the pros and cons of this type mulch.

PROS:

- Low cost
- Nice fragrance
- Protects soil from erosion and temperature variations
- Slugs and snails do not like to crawl across it
- Strong scent may repel some insects

- Like most mulches it reduces weed issues
- Over time it will degrade and add organic matter to one's soil

CONS:

- Highly flammable
- High carbon to nitrogen (C:N) ratio may cause nutrient tie-up, if a thick layer is used
- Few nutrients released as it breaks down, compared to other organic mulches
- Being composed of a single or limited number of species, it does not provide food for a wide range of beneficial microbes as compared to native mulches
- Highly variable in particle shape and size
- When freshly ground, the mulch is often very sticky from the conifer sap which can transfer to hands and clothing
- Not be as attractive as other types of mulch
- Slower to break down and improve soil quality
- May contain a high level of contaminants from flocking, tinsel, broken up ornaments to other decorations that were left on the tree and were ground up.
- May have possible herbicide contamination

Comments:

Depending on the quality control, type grinding or chipping equipment used, the mulch may vary from each recycling location as to particle size, chip shape, and contamination.

Ground mulches will knit together and be more resistant to erosion and washing out than chipped mulch. Different brands of grinders will use different screening plates resulting in wide variation in chip size and shape.

Most Christmas trees are conifers and are more of a pioneer species that grow in poor soils, hence the mulch produced is not as nutrient rich compared to other species of trees. A few of the more common species are Firs, Spruces, Pines, Hemlock, and a few others depending on where one lives.

The tree barks and needles frequently contain the chemical suberin, a naturally occurring substance that waterproofs (helps the plant shed water) and prevents the bark and needles from being broken down by microbes.

In addition to suberin, the barks and needles contain waxes that also help waterproof the tree. When this mulch is first applied it may reduce or repel rain preventing it from being absorbed into the soil for a few weeks until some of these chemicals break down.

Some plant species are sensitive to the chemicals in this type mulch. It is known that Christmas tree mulch will reduce the growth of tomatoes, marigolds, and a few others until it biodegrades.

Growers of Christmas trees often use glyphosate-based herbicides like Round Up for weed control around the tree. The waxes and other chemicals protect the tree from absorbing the toxic chemical and dying. However, once the tree

as been turned into mulch, the herbicide will wash off and get into the soil. The concentrations are not usually high enough to kill the plants but it stunts the growth of many species of plants.

For those of us that love our prairies and grasslands this was shared with me a few days ago. It is a great prairie music video with lots of beautiful ecosystem shots! It is less than 5 minutes.

View video [here](#).

* * *

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

CALENDAR SUBMISSION RULES PLEASE READ!

- Use **ONLY** this (3-line max) format & style for notice
DAY, DATE: TITLE by NAME (*if talk*), time, address, **Fee/free**.
Sponsoring group (if not in title). **website/phone** (**NO MORE!**)
- Only events submitted specifically for LG&F calendar are used
- Actual gardening/plant events only. No harvesting, cooking, etc.
- No events picked up from flyers / NO PDFS! TYPE IN EMAIL
- Submit: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com. Check published entry!
- All events on-site and in Houston unless otherwise noted
- Making us retype to our required format opens door to errors!!!!

SAT JAN. 6. WEDGE GRAFTING, by **HAZEL LAMPTON & DEBBIE ESPINOSA**, 9-11:30am; **GROWING PEACHES** by **HERMAN AUER**, 1-3pm. AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St., La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture, 281-309-5065

MON., JAN. 8: MERCER'S 50th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION, 9am-noon, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Register: pct3.com/MBG. 713-274-4160. Free.

MON., JAN. 8: INTRO TO AQUAPONICS by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (VIRTUAL), 10-11:30am, hosted by Houston Community College. Free. Register to receive link: hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register.

WED., JAN. 10: SENSATIONAL SUCCULENTS by **LEE ROWELL**, noon– 2pm, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Register: pct3.com/MBG. 713-274-4160. Free.

SAT., JAN. 13: NATIVE PLANTS by **ROBIN YATES**, 11am, Beauty's Community Garden's 'MLK Peace Throught Pie', 4204 Yale. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES, JAN. 16: INTRO TO AQUAPONICS (Virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**. 11am-noon, free. Harris County Public Library via Facebook Live. facebook.com/harriscountyppl/events

THU, JAN 18: INTERNATIONAL VEGETABLES GROWN LOCALLY by **TERESA SEE**, 10am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Lane. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu.

SAT., JAN. 20: COUSHATTA CAMELLIA SOCIETY SALE & FLOWER SHOW,
First Christian Church in Conroe

SAT., JAN 20: PLANTING FRUIT TREES RIGHT WAY by **HERMAN AUER**, 9am-Noon, **GROWING GREAT TOMATOES**, 1-3pm, by **IRA GERVAIS**, Carbide Park, 4102 Main, La Marque. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Free. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture, 281-309-5065

SAT., JAN. 20: HOUSTON ARBORETUM ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION, 10am-2pm, free 120 West Loop North, houstonarboretum.org/event/arboret-day-celebration/

TUES, JAN. 23: RAINWATER HARVESTING by **TERESA SEE**, 10am, Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Rd. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED, JAN. 24: SPRING GARDENING by **VALERIE DEPEW**, 11:30am, Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd., Cypress. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS, JAN 25: SHADE GARDENING by **DEBRA CALDWELL**, 10am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Lane. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED. FEB. 7: LA IRISES AND SPECIES PRESERVATION by **CHARLES PERILLOUX**, noon-2 m, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Register: pct3.com/MBG

THURS., FEB. 8: 29th ANNUAL FORT BEND REGIONAL VEGETABLE CONFERENCE, 8:14am-3:30pm, Bldg.C&D, AgriLife Fairgrounds, 4310 Texas 36, Rosenberg. Fees: 39thAnnualVegConf.eventbrite.com, 281-633-7033.

SAT., FEB. 10: FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS SPRING FRUIT TREE SALE, 9am-noon, Building H, Fort Bend County Fairgrounds. fbmq.org/pct3.com/MBG. 713-274-4160. Free.

SAT., APR. 6: BRAZOSPORT DAYLILY SOCIETY SALE, 9am-3pm., St. Timothy's Episcopal Church, 200 Oyster Creek Dr. Lake Jackson. 832-922-5732.

FRI-SUN., APR. 19-21: KINGWOOD GARDEN CLUB GARDENSCAPES, self-guided tours of homes and gardens \$25. kgc@kingwoodgardenclub.org

If your event didn't get in right away, one possible reason is you didn't submit it in our EXACT - NEVER CHANGING format. These usually take longer to be re-formatted and open doors to errors. Your choice! SEE TOP OF CALENDAR FOR DETAILS.

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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 general feature 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 became 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 general reporting into also doing gardening reporting 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.

About her column, Brenda says: "I don't consider myself a 'garden writer.'" I started out 50+ years ago as a very lazy "gardening reporter." I still feel that way today. I hope my columns inspire/help newcomers, but I do not write to them. I write to very experienced gardeners who want to expand their horizons.

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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