

# LAZY GARDENER AND FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

HOUSTON GARDEN  
NEWSLETTER



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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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*"If you are not killing plants, you are not really stretching yourself as a gardener."*

*-- J. C. Raulston, famed horticulturist*

*NOTE: Portions of Brenda's column are repeats. Her full regular column will return soon.*

## BIG AL'S FUTURE WINTER FORECAST, SHADE PLANTS AND WILD NEIGHBORS!

By **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

**GROUNDHOG ALERT!** Today, Groundhog Day, will determine if 91-year-old Big Al continues his 100% accurate predictions. (The 'Hog's accuracy rate is only 39% accuracy)! Beaumont's Gator

[Country](#) live noon Facebook airing of Big Al's feeding will hopefully signal no more hard winter weather. If he doesn't eat, winter continues. Big Al, at 13-foot, once ranked as the nation's largest alligator in captivity. *(Note: alligator's digestive systems slow way down until winter is over.)*



\* \* \*

**NEED SHADE-LOVING PLANT?** We are so blessed in this area with an abundance of gorgeous trees. But they, in turn, do cast a lot of shade. When asked for suggestions of vines that bloom in shade, I have to be honest. In deep shade, not many. In fact, I couldn't think of any.

But most shade is not "deep." Most is filtered as sun rays penetrate through the leaf canopy at different times of day. Usually at least an hour or more of direct sun hits the spot at different times of the year.

The good news is, with our extremely intense sun with its reflected heat and rays, these few, even temporary, penetrations might be all a vine needs to at least deserves a chance.

I'd love it if you readers could add any of your success stories with vines not mentioned below. But first, couple of thoughts:

- Don't overlook the potential for blooming vines to be great groundcovers. Or to add color to nonblooming groundcovers used under trees, etc., where St. Augustine refuses to grow. Consider planting these in containers set into the groundcover.
- Groundcovers spread by producing spreading foliage that roots into the ground. Vines spread from a single base by producing tendrils that will also root if in contact with soil but which don't need to.
- Researching shade blooming vines online can be frustratingly confusing for us. Sweet autumn clematis, honeysuckle, wisteria and trumpet creeper are frequently recommend as shade vines. But all four are now very invasive in our subtropical area. You've been forewarned!
- Expect vines to grow longer tendrils here than listed in descriptions if your sources is not based in the Greater Houston area.
- Many vines listed as annuals in nationwide lists will be perennial here if well mulched. Give them a chance to return in spring.
- Get to know your yard. The sun moves around the sky. Shade spots now might be sunnier in July.
- All these below attract butterflies, hummingbirds or both as well as other



pollinators and thrive in a wide variety of soils. All benefit from a good organic mulch and (unless labeled evergreen) are all root-hardy which means will die back in cold and return in spring.

- Best bet: always first consult your local neighborhood nurseryman. He/she shares your growing environment, your challenges and has on hand good-for-you, often brand new, recommendations ready to try. Starting with him/her may make your search much easier than traipsing around town trying to find specific plants.

**Since "shade" is so hard to define exactly,** let's just say these below are worth trying. Don't buy dozens of plants until you know they work in your yard.



### **BLACK-EYED SUSAN VINE**

*(Thunbergia alata)*

Listed as annual but usually perennial here, especially if well mulched. Flowers come in red, orange, yellow and white. Blooms summer-frost.



### **BLEEDING HEART**

*(Clerodendrum thomsoniae)*

Over 400 species of these. Shop local source! Mine lived for decades on a fence that got only little morning sun. Blooms summer to fall.



### **BUTTERFLY VINE**

*(Mascagnia macroptera)*

Named for seed pods, not flowers, both often on vine at same time. Pods last forever. Blooms heaviest in spring and fall, through to frost. Evergreen. Climbs easily up fence or trellis.



### **CLEMATIS**

*(Clematis 'Jackmanii')*

Unlike our invasive sweet autumn clematis, standard clematis usually require more cold than we have. Even so, my white 'Henryii' bloomed 5+/- years before dying. Look for varieties recommended for



"Gulf Coast," like this Clematis  
'Aotearoa'. Let me know if you find  
one that works!



**CONFEDERATE JASMINE**

*(Trachelospermum jasminoides)*

So fragrant, so beautiful. But needs  
a least a little sun. Also called star  
jasmine.



**HYACINTH BEAN VINE**

*(Lablab purpureus)*

Showstopper! Heavy vine, needs  
strong fence/ support. Plays well  
with morning glories.



**CLIMBING HYDRANGEA**

*(Hydrangea petiolaris)*

Starts out looking like a shrub, then  
sends out aerial rootlets. Slow  
growing at first, then speeds up.  
Lush foliage. Magnificent, white  
lacecap blooms in summer.



**THUNBERGIA  
'MERCER BLUE'**

*(Thunbergia Battiscombei)*

Brilliant blue trumpet-shaped flower  
with a yellow throat. Starts out  
shrub-like but then produces weak,  
vine-like stems. Blooms  
spring/summer.





### **DUTCHMAN'S PIPE VINE**

*(Aristolochia californica)*

A must for butterfly enthusiasts, only host plant of pipevine swallowtail butterfly. These "pipes" are its flower. Not a pleasant fragrance, but so interesting! Blooms winter/spring.



### **RANGOON CREEPER (*Combretum indicum*)**

Fast growing in moist areas. Better kept on dry side. Very showy and evergreen but give it plenty of room to spread. Blooms spring through fall. Also called Drunken Sailor vine. Sweet, fruity fragrance



### **EVERGREEN WISTERIA (*Millettia reticulata*)**

This is not our now-invasive Chinese wisteria. It's not even a true wisteria. Evergreen, fragrant and a much more civilized vine. You can see it by the Japanese Garden in Hermann Park. Needs a trellis or fence. Flowers spring, summer, fall.



### **CROSSVINE**

*(Bignonia capreolata)*

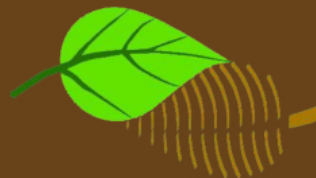
The 'nice' cousin of our invasive trumpet creeper vine found in trees all over our area. Perennial vine. Glossy green leaves turn reddish after frost. 2-inch trumpet flowers are yellow, buff-orange, brick or red. Named varieties much more civilized!

**Potpourri**

\* \* \*



## John's Corner



### NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 271

#### **Subject: Spring Chores, Mulch And Turning Clay Into Soil**

I was at my farm a few days ago and I noticed the buds on my Buckeyes were swollen, a sure sign that spring is right around the corner. This made me think of the spring gardening chores I needed to get done.

After the freeze a few weeks ago, there is a lot of dead foliage that needs to be trimmed back. Last year I purchased a DeWalt battery powered hedge trimmer and it has become one of my favorite garden tools. It has a lot of power and will easily cut branches over ¼ inch thick. No more dragging a long extension cord all over the yard.

In my yard in Houston, I have several species of Salvia's that cover a large portion of my yard that are now dead sticks. In years past I would have to use my hands or hand pruners to cut them a tedious time-consuming task.

I now use the hedge trimmer to cut them into 3-4-inch-long pieces that just fall to the ground adding to the mulch layer. After a few passes, they are cleared to the ground and ready for spring growth. What used to take hours now takes only a few minutes.

Now that the dead material has been removed it is time to make sure all my beds are mulched. Mulching is one of the most important gardening practices one can do and is also the one most often neglected or done incorrectly.

I live in southwest Houston with the black clay (Beaumont-Lake Charles clay). It is fertile but difficult to work in, hard as a rock in summer and slippery and sticky when wet, swells and shrinks tearing up roots.

Canada's department of forestry has funded research on every continent studying how to improve clay soils for decades. They found that a native mulch (**properly made**) improves clay soils better, faster, and cheaper than any other



technology.

I have been using aged Native Mulch from Nature's Way Resources for many years. Over time the clay has broken down into a rich beautiful fertile loam that can grow anything. My yard was featured in Better Homes and Garden's back in the Spring 2000 issue. The soil was so rich that I was able to go over 14 years without needing to water my lawn or garden. I will miss this soil when I move to my retirement home in a few weeks where I will have to start over.

On my website there are numerous articles on mulches that can be found at <https://www.natureswayresources.com/mulchcorner.html>

One can also search the Newsletter archive for additional articles on Native Mulch.

## LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

### CALENDAR SUBMISSION RULES PLEASE READ!

- Use **ONLY** this (3-line max) format & style for **FASTER INCLUSION**.  
**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](mailto: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
- **ALWAYS PROOF PUBLISHED WORDING & TEST EMAIL**

**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](http://pct3.com/MBG)

**SAT., FEB 7: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING** by **ROBIN YATES**, 6pm, Pasadena Public Library Fairmont Branch, 4330 Fairmont Parkway, Pasadena, free. Harris County Master Gardeners event. [hcmga.tamu.edu](http://hcmga.tamu.edu)

**WED., FEB. 7: LA IRISES AND SPECIES PRESERVATION** by **CHARLES PERILLOUX**, noon–2 pm, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free, Register: [pct3.com/MBG](http://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](http://39thAnnualVegConf.eventbrite.com) 281-633-7033.

**FRI., FEB. 9: MERCER GARDEN TOUR** by **HORTICULTURAL STAFF**, 9–10am, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free. Register: [pct3.com/MBG](http://pct3.com/MBG)

**SAT., FEB. 10: FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS SPRING FRUIT TREE**

**SALE**, 9am-noon, Building H, Fort Bend County Fairgrounds. [fbmg.org/pct3.com/MBG](http://fbmg.org/pct3.com/MBG). 713-274-4160. Free.

**SAT., FEB. 11: ANNUAL PRUNING DEMONSTRATION**, 2pm, Annual Pruning Demonstration. St Andrew's Episcopal Church 1819 Heights Blvd. Free. Houston Rose Society/Houston event.

**SAT., FEB 10: VIRTUAL TOMATO & FRUIT TREE SALE**, 8 am.-Sunday am or sellout. [friendsofmercer.com](http://friendsofmercer.com)

**MON., FEB 12: SUCCESS WITH SPRING VEGETABLES** (Virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am- 11:30am, free. Register in advance to receive link: [hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register](http://hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register)

**THURS., FEB 15: GROWING ROSES** by **MARIA BURGER**, 1pm, Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd Cypress, free. Harris County Master Gardeners event. [hcmga.tamu.edu](http://hcmga.tamu.edu)

**SAT., FEB 17: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS SOUTHEAST FRUIT TREE & TOMATO SALE**, 9am- 1pm, Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Pre-order online Feb 1-15: [hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/](http://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/)

**TUES., FEB 20: SUCCESS WITH SPRING VEGETABLES** (Virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 11am- Noon, free. Harris County Public Library via Facebook Live. [facebook.com/harriscountyppl/events](https://facebook.com/harriscountyppl/events)

**THURS., FEB 22: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING** by **TERESA SEE**, 10am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Lane, free. Harris County Master Gardeners event. [hcmga.tamu.edu](http://hcmga.tamu.edu)

**SAT., FEB. 24: RAIN BARREL WORKSHOP** by **GALVESTON BAY FOUNDATION**, 10-11:30am, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., \$40, Register: [galvbay.org/events](http://galvbay.org/events)

**FRI.,-SUN., MAR. 8-10: AZALEA TRAIL 2024 BRANCH OUT!** River Oaks Garden Club event. [riveroaksgc.org/azalea-trail-2024](http://riveroaksgc.org/azalea-trail-2024)

**SAT., MAR 25: HERB FESTIVAL AT THE WYNNE HOME** 8am-1pm. 1428 11th St. Huntsville. Free. Texas Thyme Unit, Herb Society of America. [texasthymeunit.org](http://texasthymeunit.org) 936-891-5024

**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](mailto: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.***





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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