

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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*NOTE: Below, Partial repeat of earlier column.
Brenda's regular column will return soon.*

"The most interesting plants grow in shade"

-- Wednesday Adams in "Wednesday" -- Addams Family Netflix spinoff

UNDER-TREE PLANTING READERS SHARE SUCCESSES!

By **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

Great suggestions have come in for plantings to try under trees (~~see last week's column for tree-protecting CYLINDERS suggestions~~).

A huge sweet gum tree and several oaks filled **SHANNON MORRISON'S** Heights area backyard with shade. What worked? These six file photos illustrate the beginning of Shannon's list. In order of favorites . . .



L t r: Missouri Violets (Viola missouriensis), Lyreleaf sage (Salvia lyrata), Pigeonberry (Ravini humilis), Texas Sedge (Carex texensis) and Longleaf Wood Oats (Chasmanthium sessiliflorum)



Continuing Shannon's list of under tree plantings in order of favorites,: Cherokee Sedge (*Carex cherokeensis*), left, and Heartleaf skullcap (*Scutellaria ovata*). The latter reseeds readily.

Two Shannon likes with some reservations: Frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) — though it is hard to

control....also successful and taller than she likes when in the shade. Inland Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) — least favorite because it can be so successful (invasive).

How did she discover so many great shade lovers? Shannon credits [Native Plant Society of Texas/Houston Chapter](#), [Houston Audubon Society Texas](#), [Master Naturalists/Gulf Coast Chapter](#) and the [Nature Discovery Center](#) in Bellaire for introducing her to such great native plants.



Left, my late close friend **SHARON ENNIS's** Easter Lilies, left, lived for decades under a tree at her SW Houston home. Center & right, Houston's Clivia Lady, **PATTY ALLEN's** favorite clivia bulbs also LOVE growing under trees. At far right, **MICHAEL RIEKE's** at least 10-year-old clivia's' greenery provides nice greenery all winter under his trees. Look for buds to appear any day now. ([More on growing clivias](#)).

* * *

NO PLANT SIGNALS SPRING LIKE AZALEAS

in Houston, and they are being celebrated in grand fashion this year, for the 87th anniversary of the **River Oaks Garden Club's 2024 AZALEA TRAIL**. This biannual fundraiser supports numerous local organization by opening River Oaks private gardens and beyond for public viewing. 2024's Fri.-Sun., March 8-10 Trail will, as usual, benefit ROGC's horticultural education, conservation and civic beautification. Ticket info: riveroaksgc.org/



Potpourri

- **FEB. 27 IS NATIONAL STRAWBERRY DAY.** If you're craving home-grown ones, start in

November. or buy plants full of fruit. For now, this means a big celebration: Pasadena Strawberry Festival, recalling days when Pasadena, TX, was once "World Strawberry Center of the Universe"? Great historical report!



- **MONARCH WATCH UPDATE:** Total forest area occupied by overwintering monarch colonies reveal a 59.3% decrease from the previous season, the second lowest number to date. Low reports are affected by fluctuating. Still, to recover, monarchs need an abundance of milkweeds and nectar sources (preferable natives). Plant now! [Monarch Watch Blog](#)



* * *

SPOTLIGHT ARTICLES! Our two great Spotlight Articles below highlight peppers and orchids that will star in their own events:

- **SAT., MAR 9: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS ANNUAL SPRING VEGETABLE-HERB PLANT SALE**, 9am-noon (or sell-out), Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg. fbmg.org
- **SAT-SUN MAR. 9-10: HOUSTON ORCHID SOCIETY ANNUAL SHOW & SALE**, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun. Memorial City Mall (front of Dillard's), 303 Memorial City Way, houstonorchidsociety.org

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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.

* * *



IN THE MOOD FOR PEPPERS?

By **BARBARA BUCKLEY**
[Fort Bend County Master Gardeners](#)

County are excited about two new peppers: Sugar Rush Peach and Emerald Giant. FBMG's Barbara Buckley describes Sugar Rush Peach as a "sweet, hot pepper." It is reported to have a sweet, citrusy, smokey flavor.



Sugar Rush Pepper averages between 50,000 and 100,000 Scoville Heat Units (SHU), placing it between Thai, Pequin and Habanero peppers. The 3-inch long peppers start off green, changing to a peach color as they ripen. Plants can reach 5' and under ideal conditions can produce nearly 40 large peppers.

"Emerald Giant is a big green pepper that ripens to red," said Buckley, "and it's sweet." The largethick-walled peppers are great for stuffing and are easy to grow.

Two other sure to be popular spring garden plants are Lemon Balm and Bush Basil.

- Lemon Balm is an evergreen perennial that will attract pollinators to the garden. It is a good companion plant with other herbs such as rosemary, mint and basil.
- Bush Basil has smaller leaves than the common Genovese basil. Aggie Horticulture says basil is an easy to grow annual herb, which produces tiny white flowers. Basil also is a good companion plant for tomatoes .

* * *

EDITOR'S NOTE: These and other Herb/vegetable plants will be at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension FBMG sale, March 9, 9 a.m.-noon or until sold out, Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Road, Rosenberg. fbmg.org

* * *



**Don't water your
Phalaenopsis if roots
are green. Wait until
they turn silver!**



BY JAY BALCHAN

*American Orchid Society President,
Houston Orchid Society, Past President
houstonorchidsociety.org*

Phalaenopsis orchids are the number one selling "pot plant" in the country with

flowers lasting up to 4 months. Here are some basics for growing and reblooming:

Watering is the most important area of care with overwatering the surest way to send it to compost. Rather than following various "ice cube" recommendations, water your plant when it needs water. *Phals* are usually potted in a clear pot inside a decorative pot. If the roots in the bottom third of the liner pot are deep green, do not water. If they are silver to match the top roots, it's time to water. Water by soaking the plant overnight in a cereal bowl in the sink, probably every 2 to 3 weeks.

Fertilize with a 1/4 tsp/gal treatment every other watering with any balanced fertilizer or sprinkle a very light dose (1/2 tsp) of time-release fertilizer 2x per year.

Phals do not suffer from many diseases. If you see critters, use a solution of 1/2 water and 1/2 rubbing alcohol with a dash of soap. Spray every other day until all bugs are gone.

Phals are usually planted in sphagnum moss, which lasts 2 to 3 years. To repot use a bark-based orchid mix in a clay pot. Put some Styrofoam peanuts in the bottom quarter. Trim off dead roots and firm the mix around the remaining roots. Clay pots dry out faster than plastic pots so you may need to water more frequently using the same cereal bowl soaking technique.

Phals need a 20-degree temperature drop to initiate a bloom spike. If your plant is not reblooming, try placing it outside under cover in the fall when the nights are in the upper 50s for 7 to 10 days.

To maximize flower duration, avoid places where your A/C can directly blow on the flowers or near ripening fruit.

Don't throw your Phal away after it has stopped blooming. It's easy to grow and can reward you every year with new blooms!

* * *

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John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 273

Subject: Bees & GMO's, Monarch Butterflies, Earthworms

We all know about an issue with our honeybee populations called colony collapse disorder, where we lose 50% of our beehives each year. Less bees means less pollination then less yields of crops, which then raises the price of our food.

I was reading the other day about systemic Neonicotinoids also known as neonic pesticides used on genetically modified crops (GMO's). *One corn seed treated with this pesticide can has enough toxicity to kill 250,000 bees!* This does not include other insects.

As we lose insect populations, we lose our bird populations as they require lots of insects when they have eggs and babies in the nest.

A report in the Organic Consumers Association newsletter states that today's agricultural environment is 48 times more toxic to bees than it was just 25 years ago.

These chemicals are not only killing birds they are hurting many animal species, contributing to their decline.

Most gardeners love our butterflies, especially our Monarchs. A report by the World Wildlife Fund found that Monarch populations wintering in Mexico this

recent season was the second lowest in history.

We can plant all the Milkweeds we can and it will help, but to rescue the Monarchs we must quit exposing them to these toxic chemicals.

IF consumers would not purchase GMO crops, then prices would drop and farmers would quit planting them. By only buying organic foods instead of GMO's one can be part of the solution.

In addition to killing bees and insects, GMOs are loaded with the carcinogen called glyphosate found in Round Up and other herbicides. The American Academy of Pediatrics now advises that we avoid GMO foods do to the contamination.

Note: Ultra processed foods and animal feed have the highest levels of these toxic chemicals. Fast foods are also very high in these chemicals.

Another report by the American Chemical Society and published in the journal Environmental Science and Technology Letters (2024) has found that earthworms are also affected by the small amounts of pesticides that leach out of pesticide treated seeds like those mentioned above.

Exposure to non-lethal amounts of pesticides and fungicides resulted in poor growth and caused mitochondrial DNA damage in the worms. Earthworms aerate our soil, eat weed seeds, produce plant growth hormones, and provide food for birds and other animals.

Note: Neonicotinoids poisons have been banned in Europe due to their extreme toxicity.

The reasons to use modern organic methods in our gardens, in the vegetables and fruits we grow and eat, in our landscapes, and the food we buy, increase every day.

The modern organic methods work much better, at lower cost, and do not destroy God's creation.

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. 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

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/

SAT., FEB. 17: CREATING HEALTHY GARDEN SOIL 9am, 1330 Band Rd, Rosenberg, Free. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Fort Bend County Master Gardeners. fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own/

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

WED., FEB. 21: TRAVELING AMERICA'S DIVERSE GARDENS by **KARL GERCENS**, 10am, St. Martin's Episcopal Church Bagby Hall, 717 Sage Rd. Nancy Stallworth Thomas Horticulture Lecture. Free. gchouston.org/lectures/

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

FRI., FEB. 23: LANDSCAPE BASICS (Online), 1pm. Free. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Fort Bend County w/ FBC Master Gardeners. fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success/

SAT., FEB. 24: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS WESTSIDE TOMATOES, HERBS, PEPPERS & PERENNIALS SALE. 9am-1pm. Cash and cards accepted. 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

WED, FEB. 28: MOST FAMOUS GENUS OF ALL: ASTROPHYTUM by **GIERAYL NACAR CLEPPER**. 7pm, Metropolitan Multi-Family Services Center 1475 W. Gray. Houston Cactus and Succulent Society. Free. hcsstex.org

THURS., MAR 7: ORGANIC GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10:30am, Moody Neighborhood Library, 9525 Irvington Blvd, Houston, Free. Available in person and online. facebook.com/houstonlibrary

THURS., MAR. 7: HERBS FOR EVERY GARDEN, by **PHOEBE LAKE**, 9am, Waller County Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. Free. txmg.org/wallermg. RSVP: 979-826-7651.

FRI.,-SUN., MAR. 8-10: AZALEA TRAIL 2024 "BRANCH OUT!" River Oaks Garden Club event. riveroaksgc.org/azalea-trail-2024

SAT., MAR. 9: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS PLANT SALE 9-11am,

Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. txmg.org/wallermg.

SAT-SUN MAR. 9-10: HOUSTON ORCHID SOCIETY ANNUAL SHOW & SALE, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun. Memorial City Mall (front of Dillard's), 303 Memorial City Way, houstonorchidsociety.org.

MON., MAR. 11: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 12:30pm, Fonteno Senior Education Center, 3600 Bissonnet St. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., MAR. 12: MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM IMPACT IN 2023 by **BRANDI KELLER & STEPHANIE GRAY**, 11am-12:30pm, Trini Mendenhall Community Center 1414 Wirt Rd., Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED., MAR. 13: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (virtual), 10am, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Dr. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

MARK YOUR CALENDAR — FUTURE EVENTS!

MON., MAR. 18: EDIBLE LANDSCAPING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (Virtual) , 10-11:30am, Free. Register receive link: hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register

MON., MAR. 18: GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN - OPEN GARDEN DAY, 8:30-11am, Free tour, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES, MAR. 19: EDIBLE LANDSCAPING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (Virtual) 11am-noon. Free. facebook.com/harriscountyp/1/events

WED., MAR. 20: EARTHKIND LANDSCAPING (also Virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10:30am, Ring Neighborhood Library, 8835 Long Point Rd. facebook.com/houstonlibrary

THURS., MAR. 21: PLANT PROPAGATION by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Lane. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

SAT., MAR. 23: HERB FESTIVAL AT THE WYNNE HOME 8am-1pm, 1428 11th St. Huntsville. Free. Texas Thyme Unit, Herb Society of America. texasthymeunit.org. 936-891-5024

SAT., MAR. 23: THE WOODLANDS GARDEN CLUB SPRING PLANT SALE, 9am-1pm, The Woodlands Farmer's Market at Grogan's Mill, 7 Switchbud Place. thewoodlandsgardenclub.org

SAT, MAR. 23: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS SPRING SALE, 9am-noon, 9020 Airport Rd, Conroe. 935-539-7824; MCMGA.com.

TUES., MAR. 26: GROWING ROSES IN OUR CLIMATE by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Fonteno Senior Education Center, 3600 Bissonnet St. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., MAR. 28: GROWING TOMATOES by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (also Virtual) 10:30am, Johnson Neighborhood Library, 3517 Reed Rd. Free. facebook.com/houstonlibrary

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 GARDENSAPES, self-guided tours of homes and gardens \$25. kgc@kingwoodgardenclub.org

SAT., APR. 27: DEER PARK PRAIRIE POLLINATION WORKSHOP & CNC BIO BLITZ 9am. Della_Barbato@TexasPrairie.org

SAT., APR. 27: WESTSIDE VEGETABLES & FLOWERS SALE by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am- 1pm, Alabonson Park, 9650 N Houston Rosslyn Rd. hcmga.tamu.edu

*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,
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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 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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