

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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"There are no gardening mistakes, only experiments.

~ ~ Janet Kilburn Phillips

IT'S JULY — TIME TO THINK ABOUT . . . FALL TOMATOES & A NOT-YOUR-GRANNY'S GINGER!

NORMALLY THIS COLUMN is aimed at experienced Houston area gardeners who know all the basics and are mainly interested in expanding their flora horizons.

Fortunately this area is also ringed with experienced gardeners in very specific areas (our specialty plant societies) who are happy to share knowledge of how to cope with our (shall we say "challenging?") weather variables and to help me share what's new in their various plant worlds.

Today, however, want to temporarily focus on hopefully helpful tips to newcomers who come from such diverse growing environments they may not be aware that even though July, 2024, is predicted to be even hotter than June, it also marks start of our "Fall Growing Season" for many plants.

IF YOU'RE INTO TOMATOES, for example, don't assume plants you bought in

spring will easily start bearing again in Fall. Normally predictions depend on whether they're determinate or indeterminate. If determinate, they're spring bloomers only. Indeterminates may take a break and restart re-bearing in fall. This year, all bets are off. So much depends on the weather.

For the best results, start new plants this month. Best advice before you decide on varieties? Drop by YOUR County Master Gardeners' Demonstration Gardens (finder link) to see FALL varieties they judge most successful for your area and which ones they're predicting will be. And other vegetables too!

WATERING IS THE KEY.

- Water bulbs with greenery showing. Caladiums may disappear if not well watered now. Others (including St. Augustine) in self-defense may go semi-dormant to conserve energy. They may not be dead! They may return when temps drop.
- Evening wilting is normal, self-preservation. If still wilted in morning, water.
- Rolled-up canna leaf? Cut off at base, destroy to kill insect larva inside.
- Keep pecan trees well watered to protect developing pecans.
- Crimping leaves on hibiscus may mean too much sun. Move to shade or cover mid-day with umbrella. May work on other fading plants too.
- Ignore fairy rings that pop up after rains. Circular-growing mushrooms simply indicate plenty of organic matter in soil. They'll go away.
- Use gray water (washing machine) on your plants, if possible.

DON'T DO TIPS FOR REALLY LAZY GARDENERS

- Don't panic if oleanders lose leaves now. Normal. If a lot fall off, it could be overwatering. Trees also lose leaves now in reaction to the heat.
- Don't overwater azaleas, camellias. Some mid-day wilting normal now.
- Don't do any heavy fertilizing. Light feedings are okay.
- Don't touch white, stocking-like webs on tree trunk. Beneficial bark lice.
- Don't mow the lawn too short or too often. Longer blades protect roots from the hot sun.
- Don't water bulbs with no greenery showing. They are dormant. Overwatering rots them.
- Don't plant flowers that need summer water in beds with bulbs that lose greenery now.
- Don't pinch back poinsettias and blackberries any more.
- Don't water in the evening if you can help it. Morning's the best time. On the other hand . . .
- . . . watering at the wrong time is better than not watering at all!

Tips above from **Lazy Gardeners Guide**, now out of print but available free in pdf format. Email: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com.

* * *

Potpourri

ARE TOAD HOUSES WORTH IT? Cuteness aside,

both toads and frogs eat thousands of insects, Either or both may show up in a garden now-during growing season when other insects do most harm. Gardeners are often toads/frogs' worst enemies. We destroy favorite their homesites (fallen branches, leaf piles, water access) and, with poison treatments, their favorite foods (grubs, slugs and other garden pests).



Fancy toad houses are fun and do work, but these blessed littleamphibians will be just as happy with any ol' "loosened-up" soil site (hard for pets to access), any ol' upside-down stone, clay or ceramic container/pot with an opening 3" wide and high, in a shady spot with accessible "food and water" and a slightly-raked soil floor, slightly-sunk in the ground to stabilize. **Tip from Pros:** *Once a frog moves in, don't arbitrarily relocate the "home." That will make 'em mad and they may leave altogether!*

* * *

SPEAKING OF GARDENERS WHO WANT TO EXPAND THEIR HORIZONS, MERCER BOTANIC GARDEN'S CEIL DOW and other staffers have collected many new-to-many-of-us-delight (that won't be found in box stores plant departments!) for the Saturday, July 13, [Mercer's Tropical Symposium and Plant Sale](#). Click link for registration and other details on the Symposium that will feature Ceil on Gingers, **Loretta Osteen** on Plumerias, **Marti & Greg Graves** on Hardy/Tropical Hibiscus, **Darla Harris** on Hardy/Tropical Ferns and **Lee Rowell's** Bromeliads Workshop. Think you've seen everything in these categories? Recognize the ginger Ceil donated to her **Spotlight** blurb below? Sale is open free to public; Symposium requires registration at above link. The link gives previews but below is a look at one of the many spectacular gingers.

* * *

*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.

* * *



**-- TIME TO 'WOW!' --
A-NOT-YOUR-GRANNY'S GINGER!**



from **CEIL DOW,**
MERCER BOTANIC GARDEN GINGER GROWER,

SCIENTIFIC NAME: COSTUS 'PINA COLADA'

COMMON NAME: Spiral Ginger

LIGHT: Filtered Sun

HARDINESS: Root Hardy

SOIL: Moist & Well Draining

HEIGHT: 3'

VERY RARE IN THE TRADE!!

Delightful small Costus with a beautiful inflorescence! A rosette of soft pink top bracts mature to blush pink bracts that are framed in peridot green tips. Coral orange tubular flowers emerge from each bract making this quite an eye-catching whorl of color.



Hummingbirds love to sip nectar from the tubular flowers. Compact growth habit and truly free-flowering! Small size makes it easy to grow & bloom in a container too. Will freeze to the ground but will return from its roots in late spring. Hybridized by Jim Conyers

- **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Many exotic gingers and other speciality plants not generally available in the market will be featured at the **MERCER BOTANIC GARDEN *Tropical Symposium and Plant Sale*** Saturday, July 13. Click link for details. In-person only, no virtual/online sales
www.facebook.com/riendsofMercer

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Saturday
August 10, 2024

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Date*

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TIME:
8:00 AM - 3:30 PM

50 Waugh Dr.
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SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

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Brienne Bensen | Diana Wilson | Mike Serant | Erin Mills
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2 HEADLINERS | 3 CONCURRENT SESSIONS

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John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL
AND PLANTS # 290

Subject: Farm Contamination, Organic Standards, Blue Bells

I read a scary statistic the other day, that 20 million acres of US farmland is now contaminated by PFAS (perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals). In addition, there are phthalates, pesticides, PCB, antibiotics, pharmaceuticals, microplastics, heavy metals and many other harmful substances.

These toxic chemicals come from the EPA and USDA allowing sewage sludge

to be used on farmland as fertilizer. These chemicals get absorbed into our food and into our bodies, and people wonder why we have so many health problems.

These toxic chemicals also get into our milk, eggs, and meat when animals eat grass or grain grown with sewage sludge as a fertilizer. For marketing purposes sewage sludge is called "Biosolids" which sounds much nicer.

Gardeners around Houston need to be aware that there are several companies that are composting sewage sludge aka Biosolids which concentrates these toxic chemicals. It may be sold as compost or used in soil blends. This material is used in our landscapes, parks, playgrounds, schools, etc., putting our children and pets at risk.

Homeowners beware, as it is often sold at discounted prices as the companies need to get rid of it. Remember the old sayings:

"I have no quarrel with a man whom has a lower price, whom better knows what his product is really worth" and "You get what you pay for!"

You can find more about the dangers of biosolids (sewage sludge) at:

<https://www.natureswayresources.com/DocsPdfs/BioSolids.pdf>

Another issue that gardeners need to be aware of is the lack of responsibility of the EPA and USDA in protecting citizens. For example, a fertilizer called AGRA Gold that was authorized by the USDA/EPA to sell as an organic fertilizer was recently found by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, to contain the herbicides diquat and glyphosate! These are illegal in organic agriculture.

It is a case of "buyer beware", as the government is not doing their job and protecting citizens as shown in the sewage sludge issue mentioned above. In the Texas area gardeners can depend on brand names like the Microlife™ line of organic fertilizers which is my personal favorite.

On a positive note, I was taking a break this morning and riding around in the prairie, and I found the recent rains have triggered the Blue Bells to start blooming.



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

CALENDAR SUBMISSION RULES PLEASE READ!
EVENTS MUST BE OPEN TO & CAPABLE OF HANDLING PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

- 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**
- **YOU** are responsible for telling us about cancelled events

FRI., JUNE 28: SHADE GARDENING IDEAS AND TIPS (ONLINE), 1pm, Fort Bend County Master Gardeners. Free. [Landscape Success - Fort Bend \(agrillife.org\)](http://Landscape Success - Fort Bend (agrillife.org))

FRI, JUNE 28: INTEGRATING NATIVES INTO YOUR LANDSCAPE by **CHERIE COLBURN**, 6-7:30 pm, virtual & in-person, free, The Woodlands Township, RSVP <https://bit.ly/3PurbTi>

TUES., JULY 2: CLAY POT IRRIGATION by **DR. JEAN FEFER**, 11am, Trini

Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu/lecture-series

MON., JULY 8: COMPOSTING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 12pm, Fonteno Senior Education Center, 6600 Bissonet St. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

MON., JULY 8: FALL'S BEST VEGETABLE GARDEN by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (virtual), 10am- 11:30am. Register in advance to receive link: hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register

TUES., JULY 9: PROPAGATION by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 1pm, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Ln. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED., JULY 10: PLANT PROPAGATION by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 6pm, Tuttle Neighborhood Library, 702 Kress St, Free, Livestream on Facebook. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED., JULY 10: GROWING AND COOKING MUSHROOMS by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 6pm, Pasadena Public Library, 4330 Fairmont Pkwy., Pasadena. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED., JULY 10: PLANT PROPAGATION by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 6pm, Tuttle Neighborhood Library, 702 Kress St. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED., JULY 10: LANDSCAPING FOR THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE by **MARK VORDERBRUGGEN**, 12 – 2pm. Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Humble. Free. Registration required. Pct3.com/mbg 713-274-4160.

WED., JULY 10: CONTAINER GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am, Peckham Aquatic and Fitness Center, 5597 Gardenia Ln., Katy. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., JULY 11: COMPOSTING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 12:30pm, Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

WED., JULY 13: TROPICAL PLANT SYMPOSIUM (GINGERS, TROPICAL HIBISCUS & FERNS, BROMELIADS & PLUMERIAS), Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield. friendsofmercer.com/

SAT., JULY 13: COMPOSTING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Fonteno Senior Education Center, 6600 Bissonet St. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

SAT., JULY 13 : PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SALE, 9am-1pm Bay Area Community Center, 5002 E. NASA Pkwy, Seabrook. theplumeriasociety.org/

MON., JULY 15: GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN- OPEN GARDEN DAY by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 8:30am- 11am, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., JULY 16: FALL'S BEST VEGETABLE GARDEN by **HARRIS COUNTY**

MASTER GARDENERS (virtual), 11am- 12pm, No reservation required: [facebook.com/harriscountyp/events](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountyp/)

THUR., JULY 18: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Ln. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

MON., JULY 22: COMPOSTING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 12pm, Fonteno Senior Education Center, 6600 Bissonet St. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., JULY 23: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Rd. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., JULY 25: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 12pm, Walker Neighborhood Library, 5505 Belrose Dr. In person and livestreamed at [facebook.com/houstonlibrary](https://www.facebook.com/houstonlibrary)

THURS., JULY 25: THE WATERSHED STEWARD PROGRAM by **HARRIS COUNTY AGRILIFE**, 1pm- 5pm, Michael Talbott Pavilion, 7522 Prairie Oak Dr. Free. Pre-registration required. tw.s.tamu.edu/workshops/registration

FRI, JULY 26: RECIPE FOR A 24/7 LANDSCAPE by **CHERIE COLBURN**, 6-7:30 pm, virtual & in-person, free, The Woodlands Township, RSVP <https://bit.ly/3PurbTi>

TUES., JULY 30: GROWING TOMATOES IN FALL by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10:30am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Ln. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

— **MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE FUTURE EVENTS!** —

SAT., AUG. 10: OHBAPALOOZA GARDENING & MORE, 8am-3:30pm, 50 Waugh Dr. \$70. Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance event. Register: [OHBAonline.org/register](https://ohbaonline.org/register)

TUES., AUG. 6: MYCORRHIZAL FUNGI by **DR. LISA MORANO**, 11am, Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu/lecture-series

MON., AUG. 12: GROWING BULBS IN TEXAS by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (virtual), 10am- 11:30am, Register in advance to receive link: hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register

WED., AUG. 14: COMPOSTING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10:30am, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Dr. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

THURS., AUG. 15: CONTAINER GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Glazier Senior Ed Center, 16600 Pine Forest Ln. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

MON., AUG. 19: OPEN GARDEN DAY by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 8:30am-11am, Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. hcmga.tamu.edu

MON., AUG. 19: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 5pm, Hockley Community Center, 28515 Old Washington Rd., Hockley. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

TUES., AUG. 20: GROWING BULBS IN TEXAS by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER**

GARDENERS (virtual), 11am- 12pm, No reservation required: [facebook.com/harriscountyp/1/events](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountyp/1/events)

TUES., AUG. 27: RAISED BED GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10am, Steve Radack Community Center, 18650 Clay Rd. Free and open to the public. hcmga.tamu.edu

OCT., 11-12: 82nd ANNUAL BULB AND PLANT MART. gchouston.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 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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