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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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By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

CAMELLIA 'YUME' blooming now in the Asian Section of Houston Botanic Garden's Global Collection Garden and Woodland Glade.

WITH WINTER COMES DIFFERENT (NEW?) GARDEN OUTLOOKS!



OUR PAST FEW WINTERS have everyone looking for more cold hardy plants. Nowhere is there a better resource for our home gardens than our two major botanical gardens:

- [Houston Botanic Garden](#), south of downtown Houston
- [Mercer Botanic Garden](#) to the north

Not many cities can boast two such internationally-recognized horticultural gardens! If you haven't visited both, now -- with all the lights & decorations -- is a perfect season for the whole family. Even non-gardening members will be awed by displays, while gardeners surely want to know what's in bloom, especially mature plants that obviously can withstand our recent cold winters, blasting hot summers, prolonged droughts and infuriating floods!

In the meantime, click both websites for maps, seasonal delights and activity calendars. Both are great places to see winter bloomers and LOTS more!

NEXT WEEK, we'll spotlight Mercer's now-in-bloom

plants. This week -- in **Spotlight Article** below, **COLIN A. LYMAN**, Houston Botanic Garden's Associate Director of Horticulture, advises on great gingers for us. While not in full bloom now, this gives you time before spring to decide which ones to plant where and to see how HBG positions them while enjoying HBG's incredible holiday lights show "**RADIANT NATURE**"!



* * *

CONGRATULATIONS, URBAN HARVEST!

This unique horticultural (mostly) volunteer group is celebrating 30 years of educating Houstonians about organic gardening and more. Urban Harvest serves 45,000+ Farmers Market patrons with fresh, local produce; providing nearly 4,500 students/teachers in socially-vulnerable areas with hands-on education; helped 3,823 community gardeners preserve 34+ acres of urban green space, promoting sustainability, access to healthy food and provided 2,000+ customers with affordable, healthy, local food. You can help! urbanharvest.org/support/



Potpourri

- **CLUBS: SPEAKERS EVER CANCEL AT LAST MINUTE?**
Video/slides of **Houston Botanic Garden's & Mercer Botanic Garden's** current Holiday Celebrations would make a great meeting emergency program, if members who go will record what they see!
- **GARDENING EVENT CALENDAR** below. Is overflowing with great plant sales and other events in almost every part of the Greater Houston area.
- **ATTN. GARDEN/PLANT GROUPS** -- In wake of Hurricane Beryl, [Nature's Way Resources](#) offers free guided tours of NWR's extensive nursery/soil/mulch enterprise to plant-oriented, organized groups. As usual, NWR's now-expanded meeting site is free to above groups. Reservations a must for both.



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

* * *

Spotlighting . . . Houston Botanic Garden

Lazy Gardener and Friends Newsletter



GREAT GINGERS FOR HOUSTON: *Globba schomburgkii*,
Curcuma caesia, *Hedychium coccineum* 'Disney' and *Hellenia speciosa*

DESPITE CHALLENGES, GINGERS REALLY DO LIKE HOUSTON AREA!

By COLIN A. LYMAN
Houston Botanic Garden
Associate Director of Horticulture

Since Houston, over the last few years, has experienced more consistent freezes, we try to find plants to add to our collection that can withstand the heat and humidity of the summer, and the short freezes we get in the winter.

This is sometimes a challenge when temperatures can change drastically. A good amount of plant species can withstand cold and heat, but if there isn't a period of transition, or consistent drop in temperature over a longer period of time, the plants struggle to adapt to dramatic shifts in temperature, much like we do.

Despite this challenge there are a lot of cultivars and species of ginger that grow well in the Houston climate. In the event of a freeze the plants foliage dies back, but the underground rhizomes send up new growth in the spring as the weather warms up.

Some gingers however don't withstand the freezes, sudden drops in temperature, or cold weather and are not as consistent in sending up new growth after a freeze. This inconsistency makes them more difficult to grow in our region, so we try to lean in to the species that can bounce back after cold temperatures.

The species below are the ones we recently planted in our tropical garden that from experience of staff, we think will bounce back consistently after freeze events. We plan to monitor their success over the next few years to withstand

freezes.

- **Globba schomburgkii**
- **Globba grandis**
- **Curcuma caesia**
- **Curcuma 'Great Reign'**
- **Costus phyllocephalus**
- **Costus varzerum**
- **Hedychium 'Palani'**
- **Hedychium coccineum 'Disney'**
- **Hellenia speciosa**

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you've never attended **Houston Botanic Garden's** annual Christmas season "[***RADIANT NATURE***](#)" celebration, be sure to check this link above for parking and entrance directions. Tickets must be purchased in advance to park at the garden. (Presented by Reliant)



John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL
AND PLANTS # 311

Subject: Mulch

I have been asked several times recently, "What is the best time to mulch and what is the best type of mulch?"

Fall is the best time to mulch as one of the principles of successful gardening is to copy nature. However, anytime is better than not at all. Nature hates bare ground and if there is not any mulch nature will cover it with plants often referred to as weeds.

This brings us to the second question, "What is the best type of mulch?" Texas does not have labeling laws hence the price point that it sells for is a good indicator. As in all things, higher quality generally costs more.

Mulch can be broken into three basic types based on its quality and usage. These types are Biological, Commercial, and Industrial.

Biological – This is the highest quality mulch and therefore the most beneficial in improving soils, preventing disease, protecting plants, etc. It has a low carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, so it does not steal nitrogen from the soil and weaken or stress plants. It has been composted to kill weed seeds and pathogens. Composted "*native mulch*" and "*coarse screened compost*" are examples of this class of mulch. Aged Native Mulch, if made correctly, is the very best mulch for our flower beds. The bag will have holes in it so that air can enter allowing the beneficial microbes to breathe and be kept alive. This mulch will typically sell retail for \$8-12 per bag (2 cubic feet).

Commercial – This is a middle grade of mulch made from tree barks (pine,

hardwood, etc.) and is the most common. It will be in a sealed bag and may have a sour, stale or strong odor. It has a high carbon-to-nitrogen ratio and robs soil of nitrogen and other nutrients. Tends to float off in heavy rain or develops unsightly molds and fungal mats and may attract fire ants or termites. Often becomes hydrophobic and will repel water and is often flammable. This mulch will typically sell retail for \$4-6 per bag (2 cubic feet).

Industrial – This is the lowest grade of products called mulch. It is made from industrial waste like old pallets, construction wood, etc. It is often chemically burned black with industrial waste like coal ash, it will sometimes rub off in your hand, and it is often dyed various colors. It may contain arsenic from CCA treated waste wood. It has a very high carbon-to-nitrogen ratio and robs nitrogen and other nutrients from the soil for a long time. It may be extremely alkaline and high in toxic salts. It is often harmful to plants and soil and creates many problems. It is also very flammable. This product will typically sell retail for \$3-4 per bag (2 cubic feet).

The picture below courtesy of the late Randy Lemon illustrates a dyed mulch killing plants.

Slide courtesy of Randy Lemon



As in all things, one gets what they pay for or as the old adage states, “Buyer Beware”.

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LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

WANT YOUR EVENT IN RIGHT AWAY? FOLLOW THESE CALENDAR RULES!

ALL EVENTS MUST BE OPEN TO & CAPABLE OF HANDLING PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

- Use this 3*-line (max) **EXACT FORMAT/STYLE** (*reformatting=delay!*)
DAY, DATE: TITLE by NAME (if talk), time, address, Fee/free.
Sponsoring group (if not in title). website/phone (NO MORE!)
- *2 events same day/site, 4 lines ok (ONLY if we can't tighten text to fit in 3)--
- Only events submitted/earmarked specifically for LG&F calendar are used
- Actual gardening/plant type events only. No harvesting, cooking, etc.
- NO events picked up from general flyers. NO PDFS! TYPE IN EMAIL
- Submit: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com. Check published entry!
- All events on-site and in Greater Houston area ONLY!
- ALWAYS PROOF PUBLISHED WORDING & TEST EMAIL
- YOU are responsible for telling us about cancelled events

WED., DEC. 11: WINTER SALAD CONTAINER GARDENING by **SARAH ELLIS**, Noon–2pm, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

SAT., JAN 4. DESIGNING/GROWING HERB GARDENS by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9-11am; **WEDGE GARDENING**, 1-3 pm. Discovery Garden in Carbide Park, 4102 Main Street (FM 519), La Marque. Free. txmg.org/galveston

SAT., JAN 18. GROWING TOMATOES, Part 2, by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER**, 9-11 am; **ANYONE CAN GROW ROSES**, 1-3 pm. Free. AgriLife Extension Office, Carbide Park, 4102-B Main (FM 519), La Marque txmg.org/galveston

WED. JAN. 8: LUNCH & LEARN – NATIVE PLANT CONSERVATION by **KARI HERNANDEZ**, Noon- 2pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG or call 713-274-4160

SAT. JAN. 11: THREATENED TEXAS PRICKLY ASH by **JACOB MARTIN**, 11am-12:30pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG or call 713-274-4160

MON., FEB. 10: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (virtual), 10-11:30am, Free. Register in advance to receive link: hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register

FRI & SAT. FEB. 14 & 15: FRUIT & TOMATO VIRTUAL PLANT SALE, Friends of Mercer Botanic Gardens, friendsofmercer.com, 713-274-4166

SAT., FEB. 15: FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS 2025 FRUIT TREE SALE, 9am-noon, County Fairgrounds, Barn H, 4310 Texas 36 S. Rosenberg. [Fort Bend Master Gardeners 2025 Fruit Tree Sale-Open to the Public](#)

TUES., FEB. 18: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (virtual), 11am- 12pm, Free on Facebook Live. facebook.com/harriscountyp/1/events

SAT., MAR. 8: FORT BEND MASTER GARDENER SPRING VEGETABLE & HERB PLANT SALE, 9-noon, Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd, Rosenberg. [Ft. Bend Master Gardener Spring Vegetable & Herb Plant Sale](#)

PLEASE READ BELOW

If your event didn't get in right away, one possible reason is you didn't submit it in our EXACT - NEVER CHANGING format. Reformatting delays publication and opens doors for errors. Your choice! SEE TOP OF CALENDAR FOR EXACT FORMAT.

* * *



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 later was said to rank 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 show 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 had 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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