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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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"Ok, longtime Houston gardeners, lets tell newbies to gardening here, how important it is to use GREATER HOUSTON AREA ADVICE!" -- Oft-repeated quote, origin not credited



TIME TO PRUNE, BUT DO IT RIGHT! MERCER'S TIPS BELOW

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

WHAT A FRUSTRATING GARDENING PERIOD THIS MONTH !

We want to garden! Sun was out, we were into sleeveless shirts, rains have been sufficient, nurseries are PACKED with gorgeous flowers. Everyone's thinking GARDENING!!! This current rain is a good thing, cold iffy. Plant roots below ground are itchin' to shoot green growth upward!. Rainwater will make

them healthier. Wondering what you should do first?

DON'T POUT — TURN ON RADIO! Used to have many gardening radio shows. Now only know of two, but both have excellent hosts and experienced LOCAL guest experts. Be patient! Don't hesitate to call if you have queries!

- **GARDEN LINE WITH SKIP RICHTER, [740AM KTRH](#)** — Saturday & Sunday, 6–10 AM. Call in line: 713-212-5874. (Also on Heart Radio app.)
- **HOME SHOW GARDENING PROS with TOM TYNAN, [SPORTS RADIO](#)** Saturdays, Sat. 7-9am. Call-in line: 281-833-3333

Know of any others specifically for our area? Do share! Always check out-of-Greater Houston-Area against a LOCAL source. One size fits all doesn't work for all! <https://homeshowgardenpros.com/>

Potpourri

- **ATTN. GARDEN/PLANT GROUPS --** Speaking of local experts, [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. Great time to visit ... ALSO CHECK OUT . . .



- **2025 COLOR OF THE YEAR!** Pantone picked this color "...rich, warming brown hue" because "MOCHA MOUSSE" is "supposed to evoke feelings of comfort and indulgence, such as those associated with chocolate and coffee, to feed our desire for harmony"!

Pictured: *Cosmos Atrosanguineus*



I actually knew someone who waited every spring to put in her new spring garden until Pantone announced its "Color of the Year." Not sure how she'd have done it this year. Don't find many 'brown' blooms around these days!

* * *

Brenda Beust Smith's column is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's "Lazy Gardener" column, continuing sponsored by Nature's Way Resources in 2013 — (lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com) Brenda's column focuses ONLY on the Greater Houston Area

* * *

Spotlighting . . .
Mercer Botanic Garden
Lazy Gardener and Friends Houston Garden Newsletter



Above. JACOB MARTIN, Mercer Botanic Garden Head of Horticulture/Greenhouse Manager notes: (left) On the Elm, which has naturally dense foliage, he shows cutting a branch that is crossing other branches, and if left to continue to grow, will eventually rub and damage the larger branch to the left. Right Jacob cuts an apricot branch with a saw, and at an angle to protect the branch collar. Christy Jones photos

DON'T JUST 'WHACK-AWAY'!

***HAVE A TREE-PRUNING
PLAN AND DO IT NOW!***

by **CHRISTY JONES**
Mercer Botanic Garden
Education Director



We are in 'late-winter' pruning time that needs to be done before it gets too hot. Bugs and diseases get more active with heat. Give your tree time to adjust

through Houston's typical quick spring season.

First, you must have a goal – possibly to improve shape and health. Next, develop a plan – ours for smaller trees is to ensure balance and encourage healthy growth. Of course, we will remove any dead or broken limbs. Then, we use sharp, clean pruning shears, loppers, or saw depending on the size of branch.

Overall, we don't want to trim more than 25% of the living crown of a tree at one time. Also, the shape should not resemble a 'lollypop' as this creates a top-heavy, thin tree that will be structurally weak and apt to blow over more easily in windstorms.

Pictured illustrate Jacob demonstrating trimming on two smaller ornamental trees: a White Flowering Apricot and Dwarf Chinese Elm.

Jacob shows how to prune two smaller trees with hand tools. We are in 'late-winter' pruning time that needs to be done before it gets too hot. Bugs and diseases get more active with heat so give your tree time to adjust through Houston's typical quick spring season.

On the Elm, which has naturally dense foliage, he shows cutting a branch that is crossing other branches, and if left to continue to grow, will eventually rub and damage the larger branch to the left. Jacob cuts the branch with a saw, and at an angle to protect the branch collar.

Two Photos: Jacob Observing Tree, Jacob Approaching Cross Branch w/Saw

On the Apricot, he shows an obvious 'water sprout' which are branches growing straight-up. These types of branches are long, thin and weak but will quickly grow to the top of the canopy, blocking sun-light for more desirable branches. If the cut is through the collar, the main branch will not heal correctly, and open itself up to insects and disease.

Do's

Have a vision before you cut.

Use clean tools and clean between trees and after use.

Cut dead and broken limbs first, as this will allow for a clearer vision and plan.

Don't

Trim more than 25% of the living crown at one time or in one year.

Don't 'lollypop' the crown as this weakens the trunk and makes tree top-heavy.

Wait too long to trim – spring comes and goes quickly in our region, and insects and diseases are more active when its warm.

For basic tree pruning tips: harris.agrilife.org/files/2011/05/PruneUSFS.pdf

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *You can visit Mercer almost any time and find staffers at work in gardens happy to explain what they're doing and why. Mark your calendar for Mercer's big annual plant sale **FRI.-SAT., MARCH 21-22!** Details: [Friends of Mercer, March Mart info](#). And: **FRI & SAT., FEB. 14-15: FRUIT & TOMATO VIRTUAL PLANT SALE.** Easy way to keep up with ALL Mercer's many public events, especially plant-related ones. **REMINDER:** Easy way to keep up with all Mercer's events: facebook.com/FriendsofMercer/*



John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL
AND PLANTS # 316

Subject: glyphosate soils sounds compost atrazine nutritional density

A new study released by researchers at Arizona State University found that even brief exposure to the herbicide glyphosate found in products like Round-Up can cause lasting brain damage.

Glyphosate exposure on mice resulted in neuroinflammation, Alzheimer's-like symptoms, premature death and anxiety like behaviors confirming the results of other studies. *Journal of Neuroinflammation* (2024)

There is an increasing incidence of cognitive decline in our aging population, and it has been found to cause cancer, yet the EPA and USDA think spraying down all our grains from wheat to oats and soy with glyphosate to make harvesting easier is a good idea since it makes more money for the agribusiness companies. The only way to protect your family is grow your own food or at least buy organic certified.

For gardeners and horticulturalists there is new field of study called "eco-acoustics" that is emerging. Healthy soils produce a large cacophony of sounds in many forms. The acoustic complexity and diversity are significantly higher in revegetated plots as compared to cleared plots.

The acoustic signature is associated with soil invertebrate abundance, from earthworms, to beetles, ants and spiders. All these organisms emit sounds depending on their activity. This research supports a growing amount of evidence about the benefits of mechanical stimulation, like touch, wind or rain. Maybe those little windmill ornaments do provide some benefit.

In the future I bet there will be a method to measure the health of the soil in our gardens, by just listening to them.

I often get a chuckle out of some research papers I read as the authors act like they made a miraculous discovery. A research paper in the journal *HortScience* (2024) found that compost amendments effectively enhanced radish growth especially when water was scarce. Any experienced gardener could have told them that.

The journal *Research* (2024) published an article on the herbicide atrazine. They found from animal studies that exposure makes nerve cells age faster. It also harms the hypothalamus that is part of our brains, increasing the risk of neurodegenerative disease. This herbicide has previously been found to disrupt hormones, interfere with our reproduction, linked to birth defects and some types of cancer, along with liver, kidney, and heart damage.

Note: This dangerous chemical is used in many weed and feed fertilizers and other gardening products.

This toxic chemical has been banned in Europe. However, the EPA in late 2024 has recently proposed increasing the amount of this toxic chemical allowed in the environment by almost three times.

NASA's Goddard Institute for space studies "Climate Impact Group" has found that climate change is lowering the nutritional value of many plants including some of our foods. They suggested that falling nutritional density of plants is another contributor to declining insect and animal populations.



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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 ATTENDENCE

- 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!)
- 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
- **PUT YOUR GROUP NAME IN THE EMAIL SUBJECT WHEN SUBMITTING!!!!**

WED., FEB. 12: PLANTS, PESTS, & DISEASES by SARAH ELLIS, Noon- 2pm,
Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd.

Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

THURS., FEB. 13: LIVING WILD LANDSCAPES by **ABBIE INCE-HENDRICKSON**, 9-10am, Extension Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead. Free. Waller County Master Gardeners event. 979-826-7651, txmg.org/wallermg

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

FRI.-SAT, MAR. 14-15: PIONEER UNIT'S ANNUAL PLANT AND GIFT SALE
9am-4pm, 248 Jaster Road, Round Top, Free. herbsocietypioneer.org/events. 713-503-9981

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](http://FortBendMasterGardeners2025FruitTreeSale-Open-to-thePublic)

SAT., FEB 15: GROWING CITRUS by **DR. MONTE NESBITT**, 8-9am, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Harris county Master Gardeners event. Free. hcmga.tamu.edu

SAT., FEB 15: SOUTHEAST FRUIT TREE & TOMATO SALE by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-1pm (or sold out), 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Pre-order online Feb 3-13. txmg.org/hcmga/shop

SAT., FEB. 15: ANNUAL PRUNING PARTY, 2pm, St. Andrew's Church 1819 Heights Blvd. Free. Houston Rose Society, houstonrose.org/hrsmeet.htm

MON-TUES., FEB. 17-18: GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS SPRING FLING! PLANT SALE. Online only. Details & shopping: galvestonmg.square.site/.

TUES., FEB. 18: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS** (virtual), 11am-noon, Free on Facebook Live. [facebook.com/harriscountypg/events](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountypg/events)

TUES., FEB. 18: ALL ABOUT DYCKIAS by **BRYAN WYNDAM**, 7pm, West Gray Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. Free. [Bromeliad Society/Houston](http://BromeliadSociety/Houston)

TUES., FEB 18: THE BULB HUNTER by **CHRIS WIESINGER**, 10am: Free, St. Basil's Hall, 702 Burney Road, Sugar Land. sugarlandgardenclub.org

FRI., FEB. 21: TREE GIVEAWAY, 11am-2pm or last tree is gone, Waller County AgriLife Office, 846 6th St., Hempstead, 979-826-7651, waller.mg@ag.tamu.edu

SAT., FEB 22: GROWING AVOCADOS by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 1-3 pm. AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM 512), La Marque. Free. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/events/, 281-309-5065.

SAT., FEB. 22: FULSHEAR FARMERS MARKET/FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS TREE GIVEAWAY, 9am-sellout, 9035 Bois d'Arc Lane @ FM 1093, Fulshear. foreverfulshear@gmail.com, 713-703-4129

WED., FEB. 26: A LEATHER-LIKE PRODUCT DEVELOPED FROM PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS by **KARLA HALPAAP-WOOD**, 7pm, Multi-Family Service Center, 1475 West Gray. Cactus and Succulent Society event. Free. hcsstex.org

PLAN AHEAD!

SAT., MAR. 1: SETTING UP A RAISED GARDEN, 9-10:30am, 4310 Texas 36 S. Bldng B, Rosenberg. Fort Bend County Master Gardeners event. Register: fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own-2/

SAT. MAR 1: PLANT SALE - NATIVES & GARDEN TREASURES 9am-1pm, Trinity UMC, 3430 Harrison Ave. Beaumont, Free. Magnolia Garden Club event. 615-944-4829

SAT., MAR. 1: SETTING UP A RAISED GARDEN, 9-10:30am, 4310 Texas 36 S. Bldg B, Rosenberg. Fort Bend County Master Gardeners event.
Register: fortbend.agrilife.org/grow-your-own-2/

SAT., MAR. 8: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PLANT SALE, 9am-noon, AgriLife Extension Office, 846 6th St., Waller. 979-826-7651, txmg.org/wallermg waller.mg@ag.tamu.edu

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](#)

SAT., MAR. 8: MERCER GARDEN TOUR by HORTICULTURE STAFF, 10:30–11:30am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

SAT-SUN., MAR. 8-9. HOUSTON ORCHID SOCIETY SHOW & SALE, 10am-5pm Sat; 10am-5pm, Free. Memorial City Mall (Dillard's Wing) Gessner@ I-10, [.houstonorchidsociety.org](http://houstonorchidsociety.org)

WED., MAR. 12: GARDEN FOR HEALTH by DR. JOE NOVAK, Noon–2pm, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., FREE, Register: pct3.com/MBG

FRI., MAR. 14: MERCER GARDEN TOUR by HORTICULTURE STAFF, 9 – 10am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

FRI.-SAT., MAR 14 & 15: PIONEER UNIT'S ANNUAL PLANT AND GIFT SALE, 9am-4pm, 248 Jaster Road, Round Top, Free. herbsocietypioneer.org/events. 713-503-9981

SAT., MAR. 15: BUDDING OUT PLANT SALE & FESTIVAL, 10am-4pm, The John Fairey Garden, 20559 FM 359 Hempstead. \$10 for GA, \$10. JFGARDEN.ORG, 979-826-3232

FRI.-SAT., MARCH 21-22: MARCH MART PLANT SALE. FRI. 8am-4pm, SAT. 8am-3pm, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble,.

SAT, MAR. 22: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS SPRING SALE, 9am-NOON, 9020 Airport Road, Conroe. 935-539-7824, MCMGA.com.

SAT., MAR. 22: HERB FESTIVAL AT THE WYNNE HOME. 8am-Noon. 1428 11th St., Huntsville. Free. Herb Society of America, Texas Thyme Unit, texasthymeunit.org/

FRI., MAR. 28: FLOWERING PLANTS FOR 4 SEASONS, 1-2:30pm, Zoom. Free. Fort Bend County Master Gardener event. Register: fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success/

WED., APRIL. 9: GROW YOUR BEST ROSES 2025 by SUZANNE GILBERT, Noon–2 pm, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

Wed., MAY. 14: HISTORY OF MERCER ARBORETUM & BOTANIC GARDENS by Jamie Hartwell, Noon–2pm, MA&BG Visitor's Center, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

WED., APR. 2: GARDENERS BY THE BAY APRIL PLANT SALE, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 W. NASA Road 1, Webster. gbtb.org

SAT., APR. 5: KINGWOOD GARDEN CLUB GARDENFEST, 10am-2pm, 4102 Rustic Woods, Kingwood. Free.

If your event didn't get in right away, PROBABLY BECAUSE

*you didn't submit it in our EXACT - NEVER CHANGING format.
Our required reformatting delays publication, 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 . . .
THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!
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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 35 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. For years he represented 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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