



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



April-8-2022 | Issue 431

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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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CASSIA'S BACK! PEONIES HERE? HOW'S YOUR ARIOD DOING?

The trees are coming into leaf

Like something almost being said . . .

"The Trees" by Philip Larking (British poet, 1922-1985)

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

BEGGING YOUR PATIENCE WHILE I YELL . . .

HURRAH!!! Linda Gay (see below) just confirmed — after seeing a tiny cluster of green leaves — what I was hoping/praying: my *Cassia corymbosa*, "dead" for 3+ years, has indeed returned!!! (Pictured: file photo)



This cassia "died back" shortly after I planted her, a victim of 2018-2019 freezes. I couldn't bear to dig up the dead stalks. I just knew if I was patient, she would return, just like my first *Cassia corymbosa* did 50+ years ago at our first home. That one I planted after being mesmerized by Wabash Feed & Garden's spectacular specimen at the original WF&G store on Washington Avenue.



(Break for a mea culpa. Last week's note about Vanilla Bean Orchid and Deborah Duly mistakenly said she's with Maas Nursery. As most avid local gardeners well know, Deborah's with [Wabash Feed and Garden](#), now at [4537 N Shepherd Dr.](#))

Back to my original prolifically-blooming cassia — one blasting hot, drought-dry July day, I decided to move her. She refused to be dug up. Not to be thwarted by a mere plant, I thoroughly soaked the soil and, with a chain circling the base and tied to my car, jerked her out and replanted her in my new spot.

All her leaves yellowed and fell off. I felt so guilty, just let her be to remind me not to try that again! Then, suddenly one Fall day yellow blooms totally covered those "dead" stalks! Cassia #1 lived and bloomed a long time. She became the first inductee in my mythical "Lazy Gardener Hall of Honor."

Also in LGHOH are my Japanese magnolia (thrived in spite of early split-in-half main stalk secured back together with electric tape!) and Grandmother Mimi's althaea. I wanted more altheas, but too expensive, so dug up Mimi's adult root ball and sawed it in fourths. All four sections lived & bloomed for decades. *(Pictured: my pink magnolia at top and althaea - RIP!)*



And now, my 3-year-old "dead" cassia has returned. Another Hall of Famer!



LINDA GAY'S CONFIRMATION of my returning cassia was accompanied by her own great "return" story. Linda's evergreen Claspig Heliotrope groundcover growing on side of her house was ruthlessly crowded out (and thought eliminated!) by other plants. To Linda's surprise and delight, it reappeared in her beautiful front raised bed!

Linda will educate gardeners soon on another group of great plants: aroids. Not familiar with these? I had to ask when received this event notice:

TUES., APR 19: CARE, PROPAGATION AND CULTURE OF AROID FAMILY
10am, St. Basil's Hall, 702 Burney Rd, Sugar Land. Free. sugarlandgardenclub.org.

Linda, former Mercer Botanic Garden director, explains more about these actually-very-familiar-plants in our Spotlight Article below.

* * *

Speaking of being excited about a plant, **JAMES FLAHERTY**, owner of [Plants for All Seasons](#), is thrilled with Monrovia's warmer-weather peonies. These

are still in nursery pots but they made it through our February freeze to bloom beautifully, the first peonies James has ever seen bloom here. As the son of legendary Houston horticulturist Victor Flaherty, James has been around plants since childhood! He'd like to hear from anyone else locally who's had a similar peony success.



POTPOURRI

- **FLOWERS BLOOM ON THEIR OWN SCHEDULES**, not ours. Witness how magnificent azaleas are now, albeit a bit later than usual. Those attending the [Bayou Preservation Assn. Gala Wed., April 27](#) at Houston Botanic Garden will hopefully still see fantastic displays, including, I to r below, *Rhododendron* 'Hershey's Red', *R. indicum* 'Mrs G G Gerbing' and *R. indicum* 'Daphne Salmon.' (*Houston Botanic Garden photos*)



- **EASTER LILIES** — It's a little late now to have Easter lilies blooming April 17 (unless you bury a blooming potted plant). But these bulbs will multiply and rebloom for us, as Sharon Ennis Axton's SW Houston once-beautiful display shows. However, her experience is typical. These, planted by her mother in the 1990s, multiplied and bloomed for decades before gradually dying out. So worth it but don't take their eventual demise personally. These lilies in general need a lot more extended cold than they get here, plus EXCELLENT drainage. [More on growing them.](#)
- **SO MANY NEW GARDENERS** have given up on and replaced dormant plants longtime gardeners know will return, next week I'll list my still-waiting-for beauties (with notes on thumb-test green). If you're still waiting without panic for some ol' faithfuls, do share for the lazy gardeners among them who haven't gotten around to removing/replacing just yet.
- **HOUSTON'S EARTH DAY** Kickoff Activities start Sunday at Discovery Green. Schedule: [cechouston.org](#). For other Greater Houston Area Earth Month events, check your city's or county's website.



FAVOR? IF SUBMITTING EVENTS FOR CALENDAR . . .

Event notices limited to 3 lines type. Type info, in exact calendar format, format, directly into email. so it can be copied/pasted into next issue.

NO event notices as pdf or jpg flyer. Otherwise, expect publication delay.

lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

* * *

*Brenda Beust Smith's column in the
LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER
is based on her 40+ years as Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener
Email: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com*

* * *

Spotlighting our . . . **Local Experts** *Lazy Gardener and Friends Newsletter*



Left: Albo — most rare, coveted aroid Unicorn Plant! ("when you find one it is like finding a Unicorn!" Center: Scindapsus from Peru. Right: Philodendron selloum -- a common aroid / hardy to grow outside. Linda Gay photos

AROIDS — LOW LIGHT PLANTS **'The more fenestrations, the rarer the plant!'**

by LINDA GAY

**Longtime - now - former
Director of Mercer Botanic Gardens,**

This group of very low light plants thrives in South America rainforests and other tropical places makes wonderful indoor plants. Many are epiphytic (vine-like) and require support..

Devils' Ivy and split leaf Philodendron started the houseplant frenzy with their colorful foliage, very large leaves or leaves with holes (fenestrations). The more fenestrations the rarer the plant. Kind of like paying more for holey jeans!

All aroids have spathe-type flowers, like *Spathiphyllum* (closet plant (*file photo right*)). They are identified by flower and fruit. Others common ones are, below l to r, Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaonema*), Pothos (*Epipremnum*), Swiss Cheese Plant

(*Monstera*), *Amorphophallus* (Corpse Flower) and *Diffenbachia* (Dumbcane). (File photos)



Aroids' calcium oxalate crystals (which look like little needles under a microscope) are inside leaves making them toxic to pets and humans if ingested. Curious, I cut a Dumbcane plant, touched my finger to the latex and put it on my tongue. Within a few seconds I could feel swelling in my throat — hence the name Dumbcane. It's doubtful animals would eat much as reaction is quick and animals have instincts we have lost.

I have repotted and propagated these plants without any incident to handling and have them growing all over my house. My two standard poodles do not even mess with them.

* * *

EDITOR'S NOTE: Linda will be happy to diagnose ailing houseplants (or a picture thereof) following her free upcoming lecture — **TUES., APR 19: CARE, PROPAGATION AND CULTURE OF AROID FAMILY** by **LINDA GAY**, 10AM, St. Basil's Hall, 702 Burney Road, Sugar Land. Free. sugarlandgardenclub.org.

* * *



John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 191

We often talk about the importance of trace elements (minerals). The April issue of Mother Earth News had an advertisement with few quotes on this subject:

"You can trace EVERY sickness, EVERY disease, and EVERY ailment to a mineral deficiency." Dr. Linus Pauling, two-time Nobel prize Winer.

According to the USDA, "in North America we have seen an average of 85% mineral depletion over the past 100 years, worse than any other country in the world."

Thirty-five million Americans suffer from arthritis because of a lack of zinc and other minerals (elements)."

In horticulture we often forget Liebig's law of the minimum, "plant growth is limited by the nutrient (element) in shortest supply."

There are many gardening supplements to address this issue. Like the advertisement referenced above, there are mineral packages derived from evaporated seawater with the sodium (Na) removed, there are clay minerals like those in Azomite, some mined humates have some minerals in them, mineral sands like greensand, granite sands, basalt sands, have been used for years by experienced gardeners, etc. Each offering a variety of elements.

There is also Re-mineralizer which is a blend of greensand, basalt sand, and granite sand to give a more complete range of elements in one product. It is also the most cost effective as all the minerals as it is sourced in Texas and it is a byproduct of other industries. This means no wetlands or wild areas were destroyed to mine the materials as in the other products. There is also less greenhouse gases produced from the mining and transportation into Houston from northern states.

A disease that affects stone fruits like *Prunus sp.* and citrus is Gummosis. This is a disease found all over the world which occurs mainly on the tree trunks and main branches. Researchers have found a strong correlation of this disease and the minerals (elements) available in the soil.

The study found that high levels of nitrogen (N) from artificial fertilizers increased the occurrence of this disease as did manganese (Mn) build up from pesticides.

They also found that lower levels of several minor and trace elements in the soil also increased the occurrence and severity of this disease. HortScience (2021)

Adding trace minerals (elements) every 3-4 years to all our gardening beds is very cheap insurance to ensure our plants are getting all they need.

Another paper in HortScience (2021) on trace minerals was on the element strontium (Sr). Strontium is an essential trace element for humans and other mammals.

If you remember from our study of the elements a few months ago, strontium is in the same column on the periodic table as calcium (Ca). This means it has similar chemical properties.

Strontium in the past was not considered an essential element for plants. However, the study found that adequate levels of strontium promoted the growth of Chinese cabbage (*Brassica rapa*). However, at high levels it had an inhibitory effect.

They also found that strontium, even though it has similar chemical properties, could not replace the function of calcium (Ca) in plants at low calcium levels.

I often get asked about using black weed mats for weed control. I have learned over the years that it causes more problems than it solves.

There was an article in HortScience (2021) last year that had an interesting statistic. The researchers found that the weed mat over bare ground increased irrigation requirements by 50% compared to a sawdust or wood chip mulch.

We know the chemicals in our public water supply kill off good microbes, which then leads to more disease issues in our lawns and gardens. Hence, the more one waters, the greater the potential for other problems. As you can see, weed mats worsen this problem.

We have often discussed the benefits of microbes in our soil. Healthy populations of good bacteria and fungi in the soil helps us have beautiful gardens with low maintenance costs (both time and money).

The journal HortScience (2021) had an interesting research paper on arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (AMF) that illustrates the benefits. They found that when AMF were added to tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers at planting time, these plants had greatly increased vigor and endurance under heat stress. The plants also had greater productivity and quality.

When we use chemical fungicides or other toxic chemicals in our gardens, we lose these type benefits.

NWR NOW CARRIES SEEDS FROM

NATIVE AMERICAN SEED COMPANY

\$3.00 EACH !

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

SUBMITTING EVENTS? PLEASE READ!

- *Only events submitted specifically to LG&F calendar are used*
- *Use our exact format, type into email, no pdfs/jpgs/flyers*
- *3 lines max allowed per entry. We will edit down if you don't.*
- *Too long links activated by word "Details."*
- *Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com*

EVENTS ARE ON-SITE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

SAT., APR.9: AN EDIBLE EDEN - TURNING YOUR LANDSCAPE INTO A BEAUTIFUL FOODSCAPE (Zoom) by **ANGELA CHANDLER**, 9:30-11:30am. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT., APR.9: EDIBLE ACADEMY: SPRING GARDENING AND NUTRITION EDU by **CAROL BURTON**, 9 am-noon. Gregory Lincoln Education Center. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

SAT. APR 9: GRAFTING PECANS by **STEPHEN BRUEGGERHOFF**, 9-NOON. Free. Galveston County Master Gardener event. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/

SAT., APR. 9: HOME GROWN SHOW (virtual) by **PAUL WINSKI, BRANDI KELLER & SHANNON DIETZ**. 9am-noon., Trini Mendenhall Center, 1414 Wirt Rd. \$20. Harris County AgriLive event. [Register](#).

SAT., APR 9: GROW YOU OWN - SETTING UP RAISED BEDS/PLANTERS (virtual) by **FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS**, 9-10:30am, Register: fbmg.org.

MON., APR. 11: COMPOSTING (virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10-11:30am, HCMG/Houston Community College event. Free. Register: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

TUES., APR.12: URBAN COMPOSTING FOR SMALL SPACES by **CHRIS WOOD, MOONSHOT COMPOST** and **PHILIPPA JOHNSTONE**, 5:30-7pm. Urban Harvest Teaching Garden. Urban Harvest event. [Details](#).

FRI., APR. 14: MAKE GARDENING EASIER by **DR. JOSEPH R. NOVAK**, 10am Trinity Episcopal Church, 1015 Holman. Free. Federation of Garden Clubs event. houstonfederationgardenclubs.org.

THURS., APR. 14: AMERICAN ROSE SELECTIONS by **PAT SHANLEY** (virtual), 7-9pm. meet.goto.com/875520813

SAT., APR. 16: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ONLINE PLANT & SPRING VEGETABLE SALE. hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/. Pickup Mon., Apr. 18, Genoa Friendship Garden, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., on-site sale.

MON., APR. 18: GENOA FRIENDSHIP OPEN GARDEN DAY & PLANT/VEGETABLE SALE, 8:30-11am., 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. [Advance online orders](#).

TUES., APR.19: CREATING SIMPLE GARDENS WITH NATIVE PRAIRIE PLANTS by **BETH CLARK**, 5-6pm: Sip and Stroll Garden Tour: 6-7pm: Program. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

MON., APR. 19: COMPOSTING (virtual) by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 11am-noon. Free. HCMG/Harris County Public Library event. facebook.com/harriscountyppl/events/

TUES., APR. 19: CARE, PROPAGATION AND CULTURE OF FAMILY by **LINDA GAY**, 10am, St. Basil's Hall, 702 Burney Road, Sugar Land.

Free. <https://sugarlandgardenclub.org>.

THURS., APR 21: FLOWERING PLANTS FOR FOUR SEASONS (virtual) by **FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS**, 2-3pm, Register: us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZErd-yprT4sHdyJOti3t

THURS.-FRI., APR. 21-22: GARDEN CLUB OF HOUSTON "COLOR" FLOWER SHOW, noon-4pm Thurs.; 10am-4pm Fri. Contemporary Arts Museum, 5216 Montrose Blvd. Free. gchouston.org

SAT., APR. 23: 2022 OLEANDER FESTIVAL, 9am-1pm, Betty Head Oleander Park, 2624 Sealy Ave., Galveston. Free. International Oleander Society event. oleander.org/

SAT. APR 23: INCREDIBLE EDIBLE HERBS by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**. \$10. Register: galveston.agrilife.org/horticulture/mgseminars/

SAT., APR. 23: NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY SALE, 9:30-2:30, New World Botanical, 2701 Lone Star Parkway, Montgomery. Pines and Prairies Chapter - NPSOT event. Availability list: npsot.org/wp/pinesandprairies/

SAT-SUN, APR. 23-24: HERITAGE GARDENERS SPRING TOURS/MARKET, tours (\$15) 1-5 pm. Markets Sat. & Sun, 9am-5 pm, 112 W. Spreading Oaks, Friendswood. Heritage Gardeners on Facebook.

SUN., APR. 24: TEXAS SUPERSTARS, by **DEBRA STALLINGS**, 2-3pm. Plants for All Seasons, 21328 SH 249. Cypress Creek Daylily Club event. Free. cypresscreekdaylily.wixsite.com/ccdc

TUES., APR.26: THE WORMERY (Zoom) by **MEG TAPP**, 5-6pm. Urban Harvest event. urbanharvest.org/education/classes/

FRI.-SUN, APR. 29 - MAY 1: KINGWOOD GARDEN CLUB GARDENSCAPES TOUR & PLANT SALE, Fri: 10am-4pm; Sat: 10am-4pm, Sun: 12pm-4pm. \$25. kingwoodgardenclub.org

SAT., APR. 30: BROMELIAD SOCIETY/HOUSTON SPRING SALE, 9am-4pm, Metropolitan Multi-services Center, 1475 W. Gray. Free. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

FRI.-SAT., MAY 6 & 7,: HOUSTON CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY SPRING SALE. 9am-5pm Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. Cash Preferred. hcsstex.org

SAT MAY 7: HOUSTON HEMEROCALLIS SOCIETY ANNUAL DAYLILY SALE, 9am-2pm, 5705 Pinemont Dr. Inventory: ofts.com/hhs/plantsales.html

TUES., MAY 10: GROWING PLUMERIAS, 7pm, (ZOOM & in-person), Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org; 281-796-7185

FRI., MAY 13: NATURE'S BURIAL, NATURAL LANDSCAPE AS YOUR LEGACY, by **KATY PRAIRIE CONSERVANCY**, 10am, Trinity Episcopal

Church. 1015 Holman. Free. Federation of Garden Clubs event. ([Details](#))

SAT.-SUN., MAY 21-22: BROMELIAD SOCIETY/HOUSTON ANNUAL

SHOW-SALE, 9am-5pm Sat.; 11am-4pm Sun., Judson Robinson, Jr.

Community Center, 2020 Hermann Drive. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

SAT., JUN 11: PLUMERIA SOCIETY SHOW & SALE, 5002 NASA Parkway,
Bay Area Community Center, Seabrook, theplumeriasociety.org, 281-796-7185

TUES., JULY 12: GROWING PLUMERIAS, (Zoom & in-person), 7pm, Cherie
Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America
event. theplumeriasociety.org; 281-796-7185

SAT., JULY 23: PLUMERIA SOCIETY SHOW & SALE, 5002 NASA Parkway,
Bay Area Community Center, Seabrook. theplumeriasociety.org, 281-796-7185

TUES., OCT 11: GROWING PLUMERIAS, (Zoom & in-person), 7pm, Cherie
Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America
event. theplumeriasociety.org; 281-796-7185

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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 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 then 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 reporter into gardening writing 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 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.

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.

