



August 23, 2013

Dear Friends,

Here is the 24th issue of our weekly gardening newsletter for Houston, the Gulf Coast and beyond. This a project of The Lazy Gardener, Brenda Beust Smith, John Ferguson and Mark Bowen (both John and Mark are with Nature's Way Resources). We also have a great supporting cast of contributing writers and technical specialists who will chime in and tweak away regularly. We would love to keep receiving your input on this newsletter comments suggestions questions. . . .Email your thoughts to: lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com. Thanks so much for your interest.

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Enjoy!

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HEADLINE: BOWLING WITH WILDFLOWERS? - A GOAT-Y CURE FOR TEXAS WEEDS

BY BRENDA SMITH



Great for choices for wildflower balls, left to right, Indian blankets (Gaillardia), black-eyed Susans, bluebonnets, coreopsis and coneflowers.

Daisy: What kind of a garden do you come from?

Alice: Oh, I don't come from any garden.

Daisy: Do you suppose she's a wildflower?

-- "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll

Planting wildflowers can be a lot of fun - if you remember: Mother Nature rules.

Wildflowers march to their own drummers.

My sister waits until a heavy rain is forecast. Then she runs outside and throws around lots of seed she's purchased off the sale tables - at the right time of year, of course.

Another reader I know sows those wildflower mix packages in an unused area of his yard - just to see what comes up. Always a delight and while what you expect might never appear, lots of strange beauties continue to pop up for years.

Most definitely wildflowers are not for the most fastidious of gardeners!

Wildflower seed balls are a fun project, especially for children but also for the young at heart. Gudrun Opperman leaned to make them from the volunteers at [Jesse Jones Park and Nature Center](#). Good flowers for a start include Indian blankets, black-eyed susans, prairie coneflowers, plains coreopsis, bluebonnets and lemon mint, to name just a few.

The Jones volunteers use clay from the park's creekbank. They roll the clay plus a "good kid-size pinch of mixed seed" into a 1/2 inch ball (using a teaspoon helps). The ball is wrapped in tissue paper, secured with twist ties. For a neater holding container, use wax paper. (These are removed before sowing, of course!)

Others recommend sifted, dry, organic compost - either homemade or commercial - mixed in with clay soil and enough water to moisten it into a fairly dry ball. But don't overdo the water! Go sparingly and only if it's necessary to get the clay to stick together.

Some recommend 1 inch balls. Some like 'em smaller. It's kinda like making stew. Everyone has his own recipe. Experimenting with what you have available is the best way to start.

Let the balls dry for three days or so before scattering them over the planting area which should be well-drained and get lots of sun. Think about where you usually see wildflowers blooming. Hot, dry fields, right?

When the fall rains come, the clay will melt taking the seeds with it down into the regular soil. In the meantime, the clay protects the seeds from hungry birds.

Our best planting time for wildflower seed is October through December. So you have plenty of time for planning, rolling and drying.

Couple of reminders:

- * Wildflowers do march to their own drummers. Some may take several years to germinate. That's one reason for using a good mixture in your balls.
- * Don't plant in rye grass, or areas that are going to be mowed in the early spring. It's almost impossible to tell wildflower leaves and stalks from lawn weeds.

* Make extras. These are wonderful gifts for teacher, grandparents, everyone on your list.

If you need more hands-on guidance, on Aug. 31, 10 a.m. at [Jesse H. Jones Park and Nature Center](http://jcp4.net/jones/), Gudrun Opperman will present a workshop making seed balls, along with information on local wildflowers, how to grow them and use them in home landscapes. 20634 Kenswick Drive in North Harris County. Free but reservations are required at 281-446-8588. Details: <http://hcp4.net/jones/>



Hi Ho Hi Ho, it's off to work we go . . .



Lunchtime!



Extra charge for poses!



Ready now for second story stuff



Sorry, we neither stack nor haul off

I don't often do columns on businesses, but [Texas Country Reporter's](http://www.texascountryreporter.com/) Bob Phillips got my dander up.

Bob recently did a segment on a lady in Wyoming who rents out her goats to folks who want to have their property cleaned up "organically."

Why didn't he do Texas' own Melinda Conner? She's doing exactly same thing!

I interviewed Melinda several years ago for the Houston Chronicle. And since I'll be traveling at the point this column needs to be turned in, I'd like to share Melinda's story again:

*"My men, like satyrs gazing on the lawns,
Shall with their goat feet dance an antic hay."
-- Christopher Marlowe, Edward II*

[Melinda Conner](http://www.melindaconner.com/) better not find her goats dancing "an antic hay." They're supposed to be working,

Melinda didn't plan on renting out her goats. She had some and put them in pasture to save a little on feed money.

They did such a good job of weed-clearing, neighbors began asking if she'd mind if her goats grazed a bit on their properties too?

One thing led to another and then next thing she knew, Melinda was compiling stats for prospective customers: travel distance, trips required, "work" hours, length of portable fencing needed, etc.

Right away I asked if they could be instructed to eat only ruellia.

Sorry, no.

Goats eat all their favorite plants first, then their next favorite, and so on.

At the bottom of their list: yaupon and bunch salt grass (they will eventually eat some but not all of these). Other than that Melinda has not found anything they won't eat.

Other goat-y facts:

- * It takes 20 goats approximately 3 days to clear a brush-filled 60 ft. X 60 ft. lot.
- * Her goats are shy of barking or aggressive dogs. Dogs just hanging out, or on the other side of the fence, don't bother them at all.
- * The goats are very useful in reclaiming overgrown backyards and fencelines. Melinda uses electric net fences to keep them out of off-limits areas
- * Goats only eat the bark off the big trees when they are too hungry and there is no smaller browse available. Or, if confined in a very small area with nothing else to do. The goats need to be removed before this happens, or given supplemental feeding if the land owner wanted the land grazed down to a degree that it would leave a goat still hungry after a day of browsing.
- * Goats make what Melinda calls "a very pleasant munching sound" as they browse through an overgrown lot, but you have to listen carefully to hear it. They generally only "speak" when spoken too or are upset.
- * She's careful to use only goats that are "sweet and social." Melinda loves hearing her goats return her greetings, each in their own recognizable voice. The landowners and neighbors often talk with them as well.

Not all areas are good for goats. She keeps them fenced away from poisonous plants, aggressive dogs and unstable structures.

I learned about Melinda's goats from reader Theresa Coucher, who hired them to "clean" some property. She likes them because "they are so easy on the land. They're light and don't compact the soil; they leave behind hundreds of pounds of fertilizer; they don't run on diesel and they make good use of what they eat in producing meat and babies."

But, she warns, "They do need to be looked after. Given enough to eat, they need little to no additional food, but they do need a source of clean water, changed every couple of days or so."

Goats can be mean. Were Melinda's goats really as gentle? Theresa called them "all sweethearts." She and her husband spent a lot of time in the woods with the goats and she's definitely now a fan. Melinda's report:

"I love my woods and think it's a huge improvement. We have crows, night herons and all the usual small birds here, and none of them minded the goats at all. We even have cardinals nesting where the goats were and they didn't turn a hair. Or feather."

What fun!

<http://www.seabreezegoats.com/grazing-service.html>

P.S. Just kidding about Bob Phillips. "[Texas Country Reporter](#)" is one of our favorite TV shows and we've made many a stop on our Texas drive-about at places we've learned about from him.

But couldn't let that Wyoming segment go by without a mention of our own Lone Star goat lady!



A QUICK "JANE LONG" REMINDER:

"Jane Long was a revolutionary, just like the famous (male) Texas heroes we learned about in school. She was one of the most politically powerful women in Texas in the early 1800s, a time when women were supposed to give birth and do little else. That is the truly amazing thing about Jane Long."

Helen Mooty, Director, Galveston County Museum.

The Jane Long Society is hoping to make Texans more aware of the incredible accomplishments of "the Mother of Texas" - Jane Long (especially on Bolivar Peninsula). She's mentioned in a single paragraph in every Texas school history book - but how much do you really know about this remarkable woman?

Three opportunities:

1. Email me at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net and I'll send you the fascinating information packet on Jane's two incredible years spent on Bolivar Peninsula (including how she came to be named the "Mother of Texas") and her subsequent amazing role in the fight for Texas Independence.

2. Mark your calendar for Oct. 12, 2013 - date of the 11 a.m.-4 p.m. [4th Annual Jane Long Festival](#) on Bolivar Peninsula. Bring your own lawn chairs - this is an old fashioned family style festival.

(Also: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jane-Long-Festival-Bolivar-Peninsula/153763924635431>)

3. Tune in to [KPFT \(90.1 FM\)](#) at 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, Aug. 27, for an Open Journal discussion of this remarkable woman, Jane Wilkinson Long.

NOTE: Last week's column mistakenly listed the time for the show at noon. Wrong. Senior moment. That was the time of my ol' EcoGardening Show on KPFT. Anyone remember that? It was such fun.

Anyway, the correct time for this coming Tuesday's show on Jane Long is 9:30 a.m. - 90.1 on your FM dial.

Questions aimed at me can be emailed to lazygardener@sbcglobal.net (altho I'll get any you send to this newsletter as well).

ARCHIVES OF BRENDA'S COLUMNS

(Link to archives: <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs172/1112503958110/archive/1112822112421.html>)

"THE LAZY GARDENER'S GUIDE ON CD" - Specifically for Houston Area gardens - WHAT TO DO EACH MONTH - when to fertilize, prune, plant what where, best plants for sun, shade, butterflies, hummingbirds, etc. Based on Brenda's quirky 40+ year Houston Chronicle Lazy Gardener column. PDF format, print out only the month you need. \$20 total, checks payable to Brenda B. Smith. Mail to: Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD, 14011 Greenranch Dr., Houston, TX 77039-2103.

For correspondence that is specific to Brenda, feel free to email her directly at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

WEEKLY EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS CALENDAR

August 23: 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. A Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group Event. We have our pear event and pear tasting with Dr. Ethan Natelson. George Mc Afee will do a hands on of multi-grafting and will have pictures of the many beautiful creations he has done. He and Ethan are both master Grafters. No fee. www.gcfsg.weebly.com/newsletter.

August 24: Irrigation For the Home Gardener (hands-on). A garden that conserves precious water resources is a rewarding investment. An irrigation system is a practical choice for most garden locations. Sat, Aug 24. 9 am - 12 pm. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Private residence in Highland, TX. Location to be provided to enrolled students. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

August 24, 2013 Woodlands Home & Garden Show. Come check out the following gardening and green programs: 10:30-11:30 a.m: Drought Tolerant Landscape! Get your Lawn, Garden and Trees ready for the Fall Months by Randy Lemmon. 11:30-12:30 p.m: Build Healthy Soils the Organic Way! Save Money and Live Better! by John Ferguson. 12:30-1:30 p.m: Give your Home Extraordinary Air Quality and Energy Efficiency that's 100% Food, Water & Renewable Energy Capable! by LaVerne Williams. 1:30-2:30 p.m: Your Landscape, Your Way, Naturally with Beautiful Native Plants that Serve as the Foundation Elements of Your Landscape by Mark Bowen. www.woodlandsshow.com

August 24: 9-11:30 a.m., Long time Galveston County Master Gardener Luke Stripling will present "Successful Fall Vegetable Gardening," a program on growing fall and winter season vegetables in Galveston County, at Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office in Carbide Park, 4102 Main Street (FM 519), La Marque. Topics: soil preparation, drainage, the use of raised beds, the best seed planting dates, the best varieties, planting depth, fertilizer methods, water requirements, pest control and harvesting. For course reservations, call 281-534-3413, ext. 12 or email GALV3@wt.net.

August 25: 1:30-3:30 p.m., Rainwater Harvesting Class at Wabash Antiques & Feed Store, free, Give your plants the water they really want-rain water. Attend the Rainwater Harvesting class and learn what it will take to catch the rain from your roof for your garden needs. Come with your yard specifications and

watering needs in mind, and as a class, we will find out what it will take for your home to catch the rain.. For more information visit <http://www.wabashfeed.com/>

August 26: 6:30 p.m., HUG Urban Farmers/HUFBC will meet at a new location, 1475 W. Gray, Houston 77007. Skip Richter with AgriLife will tell us his observations about the all day Houston Food Production Conference held Aug 17. www.houstonurbangardeners.org Free.

August 28: 7:30 p.m., Houston Cactus & Succulents Society Membership Meeting, Program: The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum by Mike Cracraft, Location: Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 W Gray St, Houston, <http://hcsstex.org/>

Aug. 31: "Orchids for Beginners" demonstration and workshop at Clown Alley Orchids, 3119 Lily St., Pasadena, TX; 281-991-6841;ClownAlley@sbcglobal.net. \$20 fee includes starter plant and all materials.

September 5 is the deadline for registering for Brazoria County Master Gardener Training. The session begins on September 12 through November 14, 2013 on every Thursday from 9:00 am to 3:30 p.m. The new fall class will be held at the Brazoria County Extension Office, 21017 CR 171, Angleton, TX 77515. Master Gardener Training program is 60 hours of classroom training that covers a wide range of gardening topics. Course cost is \$99. For more information contact the extension office at 979-864-1558 x110 or email <http://txmg.org/brazoria>.

Sept. 6 - Registration deadline for 12-week Texas Gulf Coast Gardener Program at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Garden. Call 281-443-8731 or visit park at 223-6 Aldine-Westfield, Humble, to enroll. The two-tier program for both beginner and intermediate-level gardeners was developed with guidance from Dr. David Creech and Stephen F. Austin State University's Mast Arboretum staff in Nacogdoches. Classes, starting the third week in September, will meet Tuesdays (Tier 1) and Thursdays (Tier 2), 9am-3pm (fee: \$225).

September 7: Rainwater Harvesting and Cisterns. We will discuss very low-cost methods of absorbing water on your property, as well as more expensive methods such as rainwater cisterns. Sat, Sept 7. 9 - 11:15 am. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Westbury Community Garden, 12601 Fonmeadow, 77035. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

September 7: WILDESCAPES WORKSHOP & Native Plant Sale, Landscaping with Native Plants to Attract Wildlife, 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. At the Houston Zoo's Brown Education Center in Hermann Park www.npsot.org/houston

September 7: Saturday with the Master Gardeners, Garden Talk Topic "Water Gardening"
Join the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners' in their 4 acres of demonstration gardens on Saturday, September 7th and talk to the MG volunteers who design and maintain them. It's a great way to learn about gardening and plants well-suited to Fort Bend County. Gardens will be open from 9:00-11:00 a.m. on September 7th. Attend an informal garden talk on Water Gardening which starts at 10:00 a.m. in the Water Garden. Call 281-341-7068 or visit www.fbmvg.com

September 7 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.: Become a Citizen Scientist. Help preserve native species in the area by learning how to monitor and eradicate invasive plants and animals at this workshop designed by the Texas Invasives Organization for those ages 16 and older. At Jesse H. Jones Park & Nature Center. Reservations are required. <http://www.hcp4.net/jones/>

September 7: Fall Shrubs & Tree Planting Clinic, 10:15 a.m. at both Cornelius Nursery locations, 1200 N. Dairy Ashford and 2233 S. Voss: <http://www.calloways.com/clinics>. Free. Fall is the ideal time of year to plant trees and shrubs. Discover new varieties and old favorites of trees and shrubs suited to the Texas environment. Get tips on designing your landscape with trees and shrubs, and learn how to properly prepare your soil and plant for a naturally healthy and beautiful garden.

Sept 9: HUG (Houston Urban Gardeners) Event: Cool Geeky New Ways to Grow Food; Seeking presenters
I often have people come up to me with some wonderful new equipment, inspiring doo-dads or new (or old) ways of growing food that look very interesting. Our Sept. 9 meeting will focus on the theme of fun, new, geeky stuff and new/old methods of growing food. Even better if it's for growing in your apartment, balcony or vertically. We have 3

to five interested people involved so far. Is there something you heard about or saw that YOU want to share? Let me know at the next meeting or email me atlaurel@houstonurbangardeners.org.
org. <http://www.houstonurbangardeners.org/>

September 10: Precinct 2 Harris County Master Gardeners event: Green Thumb Series at 6:30 pm, Chris Hammen, a Harris County Master Gardener will be speaking on Fall Vegetable Gardening at the Clear Lake Mtg room, 5001 NASA Pkwy in Seabrook. FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. <http://hcmga.tamu.edu> or 281 855 5600

September 14: Nacogdoches/Arcadia: Naked Ladies and Oxbloods: SFA Gardens Arcadian Fall Bulb Bus Tour, September 14. Visit Texas Gardener columnist Greg Grant's Emanis House dogtrot in Shelby County's rural community of Arcadia. Depending on the weather, see red oxblood lilies (*Rhodophiala*), several different colors of spider lilies (*Lycoris*), or assorted rain lilies (*Cooperia*, *Zephyranthes*, and *Habranthus*). Unfortunately their display depends on the first fall rains so a grand naturalized bulb display isn't guaranteed. Visit Grant's old family home with an open breezeway running through it, along with his small cottage garden, chickens, and bluebird houses. Dress comfortably for potentially hot weather. The bus tour will be from 9 a.m. until noon. All participants will meet at the SFA Ag building, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, at 9 a.m. \$25 for Friends of SFA Gardens members, \$30 for non-members. For more information and reservations contact Elyce Rodwald at 936-468-1832 erodewald@sfasu.edu. Other SFA Gardens events and information can be found at sfagardens.sfasu.edu

September 15: Organic Container Gardening. Don't have enough space to grow your favorite herbs and vegetables? Container Gardening may be your answer. Sun, Sept 15. 2:30 - 4:30 pm. \$36 non-members. Wabash Feed, 5701 Washington Ave, Houston, TX 77007. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

September 17: Planting the Fall Vegetable Garden (hands-on). What better way to gain expert knowledge than to see how it is done firsthand through our fall gardening course. Tue, Sept 17. 6:00 - 8:30 pm. \$24 members. \$36 non-members. Westbury Community Garden, 12601 Fonmeadow, 77035. For more info: 713-880-5540 or www.urbanharvest.org

September 17th: The Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens kicks off the Texas Gulf Coast Gardener classes this fall! Starting with the first gardening series: Tier-1: Basic Gardening- runs Sept.17th-Dec. 10th, Designed for beginner to intermediate level gardeners. The curriculum will include topics such as site development, plant selection, propagation, mulching and composting, lawn care and many others. Meets on Tuesdays. For more information, call 281-443-8731 or emailmsociety@hcp4.net.

September 18: Precinct 2 Harris County Master Gardeners event: at 10:00 am, Gudrun Opperman will speak on Shade Gardening. Gudrun is a Harris County Master Gardener and a Clinical Biologist. She has been volunteering at Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Garden for twenty years. FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.
Where: The Meeting Room at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX 77586.
<http://hcmga.tamu.edu> or 281 855 5600.

September 19th: December 12th: The Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens is offering Tier-2: Landscape and Garden Plants. Topics focus on plants that can be successfully cultivated and utilized in the Texas Gulf Coast climate. Participants will learn about new and exciting plants to add to their collection while improving their horticultural skills. Meets on Thursdays. For more information or to register, call 281-443-8731 or email msociety@hcp4.net.

September 19: Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening presented by a team of Fort Bend Master Gardeners Master Gardeners will provide helpful and timely information on growing methods and proven crops for Fort Bend County. The public is invited to this free program hosted by the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners at the Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Road in Rosenberg. Social at 6:30 pm; program from 7:00 - 8:00 pm. Call 281.633.7033 or visit www.fbmga.com

September 20: application deadline for The Fort Bend County Master Gardener Training class, a program offered by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service that begins on Wednesday, October 2, 2013. Classes are Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am - 3:30pm during the month of October. The cost of the class is \$200 (\$353 for couples). For more information visit www.fbmga.com (under Become a Master Gardener) or you can call 281-633-7033 or 281-342-3034.

September 22 & 23: 7th Annual Farm and Food Leadership Conference. Where: Bastrop Convention and Exhibit

Center. Times: Sunday, September 22, 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. & Monday, September 23, 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

This unique conference focuses on the policies and regulations affecting our farms and our food. Hear top speakers on a variety of issues including genetically engineered foods, the politics of organics, the 2013 Farm Bill, FDA's food safety regulations, urban farming, raw milk, water, and so much more!

farmandranchfreedom.org/farm-food-leadership-conference/

September 29: Houston: Sustainable Living Through Permaculture 1: SLTP 1. The design principles of Permaculture (PC) are explained, observed and illustrated in a series of breakout sessions at a home and garden remodeled to reflect PC sustainability principles. Sunday, September 29. 2 - 6 p.m. \$50. NE Loop Residence. Location to be provided to enrolled students. For more information, call 713-880-5540 or visit

www.urbanharvest.org.

Oct. 4-5: Bulb & Plant Mart at Holly Hall Retirement Community, 2000 Holly Hall St. 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Oct. 4; 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Oct. 5. New this year: a Garden Garage Sale of garden treasures. Sponsored by the Garden Club of Houston.

Details: www.gchouston.org

October 5: Nacogdoches: The SFA Gardens at Stephen F. Austin State University

will host its annual Fabulous Fall Festival Plant Sale from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Saturday, October 5, at the SFA Pineywoods Native Plant Center, 2900 Raguet St. in historic Nacogdoches. A wide variety of hard-to-find, "Texas tough" plants will be available, including Texas natives, heirlooms, tropicals, perennials, shrubs, trees, and exclusive Greg Grant and SFA introductions. Most of the plants are extensively trialed in the gardens before being offered to the public and most are produced by the SFA Gardens staff and volunteers. This popular event benefits the SFA Mast Arboretum, Pineywoods Native Plant Center, Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, Gayla Mize Garden, and educational programs hosted at the gardens. The educational programs at SFA Gardens reach more than 15,000 students ages 1 to 100 on a yearly basis. The public is encouraged to arrive early and bring a wagon. For more information, call (936) 468-4404, or visit www.sfagardens.sfasu.edu two weeks before the sale for a list of available plants.

October 5-6: Spring Branch African Violet Club, Annual Fall Sale, West Gray Multiservice Center

1475 West Gray Street, Houston, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. and Sunday, 10:00a.m. - 3:00p.m.,

Free Admission, Violets of all types such as standards, miniatures, semi-miniatures, and trailers will be available. Other Gesneriads such as Episcias and Streps and supplies such as potting soil, pots, and fertilizers will also be featured. Club members will be available to answer general questions on growing African Violets. For further information, contact Karla Ross, 281-748-8417, kjwross@yahoo.com.

Note: This is our fall sale and does NOT include a show.

Nov. 1-3: Antique Rose Emporium's 25th Annual Fall Festival of Roses. Free. Programs: Nov. 1 - 11am, Propagation by Glenn Schroeter; 1pm, Grow Roses by Judy Barrett; 2:30pm, Psycho Lighting by Linda Lehmusvirta; 3:30pm, Afternoon Tea. Nov. 2 - 11am, Grandma's Garden by Greg Grant; 1pm, Lawn Gone by Pam Penick; 2:30pm, Bulbs by Chris Wiesinger; 4pm, Fearless Gardening 101 by Felder Rushing. Nov. 3 - Behind Scenes Tour by Mike Shoup. Details: www.antiqueroseemporium.com

Submit calendar items to lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com. Events must be submitted by the sponsoring organization. Please note: "garden calendar request" in the subject line. We list calendar items up to two months ahead of time.

Need speakers for your group? Brenda's "Lazy Gardener's Speakers List" of area horticultural/environmental experts is available free for the asking. Email your request to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.

MULCH CORNER

BY JOHN FERGUSON



INORGANIC MULCHES: CLEAR PLASTIC

Last week we looked at black plastic so this week we are going to look at clear plastic. There are many similarities between the two but also some differences.

Clear plastic can be used to warm the soil in spring as black plastic and should be removed to prevent the growth of fungus and other pathogens in the soil. Methane and other gases produced by the anaerobic conditions can build up under the plastic damaging plant roots. The better the soil (more fertile) or the higher the clay content, the greater the problems become as with all plastic mulches.

Similar to black plastic mulches, clear plastic is generally applied as a one layer mulch. Clear plastic is available in different thicknesses, widths, and lengths. Some plastic mulches are produced with special properties like resistance to biodegradation from ultra violet light. There are more choices on clear plastic mulches that will biodegrade than with black plastic .

First let's examine some of the benefits of using a clear plastic mulch. It holds in heat and moisture, hence it helps to warm soil in spring. It works so well at trapping heat that it can be used to solarize soil. In fact, clear plastic will warm soil twice as fast as black plastic. Research has shown that clear plastic for solarization is as effective as the extremely dangerous chemical Methyl-Bromide for reducing soil pathogens prior to planting strawberries [HortTechnology July-September 1997]. It is best used and most effective in specialized applications. It has been found that translucent (clear) plastic reduces nutsedge more effectively than black plastic.

As with all plastic mulches there are some drawbacks also. Since it is clear, it allows more light energy to reach the soil allowing weed seeds to germinate and grow under the mulch.

IN THE NEWS:

Overtime for Deer Park Prairie! "Prairie-grass-roots" fundraising effort gets reprieve
<http://www.bayoulandconservancy.org/#!/deer-park-prairie/c17e5>

[Bee die-offs: New tests find bee-killing pesticides in 'bee-friendly' plants from garden centers nationwide - See more at:](#)

If you have a gardening story or news item you would like to share, please send it to us at lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com.

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 a couple of years ago, it ranked as the longest-running, continuously-published local newspaper column in the Greater Houston area.

Brenda's gradual sideways step from Chronicle 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 and now to her *Lazy Gardener's Guide* on CD (which retails for \$20. However, \$5 of every sale is returned to the sponsoring group at her speaking engagements).

A Harris County Master Gardener, Brenda has served on the boards of many Greater Houston area horticulture organizations and has hosted local radio and TV shows, most notably a 10+-year Lazy Gardener run on HoustonPBS (Ch. 8) and her call-in "EcoGardening" show on KPFT-FM.

In addition to her position as Production Editor on the Garden Club of America's magazine and her freelance writing career, Brenda's latest venture is "THE LAZY GARDENER'S & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER" with John Ferguson and Mark Bowen of Nature's Way Resources.

A native of New Orleans and graduate of St. Agnes Academy and the University of Houston, Brenda lives in Aldine and is married to the now 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 the co-author of the book *Organic Management for the Professional*.

For this newsletter, John contributes articles regularly and is responsible for publishing it.

MARK BOWEN

Mark is a native Houstonian, a horticulturist and organic specialist with a background in garden design, land restoration and organic project management. He is currently the general manager of Nature's Way Resources. Mark is also the co-author of the book *Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas*, the author of the book *Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast*, co-author of the *Bayou Planting Guide* and contributing landscape designer for the book *Landscaping Homes: Texas*.

With respect to this newsletter, Mark serves as the editor.

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, quality control, and he is a certified compost facility operator.

Pablo helps this newsletter happen from a technical support standpoint.



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