



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



May 15, 2020 - Issue # 339

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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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If your event in our calendar below is cancelled, please let us know as soon as possible at lazygardener@sbcglobal.net



SANCTUARIES FOR GARDENERS? MORE ON 'MOLESTING' & 'WOW' PLANTS & BEST (?) LAZY GARDENER PLANT

"There are certain, very stabilizing forces in gardening that can ground us when we are feeling shaky, uncertain, terrified really. It's these predictable outcomes, predictable rhythms of the garden that are very comforting right now,"

— [Andrew Keshner](#)

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

"WOW NOW!" flower photos being sent in by readers are turning me into a regular grinagog. Nothing could be a better antidote for what we're all going through. Silver linings appear in every cloud and, in this one, it's smiling down on our local independent nurseries -- lifeblood for us gardeners.

So many folks are finding comfort and new healthy food sources in their

gardens. Nurseries somehow seem safer places in which to wander around, to more easily maintain recommended distances from other folks.

Also, just maybe, we're getting a little "high" out there? We humans breathe in oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Plants do just the opposite. Could it be just a tad of an oxygen high can be found in the garden? Folks do PAY to go to "oxygen bars." This "high" is free!

* * *

INTERESTING TWIST ON WHIPPING PLANTS. Former Houston Chronicle Fashion Editor **Linda Gillan Griffin** noted: *"Momma and my grandmas always told me plants perform best, that is, put out more seeds or whatever it takes to propagate their species, when they feel threatened, like they might die."*



In her own garden, Linda notes her red buckeye puts out lots more seeds after a severe weather stress. It's true many flowers, such as crape myrtles (left), produce unexpected second or third bloom periods after having spent flowers "amputated." Do they fear eradication?

Linda's curious to know if other readers have seen specific flower/fruit production differences (besides dying, that is) after natural (as opposed to gardener-triggered) life-threatening forces?

DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO!! I bought this beautiful, albeit unlabeled plant (below right), sure it was a tibouchina . Friends wanted cuttings. PlantSnap app identified it as a *Melastoma*, along with terrible warnings, horribly invasive practically the world over.

Wow! No sharing if that's true! It told my friends no cuttings. Then, however, having second thoughts, I sent a picture to plant guru, former Mercer Botanic Garden Director Linda Gay. Linda confirmed it is a tibouchina .

What I didn't know -- but she did -- is that tibouchina is in the Family Melastoma, a very broad-range family that includes some dangerously-invasive members, mostly in very tropical areas. Tibouchinas are fine here, Linda assure me, adding *"Princess flower is common name. Winter causes freeze damage but returns if roots are healthy."*

PlantSnap is a relatively-reliable plant ID app, but not always. I almost refused to share and then remove a delightful plant because I didn't follow my own advice: Always check with a LOCAL source.



Oddly enough, this week's flower of our "Have You Tried . . ." recommendation (below John's column) looks almost exactly like this one, but it's a *Thunbergia* a cascading-branch shrub named for our own fabulous plant info resource:

[Mercer Botanic Garden.](#)



"BEST FLOWER FOR LAZY GARDENER!"

Talk about an eye-catching headline! The British website [Brinkwire](#) claims it's a penstemon. Texas has around two dozen native penstemons, including our own pink-purple, spring-blooming [Gulf Coast penstemon](#) (left). Unlike most of Texas' native penstemons, this one actually likes our heavy rains or moisture-retaining gumbo soils.

What really caught my eye in this article, however, was this fascinating quote by [Celebrated British gardener Alan Titchmarsh](#): "... it seems to me that there is an interesting correlation in that the broader and softer the leaf, the less hardy a particular variety will be." Think that's true?



Back to the perfect lazy gardener plant, I'd pick kalanchoes (right). They can go straight from decorated pot to garden and bloom for years with almost no help at all! (Thanks, Randy & Georgie for these Mother's Day kalanchoes!)

* * *

MORE "WOW NOW!" FLOWERS FROM READERS (con't).

Best news: all three sent in this week are major attractors of hummingbirds, butterflies and many other beneficial pollinators.



**BRAZILIAN
PLUME FLOWER**
(*Justicia carnea*)

DONNA ZAPATKA's
Justica is several years old. She can't remember where she bought it, but just bought another one at [Natus Nursery](#). It's in a container and gets mostly shade with a tad of afternoon sun at their Atascocita home.



RANGOON CREEPER
(*Quisqualis indica*)

Donna's fragrant, mass-summer-blooming Rangoon creeper is 15+/- years old, 8' tall & 15' wide, On a lattice trellis, its an effective screen for a hot tub. If it dies back in hard winters, she prunes to ground. It always returns.



DURANTA
(with purple coneflowers)
Also known as golden dewdrop (for its gold seed pods), this duranta thrives in **JAN FISH's** Kingwood garden, along with drift roses, lantana, alyssum, zinnias, snapdragons, verbena, plumbago and cuphea

Email WOW NOW! flower photos with your name, area of town and info about the plant to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com
They should be in full, SPECTACULAR color right now

* * *

"LAZY GARDENER SPEAKER LIST" & "PUBLICITY BOOK LET"
are free — email request to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

Brenda's column in the LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener

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NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS #119

Something to think about, I know I did not. I was reading a research article published in the journal Environment International (May, 2020) by the University of Stirling in the U.K, that may affect some gardeners.

They found that the COVID19 virus can be spread by sewage sludge (also called biosolids for marketing purposes). This virus has been found in human feces or sewage up to 33 days after a patient has tested negative.

For gardeners, several compost companies in our area use sewage sludge in their products. The researchers also believe that the virus could be transmitted in the waste water from sewage treatment plants. This wastewater is sometimes used to water gardens, golf courses, sports fields, etc. and is commonly referred to as "purple pipe water".

We have often talked about the use of cover crops to improve soils, control weeds, control erosion, and provide habitat from insects to birds. Another 5-year study by New Mexico State University has confirmed these benefits even in a hot, dry, semiarid environment.

For homeowners, if one has an area with very poor soil, where one eventually wants to build a garden, they can use a version of cover cropping to improve the soil. Why not plant a native wildflower garden for a few years and let the plants build humus in the soil, breakup up hardpan, increase microbial life, etc. While the plants are doing their work, one has a beautiful wildflower meadow to enjoy and a habitat for the butterflies, birds, and other life.

We have talked about the problems caused by tilling the soil many times in this column. Tillage destroys organic matter, kills off soil life, creates erosion, and destroys soil structure. The only time tillage should be used is to mix materials together in a brand-new garden bed.

The results of another study continue to support the advantages of not tilling. The University of Nebraska has an ongoing study for the last 40 years. They have found that No-Till farms have the highest yields and are the most profitable.

I love a good cup of organically shade grown coffee. Studies have shown that not only do they taste better, shade grown coffees have more bioactive chemicals that help our health. A study published by the American Phytopathological Society in the journal Phytobiomes found that coffee plants have a core microbiome. They discovered that coffee plants have 26 bacterial and 31 fungal species in their biome. Many of the species have been previously recognized as having plant beneficial properties. It is suspected that this biome influences the coffees flavor.

In previous issues I have mentioned that gardeners have more vitamin-D in their bodies than non-gardeners.

Several previous studies have shown high levels of this vitamin are inversely related to the severity of covid-19 infections. Two more studies have been published on this issue. A group led by Northwestern University did a statistical analysis from 10 countries and found that countries with high mortality rates had low vitamin-D levels compared to those with lower death rates.

Another study in the Journal Aging Clinical and Experimental Research by Anglia Ruskin University has found an association between low average levels of vitamin-D and high numbers of covid-19 cases across 20 European countries.

These are great reasons to get outside, work in our gardens and enjoy the sunshine!

Another study that supports the health benefits of being a gardener and raising one's own food has been released by Tufts University Health Sciences Department published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (2020).

The study conducted over 20 years found that older adults whom did not consume enough flavonoid rich foods had increased risk of Alzheimer's and dementia.

Flavonoids are natural substances found in plants such as fruit and vegetables and in some plant-based beverages like tea and wine.

Many flavonoids are produced by microbes living in the soil and on the roots of plants. Mycorrhizal fungi on the roots of grape vines have been found to produce flavonoids that the grape vines absorb and is transported into the grapes giving them a better flavor.

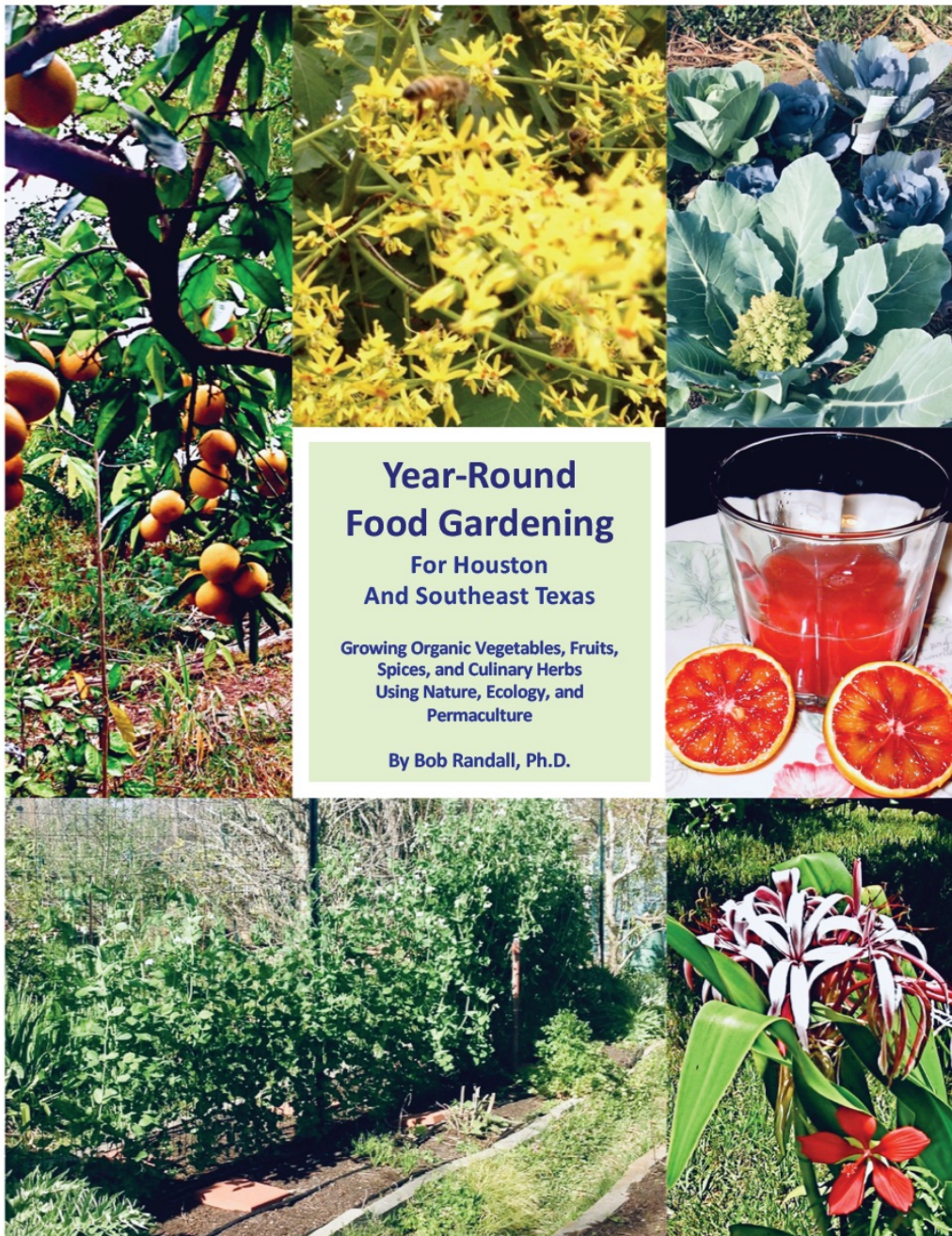
Standard toxic chemical agriculture kills off much of the good biology needed to produce the health benefits. This is another reason to be an organic gardener and grow one's own vegetables, fruits and berries.

Gardeners in Houston and along the Gulf Coast are blessed with a climate that will allow us to grow a wide range of fruits and vegetables. The best source of information for those wanting to start their own food gardens and fruit orchards is the book by Dr. Bob Randall titled "Year-Round Food Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas".

This great book is available at Nature's Way Resources and many other private nurseries.

A list of places carrying this book can be found at:

<https://yearroundgardening.me/>



Year-Round Food Gardening

For Houston
And Southeast Texas

Growing Organic Vegetables, Fruits,
Spices, and Culinary Herbs
Using Nature, Ecology, and
Permaculture

By Bob Randall, Ph.D.

* * *

HAVE YOU TRIED . . .

MERCER BLUE THUNBERGIA

(Thunbergia battiscombei)

Also known as clock or blue glory vine, this is actually a shrub with up-to-6' arching branches that can be trained to a trellis or fence, or work great in hanging baskets and containers. Its brilliant blue trumpet-

shaped flowers with yellow throats
bloom spring through summer in full
sun or partial shade. It loves our
summer heat!



Mercer Blue thunbergia is carried by Nature's Way Resources ([Map](#)).
Or . . . contact our sponsor, Montgomery Pines Nursery in Willis, our other
sponsors below or your neighborhood nurseryman for possible sources.

At Nature's Way Resources we have uploaded our **Master** and **Native** Plants
inventory online to implement a curbside pickup for orders. Any questions and
orders for the plant nursery can be directed to Carol
at nwrnursery@gmail.com.

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

ADULT GARDEN PLANT EVENTS ONLY

ALWAYS CHECK TO MAKE SURE YOUR EVENT IS IN! HOWEVER . . .

PLEASE READ BEFORE SUBMITTING EVENTS!

- *droppable-1586288881933Events NOT submitted in the EXACT format below may take 2 weeks or longer to be reformatted/retyped and added to calendar.*
- *Events written in the email in this EXACT format will be copied & pasted immediately into the next upcoming calendar.*
- *No pdfs or flyers!!! They only delay publication.*
- *Submit to: lazygardener@sbcglobal.net.*
- *Put group name in email subject.*

- **WE ARE REMOVING CANCELLED CALENDAR EVENT AS SOON AS NOTICES COME IN.**
- **CHECK UPDATED CALENDAR BELOW BEFORE ATTENDING ANY PREVIOUSLY-SCHEDULED EVENT, AS WELL AS THOSE STILL LISTED IN CASE OF LAST MINUTE CANCELLATION.**

SAT., JUN. 13: 14" METAL HANGING BASKET by JIM MAAS, & PAT CORDRAY, 10am,
Maas Nursery, 5511 Todville Rd., Seabrook. \$35. 281-474-2488; maasnursery.com

TUES., JUL 14: BONSAI by SCOTT BARBOZA, 7-9pm; Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion,
1500 Hermann Dr. Free. Plumeria Society of America event. theplumeriasociety.org

TUES., OCT 13: FALL PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SOCIAL/LUAAU 7-9:00 pm;
Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. theplumeriasociety.org

For event submission rules, see top of calendar

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 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, it then 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 which morphed into her Lazy Gardener's Guide on CD. which she now emails free upon request.

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 specialty shows on HoustonPBS (Ch. 8) and her call-in "EcoGardening" show on KPFT-FM.

For over three decades, Brenda served as as Production Manager of the Garden Club of America's BULLETIN magazine. Although still an active horticulture lecturer and 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 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.

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.

