



Jan-8-2021 | Issue 371

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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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Nature's Way Resources will accept Christmas trees from home owners for recycling at no charge. They must be not be flocked or have tinsel on them and Christmas tree stands should be removed.

CORONAVIRUS CANCELLATIONS

If your event in our calendar below is cancelled, please let us know as soon as possible at lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

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PAPERWHITES FOR WINTER LETTING NATURE CALM OUR MINDS

by BRENDA BEUST SMITH

*Brown bulbs were buried deep; Now, from the kind old earth,
Out of the winter's sleep, Comes a new birth!
Flowers on stems that sway; / Flowers of snowy white;*

*Flowers as sweet as day, / After the night.
So does Narcissus bring / Tidings most glad and plain:
"Winter's gone; here is Spring— / Easter again!"*
-- Cicely Mary Barker (1895-1973)



We aren't even close to Easter yet. But paperwhite narcissus don't wait that long to bloom for us! Among my most favorite flower books are the delightful peeks at garden fairies by [Cicely Mary Barker](#). With one earlier-for-us postscript, this excerpt from "[Fairies of the Garden](#)" seems perfect for the start of this new year in particular.

Our paperwhite narcissus should soon burst into bloom if they haven't already. It's not unusual here for the thin white single stalks with delicate white blooms with their distinctive fragrance to flower above our thin blankets of snow. Once established, they can be totally forgotten. They multiply and transplant easily.

How do they differ from traditional daffodils? (See below)*



L to r, white 'Ziva', yellow/orange 'Grand de soliel D'or' (Chinese Sacred Lily), and 'Nir'

[Garden Club of Houston](#)'s Dodie Jackson and Lucia Benton generously shared paperwhite varieties area experts have found do best here: Both have longtime experience through GCH's Bulb and Plant Mart, easily our best source these days for bulbs that love our area:

- **'ZIVA'** -- Lucia notes 'Ziva' is not only their best seller, it's great for both forcing in water and planting in the ground. Looks terrific in great swaths. Classic paperwhite, white with a little yellow eye, and very tall, 16"-20".
- **'ERLICHEER'** -- [Maas Nursery](#)'s Pat Cordray photographed this 'Erlicheer' in her own garden. Lucia adds this 14" beauty is very pale creamy yellow. Lucia's 5-year-old clumps faithfully bloom January or February.
- **'NIR'** -- Pat lists this one too as a favorite.
- **'GRAND DE SOLIEL D'OR'** (Chinese Sacred Lily)
-- Small orange cup surrounded by bright-yellow petals.



Both Lucia Benton & Angela Chandler of [The Garden Academy](#), added **'GRAND PRIMO'** (pictured left) to the above list as did Lucia. Angela adds all paperwhites are especially beautiful when thickly planted in swaths, especially with a mix of early, mid- and late-bloomers.



Angela wishes she'd thrown all her paperwhite bulbs in a wheelbarrow, mixed them thoroughly and planted them that way.

(NOTE: The [John Fairey Garden](#), Hempstead, which is open Mon-Sat., 9am-4pm, has lovely paperwhite planting that should bloom in a couple of weeks, not in time for the first Open Day Tour, 11 am, Sat., Jan. 9, but maybe for the Sat., Jan. 23, 11am tour. Plenty else to see to calm the spirit, however! No registration. \$10 for Docent-led tours at 11 both days. The nursery will be open but no bulbs for sale.)

*Narcissus is a family name that includes daffodils as well. Paperwhites are usually smaller, usually white flowers on delicate smaller stalks, although they can be tall. Daffodils usually are larger, on thicker stalks, usually with yellow flowers. With newer varieties, colors and other distinctions are narrowing. For us, the main point is most paperwhites are great lazy gardener plants for us.

Not always so daffs. Many -- but not all! -- require more cold than we provide for bulbs to replenish for future blooms. This makes them much shorter-lived (lasting one, maybe a few seasons). Next week: good daffs for us to try.

Experimenting's fun, but if you want success for sure, listen to the experts. Two excellent local sources:

- March Mart - Sat., Mar. 20. Online only. 8am-8pm The Mercer Society. themercersociety.square.site. Details: 713-274-4166.
- [The Bulb & Plant Mart](#) will be back Oct.14-16, 2021, at St John the Divine, 2450 River Oaks Blvd.

Sad to say, our local nurseries carry few if any bulbs these days. They have to carry what's already in demand. Unfortunately too many online nurseries aim at areas with more prolonged cold and/or are not carefully about zone recommendations. However, here are two **[Mercer Botanic Garden's Jere Noerager](#)**, recommends

- Mary's Garden Patch (a Texas Mail order bulb supplier, marysgardenpatch.com),
- The Bulb Hunter's Southern Bulb Company (southernbulbs.com/).

Both these nurseries have newsletter that will help educate you on good bulbs for our area. If you have a favorite bulb mail order company for specific types of bulbs that do well here, do share!

Remember, we're not just "southern" when it comes to bulbs — we're a subtropical area, with northern areas in Cold Zone Map 8b, but most in Zone 9 & (increasingly)10. What we actually really need down here is a HEAT Zone map. Our heat and monsoons probably stop flowering in as many, or more, higher zone-recommended in-ground bulbs as our lack of cold.

PS. Paperwhites in those grow-kit boxes also do great in our gardens. After you enjoy them indoors, plant them outside!

* * *

ONLINE FRUIT TREES & MORE!: Harris County Master Gardeners' online Fruit Tree Sale runs through January 31. Details: hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/. The great news is HCMG's online store now provides plants, tools and more throughout the year. Sales support HCMG's educational programs such as Ask a Master Gardener and more.



* * *



2021 — YEAR OF THE SUNFLOWER. I'm not sure who actually decides "flower of the year" (found various claimants). But, boy, did they get it right this year! If ever we could use a flower of hope and smiles, it's the sunflower.

I love clever puns, and Monrovia has certainly put a smile in my critical eye with [SunBelievable™ Brown Eyed Girl Helianthus](#).

Sunflowers highly recommended for pollinators. Native ones are most highly touted, of course, but know these also tend to be more gangly, with fewer flowers than hybrids. SunBelievable's not a tall lady, 24"H x 38"W (altho things grow bigger around here). Full sun, like all sunflowers. ([Sources](#))

* * *

TIP O' THE TROWEL TO THE CITIZENS ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION for offering a virtual version of its Wild & Scenic Film Festival Friday, Jan. 29, at 7pm. Short films about environmental and inspirational topics, including three films from local artists. "The Last Call for the Bayou" about the migratory bird flyway and, "There's Something in the Water" about invasive species in Caddo Lake. Tickets on Eventbrite: <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/citizens-environmental-coalition-4643584135>



EDITOR'S NOTE: *This series would be a wonderful, safe-distancing way to let Nature help restore equilibrium to our lives after this very frightening week on top of a very frightening year. A moment of Zen we could all use right now. Please stay safe.*

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

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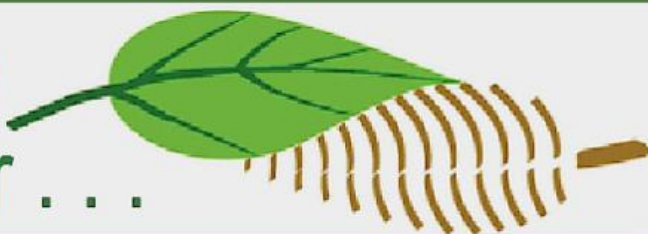
The Pines and Prairies Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas is now forming.



If you are interested in joining, please visit The Native Plant Society of Texas Web Page and go to the top right corner and click on the red box (join/renew) [Or use this link.](#)

Under chapter affiliation choose Pines and Prairies. This chapter will serve (but not be limited to) the Montgomery County Area.

John's
Corner . . .



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 141

As gardeners we are always interested in how organic matter decays into rich humus. There were two new independent papers published in the online journal E-Life (2020) on decomposition of organic material.

The researchers looked at over 65 individual studies in both fields and forests and found that plant decomposition is faster when the litter is composed of multiple species.

The other paper was composed of 69 studies and 660 observations. They found the loss of biodiversity hurt decomposition and carbon storage in the soil (think 100% pine forests for pulp and timber). They also found that chemical stressors from herbicides to pesticides hurt decomposition.

The above principle is one of the reasons why aged (composted) native mulch works so well to improve soils when made from branches and limbs of hundreds of species.

The herbicide Atrazine (which has been outlawed in Europe since 2003) has been found to hurt reproduction in animals according to a paper in the journal Reproduction, Fertility and Development (2020).

They found exposure to Atrazine caused “major abnormalities” in the male reproductive system in many animals. The damage included male infertility or even male-to-female sex reversal in some animals like frogs.

Researchers have discovered a new mechanism as to how some plants color their fruit. The paper was published in the journal Current Biology (2020). Most

plants use pigments to give them color to their leaves, flowers and fruits. They found that the blue color of fruits of the plant *Viburnum tinus* is caused by structural components in their cell walls similar to that used by butterflies and birds. The effect is caused by lipids in the cell wall.

More and more gardeners are growing their own fruits and vegetables not only for the better taste but for the higher nutrient levels. Nutrition is critical for our immune systems to work properly; hence nutrient dense food is critical.

A major nutrient for humans is vitamin-C which is used by our immune system. The study found that Red Bell Peppers, which are a fruit and not a vegetable as we were taught are a good source of this vitamin.

They found that organically grown bell peppers has *significantly higher levels* of vitamin-C and antioxidants than conventionally grown varieties.

Over the last few years, we are seeing more and more evidence that plants can communicate with each other. A study by researchers at the University of Wurzburg published in the journal PNAS 2020, has found another communication mechanism.

They found that when plants are stressed (whatever the causes) they emit long distance traveling electrical signals known as membrane potential waves. "This allows plants to transmit information quickly and precisely over long distances even though they have neither brain nor nerve cells".

When I read the article, it reminded me of a bible verse where it states let the plants speak to you. It seems that plants do speak to us in many ways but sometimes in a language we do not recognize or understand.

A study from Argentina has found a strong link between exposure to glyphosate (Round-Up) and asthma. In a small city surrounded by agricultural fields they found glyphosate levels much higher in the city than in the fields. Asthma rates were directly correlated with higher glyphosate exposure. It also correlated with higher rates of cancer and reproductive problems.

When they tested grain dust samples, they found glyphosate in 100% of the samples and at concentrations 20 times higher than other pesticides.

In the book "Bringing Nature Home - How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants by Doug Tallamay" he talks about how critical native plants that support insects are to our birds.

A study in the journal PLOS ONE (2020) has found that our farmland is now 48 times more toxic to insects than it was just 25 years ago. Much of this increase was due to the use of neonicotinoid insecticides which are very persistent in the environment.

As gardeners we should ask the question to the garden centers "Have these plants been grown or treated with neonicotinoids?" If so, we should refuse to

purchase them.

We noticed this issue a couple years ago when purchasing milkweed plants from local growers for our nursery. Monarch butterflies would lay their eggs on the milkweeds and the caterpillars would soon die due to the neonicotinoids used. As a result, we now grow many of our own milkweeds organically to prevent this issue.

In addition to being food or beautiful as in our butterflies, insects serve a valuable ecological role from recycling nutrients to aerating soil.

I read another paper over the holidays on how microbes work together for their mutual benefit. Researchers at the University of Tsukuba have found that bacteria use fungal highways to move around and travel.

The vitamin thiamine (B-1) is required for almost all life forms and it is scarce in nature but is synthesized by some bacteria and other microbes. They found that fungi would let the bacteria travel along their hyphae in exchange for thiamine the bacteria produced (I guess they had to pay their toll fee). Published in the journal Life Science Alliance 2020.

* * *

Have You Tried . . . **BALD CYPRESS** (*Taxodium distichum*)

The unique flared trunk base of this oft-described "melanconly-looking" bald cypress -- a great wildlife resource -- makes it an attractive and fascinating addition to landscapes. Fear not, the wonderful "knees" seen along bayous only form in very wet conditions. Plant in well drained site if you don't want them.

Fascinating to many notables (Muir, Longfellow, etc.), its short needles along slender branchlets range from yellow-green in spring to soft green in summer and reddish-/ orangish-brown in autumn. Wildlife love the global cones with triangular seeds. Many stories exist as to why it's called "bald." Could be because unlike evergreen conifers, it does lose its needles in late fall. Sun, 40'-50', good shade tree on west side to reduce electric bills since allows sun warmth in winter.



***BALD CYPRESS is carried by Nature's Way Resources (Map).
Or contact our other sponsors below or your
neighborhood nurseryman for possible sources***

* * *

**LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS
HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER
CALENDAR EVENTS**

All events in Houston unless otherwise specified.

See Farmers Markets at end of calendar

ADULT GARDEN PLANT EVENTS ONLY

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

PLEASE READ BEFORE SUBMITTING EVENTS!

- *Events NOT submitted in the EXACT format below may take 2 weeks or longer to be reformatted/retyped and added to calendar.*
- **FARMERS MARKETS** -- Normally we do not run non-gardening/plant events. During this pandemic, when most gardening events have been cancelled, we are happy to publish a running list of local Farmers Markets. See at end of calendar.

Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com.

PLEASE ALWAYS put group's FULL name in email subject.

CHECK WEBSITES FOR ON-SITE COVID-19-RELATED PRECAUTIONS!

SAT., JAN. 9: THE JOHN FAIREY GARDEN OPEN DAY, 11am tour. jfgarden.org

MON., JAN. 11: PRUNING BASICS (virtual) by HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 10-11:30am, free. Register early at: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

MON., JAN. 11: SIMPLE HABITAT PONDS FOR HOMES AND GARDENS (virtual), 6:30-8:30pm, free. Clear Lake Chapter - Native Plant Society of Texas event. Register: uhcl.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYof-2prToiHtQPImTak9YkBWixSoW8zoW9

THURS., JAN. 14: CREATING MASTERFUL ROSE BEDS (virtual), 7-9pm, free. Houston Rose Society event. global.gotomeeting.com/install/289934037 Access code: 289-934-037. Or: +1(312)757-3121

TUES., JAN. 19: COMPANION PLANTING by Angela Chandler, (Zoom event), 10am; Sugar Land Garden Club. www.sugarlandgardenclub.org

MON., JAN. 19: PRUNING BASICS (virtual) by HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 11am-noon, free. Facebook Live: facebook.com/harriscountyp/live

WED., JAN. 20: HOUSE PLANT MAINTENANCE/IDENTIFICATION (virtual) by HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 10am, free. Register: gardeningonthegulf.eventbrite.com

THURS., JAN. 21: SOIL TESTING (virtual) by SHANNON DIETZ. 10am, free. Harris County Master Gardeners event. Register by 7am, Jan. 21: homegrown2021Q1.eventbrite.com/. harris.agrilife.org

SAT., JAN. 23, 2021: HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FRUIT TREE SALE, 9am-noon, Richard & Meg Weekley Park, 19110 Longenbaugh, Cypress. hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/

SAT., JAN. 23: THE JOHN FAIREY GARDEN OPEN DAY, 11am tour. jfgarden.org

FRI., FEB. 5: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield. For ages 60+ and ages 12+ with transportation needs. Free. Details: 713-274-4160.

MON., FEB. 8: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING (virtual) by HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 10-11:30am, free. Register: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

THURS., FEB. 11: MERCER BOTANIC GARDENS VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION. Register: 713-274-4160.

FRI., FEB. 12: WALK 'N' TALK - PLANT FOLKLORE: LOVE & DEVOTION, 10-11am, Mercer Botanic Garden, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble, Free. [Register](#). 713-274-4160

TUES., FEB 16: SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING (virtual) by HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 11am-noon, Facebook live: [facebook.com/harriscountyp/live](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountyp/live)

FRI., FEB. 19: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield, Humble. For ages 60+ and ages 12+ with transportation needs. Free. Details: 713-274-4160. Register: 713-274-4160

FRI., FEB. 19: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield, Humble. For ages 60+ and ages 12+ with transportation needs. Free. Details: 713-274-4160. Register: 713-274-4160

FRI., MAR. 5: WALK 'N' TALK: TEXAS TOUGH PLANTS FOR A GULF COAST GARDEN, 10-11am, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield, Humble.

SAT, MAR. 20: MARCH MART VIRTUAL PLANT SALE, 8am-8pm The Mercer Society. Online only at themercersociety.square.site. Details: 713-274-4166.

LOCAL FARMERS MARKETS

- **URBAN HARVEST FARMERS MARKET**, Saturdays, 8am-noon, in St. John's School parking lot, 2752 Buffalo Speedway.
- **FULSHEAR FARMERS MARKET** Saturdays, 9am-1pm, 9035 Bois d'Arc Lane @ FM 1093, Fulshear.
- **THE WOODLANDS FARMERS MARKET AT GROGAN'S MILL**, Saturdays, 8am-noon, Grogan's Mill Shopping Center Parking Lot, 7 Switchbud Pl., The Woodlands
- **BEAUTY'S GARDEN**. Acres Homes Farmers Market Saturday, 10am-2pm, 4333 W Little York Rd.
- **WESTCHASE DISTRICT FARMERS MARKET**, Thursdays, opens 3pm, St. Cyril of Alexandria Catholic Church, 10503 Westheimer Road (at Rogerdale Road, one block west of Beltway 8)
- **MEMORIAL VILLAGE FARMERS MARKET**, Saturdays, 9am-1pm, 10840 Beinhorn Rd.

Although normally we do not run out-of-garden events, during this pandemic period when most gardening events have been cancelled, we are happy to publish a running list of local Farmers Markets.
Send notices to lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com



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 . . .

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 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-, it then ranked as the longest-running, continuously-published local newspaper column in the Greater Houston area.

Brenda's gradual sideways step from reporter into gardening writing -- first as a just-a-fun side Chronicle assignment in the early '70s -- 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 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 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.

