



LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS

Houston Garden Newsletter



Jul-16-2021 | Issue 396

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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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PERSPECTIVES ON INVASIVES CROSSVINE TO THE RESCUE

"...humans make maps and plants can't read, so being a "Native Texan" means very little to a plant."

-- Greg Grant, "Running Wild," The Arbor Gate July, 2021 Newsletter

by **BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

"GREG'S RAMBLINGS, RUNNING WILD" -- This article In [The Arbor Gate's](#) current newsletter really hit home -- with lip-pursing irony, considering how in our [last week's LG&F newsletter \(pdf\)](#), I sort-of-jokingly asked for invasive flowering vine suggestions to cover an old ramada. (*Got great one, see below!*)

Even so, Greg's words touch on an oft-overlooked gardening truth that, in fact, is the basis of this column's gardening philosophy. Fortunately Greg explains it from a perspective far broader than I ever could.

GREG GRANT, horticulturist extraordinaire, tackles the always-touchy point of advising folks which native plants are "landscape-friendly." And, more important, WHERE they are "landscape-friendly" and, as important, where they might NOT be.

One gardener's delight can easily become another's nightmare. Neglect this research, and you might get turned off of natives altogether. That would be everyone's loss. I've seen it happen. Don't let it happen to you. Homework is ESSENTIAL and LOCAL input a must.

As Greg explains in his [*"Running Wild" \(July, 2021 The Arbor Gate newsletter\)*](#):

"Native plants are those plants still around that evolved here and were found growing when the first humans set foot on your ground some 10,000 or so years ago . . . plants that all our native bees, bugs, butterflies, and birds are made from, literally. As a general rule, (but certainly not always) they tend to be more adapted to local rainfall patterns and soil conditions."

"No native plants, no matter how vigorous they are, are considered invasive plants," Greg continues. "Be very aware however that humans make maps and plants can't read, so being a "Native Texan" means very little to a plant.



"No native plants, no matter how vigorous they are, are considered invasive plants," Greg continues. "Be very aware however that humans make maps and plants can't read, so being a "Native Texan" means very little to a plant. Since Texas

encompasses numerous unique ecoregions . . . Some, like lady slipper orchids, native azaleas, and Texas madrones (pictured l to r) are literally only adapted to tiny areas of the state and are exceedingly difficult to propagate and cultivate."



L to r, vitex, Japanese wisteria and ruellia (Mexican petunia)

Greg uses vitex (*Vitex agnus-castus* or chaste tree) as an example, of an imported plant that has "naturalized" (become labeled invasive) in some westward areas of Texas. But, he maintains, this *"doesn't apply to East Texas or Louisiana where I have half a century's experience studying it."*

[*\(More about Greg\)*](#) and [*\(a few plants he has introduced\)*](#).

Pictured: Lantana 'Greg Grant'

**** * ****

Change happens slowly. Decades ago, when I quoted native plant folks begged gardeners to stop planting Japanese wisteria, a reader angrily responded to me that he had wisteria in his yard for decades, his grandparents grew it, it's HIS yard and he can plant anything he wants!



True. But fortunately most gardeners heeded the many warnings about how climate change is affecting plants and how this beautiful, fragrant lavender-flowered vine has now destroyed, literally-smothered, millions of trees along the Texas-Louisiana border and points east.

That's why you almost never see Japanese wisteria now except in very old yards.

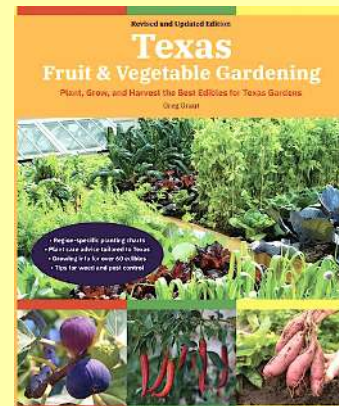
Reader **DANIEL SEBESTA** wrote of his worries about the amount of ruellia (Mexican petunia) he sees being sold and planted around Brazoria County. And with good reason. Ruellia (pictured above) has been declared invasive throughout the South, including Texas. Its seed is spread by birds and wind, so confining it to a single outdoor yard is impossible. Although a new sterile variety (Mayan™ series,) has been developed, it looks identical to the invasive ones and it spreads by rhizomes, which eliminates seed spread, but usually not local spreading in your own yard.

Neither Greg nor I are diminishing the importance of identifying and labelling invasive plants. We are just both, in our own ways, trying to point out that as gardeners -- especially now:

1. our ecology is changing so no longer can we always use past plant behaviors as indicators of how they will behave today and . . .
2. we have a personal responsibility to double-check with LOCAL sources the "bona fides" of new-to-us natives labeled "landscape-friendly" in retail markets, especially those sold by broad-based chains stocked from a national headquarters.

NOTES

- Greg Grant can be reached through:
 - [The Arbor Gate Blogs](#)
 - [Greg Grant Gardens Facebook Page](#)
- Greg's updated **[TEXAS FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GARDENING \(2nd Edition\)](#)** -- ***Plant, Grow, and Harvest the Best Edibles for Texas Gardens*** is now available at numerous stores and sites, including Amazon. Be sure you get the one with THIS cover!



* * *

THANKS TO CARROLL MCCULLOUGH, I have a free replacement for my still-hasn't-returned Mexican flame vine. I should have used the word "vigorous" instead of "invasive" in my plea last week for a freeze-hardy vine to cover a rather unattractive but eminently-useful ramada. Carroll suggested crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), noting theirs easily survived the horrible February freeze and, with in a short time, it was blooming!

The embarrassing part is I already have a crossvine (pictured)! it also survived AND was blooming by April. It's so easy to overlook treasures right under your own nose!



Cuttings are now planted right on top of the dead Mexican flame vine stalks (figured they'd be good fertilizer as they decay.) And if the Mexican flame vine decides to come out later, think how interesting that *fight-it-out* will be!). Those cross cuttings never even wilted and are already started putting out new leaves! Thanks so much, Carroll!

* * *



TIP 'O THE TROWEL, CEC! Happy 50th Anniversary to Houston's [CITIZENS ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION](#). On July 14, 1971, under the leadership of citizen extraordinaire [Terry Hershey](#), CEC incorporated as a nonprofit organization for "charitable and educational purposes...leading to the improvement of the environment." If you're not already receiving CEC's free weekly reports on it's 100+ members' activities and our general environmental news, it's your loss. A more productive or successful addition to the Greater Houston Area's horticultural/environmental health is hard to imagine.

* * *

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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Bugs of Texas

with Abbie Ince-Hendrickson M.S.



@ Nature's Way Resources

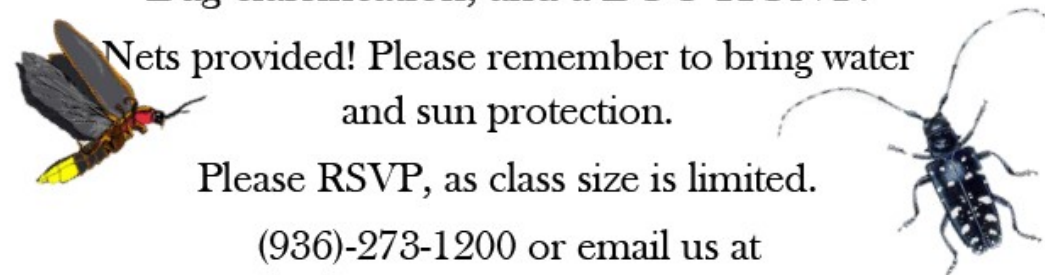


9:00 AM - 10:30AM



on Saturday, July 17th, 2021

Join us for a short talk about Texas Bugs,
Bug classification, and a BUG HUNT!



Nets provided! Please remember to bring water
and sun protection.

Please RSVP, as class size is limited.

(936)-273-1200 or email us at

nwnursery@gmail.com



John's Corner



NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS # 157

A study in Scientific Reports (2021) has found that the neonicotinoids group of systemic pesticides disrupts the memory and sleep patterns of bees and butterflies, which limits their ability to forage, pollinate and reproduce.

Additionally, since treated seeds get eaten by various birds and mammals,

where these toxic chemicals then hurt them.

Researchers at the University of Texas have reviewed the impacts of flupyradifurone (Sivanto) and sulfoxaflor (Transform) and found they are similarly systemic and toxic. Proceedings of The Royal Academy of Sciences (2020)

When we talk about pollinators we often forget about Moths. A study in the journal Biology Matters (2019) found that over 100 moth species carried pollen to dozens of different species of plants.

Moths also pollinate many species of plants that bees and butterflies do not, hence they are essential for some plant families. When designing our gardens, we need to provide for moths also to have a functioning ecosystem. Journal Biology Letters (2020)

As gardeners we often forget about life in the soil and its importance. The health of our plants is directly tied to the health of our soil. A paper in the journal Frontiers in Environmental Science (2021) was a meta-analysis of 400 studies on soil invertebrates (e.g. insects, spider, worms, anthropoids, crabs, etc.).

Soil invertebrates form up to half of all soil aggregates that allow air and water to move through the soil, breaking down litter and releasing organically enriched casts and feces. They help support nutrient cycling, control of many diseases, and provide other services that helps plant growth.

When we use toxic pesticides, we kill off these good guys, increasing the number of problems we experience in our gardens.

Similarly, a study in the journal Science (2021) has found that pesticide toxicity has more than doubled for many invertebrates since just 2005. Herbicides and fungicides were especially harmful to earthworms, nematodes, and spring tails. The pesticides reduce the soil life required for plants to grow strong and healthy resulting in weaker plants more susceptible to insects and disease.

Note: When approving insecticides, the EPA does not test for effects on non-target organisms or other toxic effects. For example, the toxic herbicide dicamba volatilizes very easily and the wind causes it to drift onto other property causing damage. By killing plants on neighboring property, bee farmers lose their bee colonies, or for wine growers suppresses their yield or just kill the grapes.

We often think of the Amazon rain forest as being old and undisturbed, however recent research has found much of the Amazon is around 500 years old by using a new mapping technique. They did find one are of rain forest in Peru that is 5,000 years old.

Plants take up silica from the soil and use it to produce microscopic mineral particles called “phytoliths” that provide structural support for the plants. When the plant dies and decomposes, these mineral particles are left behind and can

exist for thousands of years. Different species of plants produce different shaped phytoliths.

By using this new technique of studying these minerals and looking at charcoal fragments, researchers can identify what kind of plants lived there in the past. They were able to map which areas of the rain forest were undisturbed. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (2021)

Most of us are aware that the 300 or so dead zones at the mouths of rivers around the world, are caused by excess nutrients from artificial fertilizers and other source like feedlots (CAFO). CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) sometimes referred to as factory farms have other environmental costs beside polluting rivers and lakes.

The Alliance for Natural Health also found that the air pollution produced from factory farms kill 17,000 people each year who live near CAFO's as they produce a lot of toxic greenhouse gasses. This is another reason to purchase organic grass fed (pasture raised) beef, chicken, or pork which have far less environmental impact (some studies suggest up to 90% less environmental damage) and they are far better for our health. We need to be part of the solution instead of the problem by our purchasing decisions.

A new study published by Ecology Center and the Sierra Club tested artificial fertilizers for the toxic "forever chemicals". These are per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) which cause many health problems from "cancer to birth defects and liver disease".

These toxic artificial fertilizers are made with biosolids (sewage sludge) which are not regulated to remove these toxic chemicals, and were found in products sold by Lowe's, Home Depot, and Ace Hardware.

These type products should never be used to grow any type of food crop as the PFAS will be taken into the plant.

Another good reason to only uses organic fertilizers, especially since they work better, and do not create the pollution from runoff.

NOTE: Several compost/soil companies in the Houston/Galveston area use sewage sludge in their products to lower costs.

LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

All events in Houston unless otherwise specified.

**ADULT GARDENING 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.

Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com.

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

**NOTE: IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT MASKING
POLICIES AT EVENTS, CHECK WITH CONTACTS LISTED**

FRI., JUL. 24: GARDEN CRUISIN': TOUR DE 4, 9am & 11am, [Mercer Botanic Gardens](#). Free. Ages 60+ or anyone age 12+ with transportation needs. [Register](#); 713-274-4160.

TUES., JULY 20: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING (virtual), 11am-noon, Free. Harris County Master Gardener event. Watch via Facebook Live at: facebook.com/harriscountyp/live

SAT., JULY 24: PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA SALE, 9am-3pm(or sell-out), Bay Area Community Center, 5002 Nasa Parkway, Seabrook. theplumeriasociety.org

THURS., JUL. 29: MERCER BOTANIC GARDEN VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION, 6-7pm, Timber Lane Community Center. [Register](#). 713-274-4160.

THURS., JULY 29: FORT BEND REGIONAL VEGETABLE CONFERENCE SUMMER SESSION (virtual) 8:30am-noon. Counties of Waller, Wharton, Harris, Galveston, Brazoria, Colorado, Austin and Fort Bend event. [Register](#). 281-633-7029 or brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu

SAT, JULY 31: A DOZEN FERNS FOR HOUSTON GARDENS by **PATRICK HUDNALL**, 10:30-11:30am, Houston Botanic Garden, 8210 Park Place Blvd. \$15. [Register](#).

MON., AUG. 9: GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS (virtual), 10-11:30am, free, Harris County Master Gardeners/Houston Community College event. Register: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

THURS., AUG 12: "OH #!&* I DID IT TO MYSELF (AND HOW TO FIX IT IF YOU DID)" by **GAYE HAMMOND** (virtual), 7- 9pm, Houston Rose Society/Houston event. Free. Meeting link on houstonrose.org/

TUES., AUG. 17: GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS (virtual), 11am-noon, free. Harris County Master Gardeners/Harris County Public Library System event. Facebook Live: facebook.com/harriscountyp/live

THURS., AUG. 19: FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING (virtual) by **PAUL WINSKI**, 10am. Register: <https://homegrown2021Q3.eventbrite.com/>

THURS., SEPT. 2: FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENER TRAINING BEGINS (weekly, 10-month program), 9am-1pm, Fort Bend County Extension office, 1402 Band Rd, Rosenberg. Details/application: <https://fbmg.org/become-a-master-gardener/>; 281-633-7033 or mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu.

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PLEASE READ BEFORE SUBMITTING EVENTS!

- *Adult gardening events only.*
- *ONLY EVENTS SUBMITTED FOR THIS NEWSLETTER ARE USED. NONE ARE PICKED UP FROM NEWSLETTERS OR MASS MAILINGS*
- *Events NOT submitted in the EXACT format below may take 2+ weeks to be reformatted/retyped and added to calendar.*
- *Submit events to: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com*
- *PLEASE ALWAYS put group's FULL name in email subject.*
- **ALWAYS CHECK TO MAKE SURE AN EVENT IS IN!** If not, let us know!



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 -- 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.

