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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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***"All gardeners know better than other gardeners."***  
— Chinese Proverb

**BY BRENDA BEUST SMITH**

## ***Just put in NEW PLANTS? GET OUT THE UMBRELLAS!***



High temperatures we're already seeing are NOT a May norm for Houston (altho they may become so). Our totally unprepared plants, especially newly-planted ones, have already sustained the onslaught, even in shade and they have more to come, Not since 1996 have we reached this high in May. Water evaporation happens so fast. Keep plant roots watered, but NOT leaves exposed to sun. Water at soil level. Any higher is a waste of water that may even burn (especially-newly-planted) leaves, never reaching roots.

Haven't mulched already? Get some down as soon as can. Sudden high heat can fatally stress plants, especially newly-planted ones.

When this heat passes (normal for rollercoaster weather!), be patient. Plants will have probably been affected internally. Expect flowering, fruiting and even outward appearances to recover slowly. Don't assume they're dead. Plants wilt on their own as a protective measure.

Good chance to see which plants can (or can't) take our predicted increasingly hot temps. Be patient with your lawn too, usually St. Augustine should return tho it may develop some brown (or dead) patches. .

During our typical summer heat, overhead home sprinklers can lose 25-50% of water to evaporation before it reaches soil. You don't want to help hard-boil leaves. Lay hoses on ground next to base so water seeps down in a slow dribble. Most ideal for Houston are soaker hoses. (Can even create your own (right)!



**EDIBLES & HEAT:** Take advice from folks who have been preparing for decades for our increasingly hot summers: [URBAN HARVEST](#). This 30-year-old nonprofit group is a godsend with its practical advice and an amazing array of activities.



Click on link to learn more. Most immediately, log on to [URBAN HARVEST'S PLANTING GUIDES](#) to make sure your edibles planting timing is as updated as Urban Harvest's is, a must in our now rapidly changing weather patterns!

\* \* \*

**ONE OF OUR MOST COMMON GARDENING FRUSTRATIONS IS** when your supposedly-reseeding or even perennial plants don't come back like you were told they would. Unfortunately, possible answers are numerous. The main reason, if you swear your seeds are top quality, is our area's steadily increasing warming.

Other factors might be:

- Too wet in winter (rot), not enough drainage
- Too dry in winter, too much drainage
- Not properly mulched (victim of freeze/thaw cycle)
- Damaged by animals
- Severe weather (unexpected deep freeze).

***And perhaps, the important one:***

- Not the right plant for your climate zone

Pictured above are the planting times for our most common garden edibles, a free treasure offered online by URBAN HARVEST,

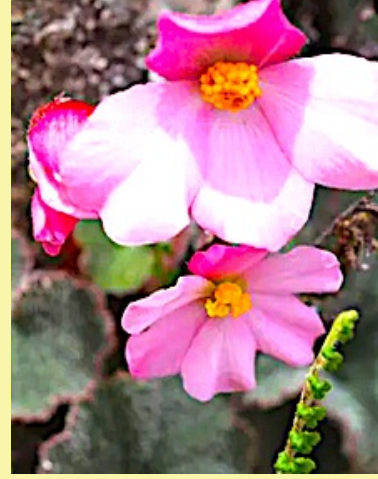
**GREATER HOUSTON COVERS 9,444 SQUARE MILES**, including nine counties: Austin\*, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller. ( *\*City of Austin's in Travis County*). So can be misleading when national folks/companies tell you a plant is "great for the Houston area." You need to know your PLANTING ZONE. whether you're in the middle of -- or on edge of -- a particular zone

*If anyone has growing experience that differs from any of this or knows of other good planting guides for OUR area, do share! [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com).*

\* \* \*

- **TIP 'O THE TROWEL to HOUSTON BEGONIA SOCIETY**, celebrating Houston's own [ASTRO BRANCH, ABS](#), chapter's 45th anniversary year. Astro Branch was founded in 1980 by Tom Keepin. Perfect time to host the May 14-17, [Begonia Rendezvous: 2025 American Begonia Society National Convention & Southwest Region Get-Together](#) here in Houston. Click links for details on open-to-public events including a National Plant Show & diverse Plant Sale.

*Pictured: tuberous begonia*



*PS. Begonia lovers/Astro Branch honchos  
Tom Keepin & Cheryl Lenert were two of my best  
resources when my Houston Chronicle Lazy Gardener column  
started in early 1970s. Will always be so grateful to them!*

*\* \* \**

## Potpourri

- **STILL REPLACING TREES?** Or just want new ones? [Trees for Houston](#)'s next Tree Giveaway is Sat., May 17. Trees available: Chickasaw Plum; American Beautyberry; Buttonbush and Eastern Redbud. No drop-ins. Must pre-register. Details: [TREE GIVEAWAY](#) *Pictured: Chickasaw Plum*  
First . . . Pay attention to below!



# TREE MULCH



How my friends think it should look



How my parents think it should look



How the neighbors think it should look



How society thinks it should look



How I once thought it should look



How it **should actually look**

Learn more at [TexasTreePlanting.tamu.edu](http://TexasTreePlanting.tamu.edu)

Keep mulch less than 3" thick and *never* against the trunk. Incorrectly applying mulch in the shape of a volcano can cause bark rot and root suffocation, which can kill the tree.



**TEXAS A&M**  
FOREST SERVICE

- **ATTN. GARDEN/PLANT GROUPS --**

*Nature's Way Resources* offers free guided tours of NWR's extensive nursery/soil/mulch enterprise to plant-oriented, organized groups. As usual, NWR's now-expanded meeting site is free to above groups. Reservations a must for both. Great time to visit!



- **SUBMITTING CALENDAR EVENTS?:** For next upcoming newsletter, submit in our exact format (see top of calendar). Otherwise, they may be held for reformatting. PS. Apr, 14 National Gardening Day. - [You take it from here!](#)

\* \* \*

*Brenda Beust Smith's column is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's "Lazy Gardener" column, continuing sponsored by Nature's Way Resources in 2013 — ([lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com))*  
*Brenda's column focuses ONLY on the Greater Houston Area*

\* \* \*



# John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL  
AND PLANTS # 329

**Subject: microbes fungi and leaves microbes and plant growth artificial fertilizers amphibians**

I often get asked why so much talk about microbes?

There is an underground world that exists that we did not know about 20 years ago as technology did not exist to even see the microbes much less understand what they were doing.

We now have new tools like the scanning electron microscope, many microbes are transparent so now we have staining techniques that allow them to be seen, we have DNA mapping techniques and many more new techniques. As researchers are using these tools we are learning more almost every day.

The results of all this new research are a better way to grow plants and take care of our yards, and that is to take care of our microbial community. A healthy microbiome can boost a plant's production, flowering, and growth rate by 20-30%. At the same time, it reduces diseases and pest problems.

The best way to obtain these benefits is to use modern biological methods we often call "organic". The book below is a great way to start learning about our microbial army waiting to help us.

**Teaming with Microbes**, A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web, 2nd Edition, by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis, Timber Press, 2006, ISBN-13:978-0-88192-777-1

Speaking of new research, researchers have discovered a fungus that helps plants eat meat. This beneficial fungus lives on the leaves of plants that trap insects like the Sundew plant. The fungus (*Acrodontium crateriforme*) makes the leaf environment more acidic and makes more digestive enzymes which help the plant enzymes work more efficiently. This finding opens another field of study, do other carnivorous plants have fungal helpers?

In an article by Dr. Anissa Poleatewich, she states that a single gram (less than a teaspoon) of healthy soil can contain  $10^{11}$  (100,000,000,000) microbes, representing thousands of species. These microbes extend the root absorption area up to 50 times, helping the plant collect water and nutrients. To achieve these benefits, we must care for our microbes which means feed them and do not kill them with toxic fertilizers and pesticides.

I remember one of the first tests I did over 30 years ago on this benefit of microbes. My wife loves the fall color of the leaves and wanted a tree in our

backyard with good fall color.

I decided on a swamp oak and all my books stated that it would only grow 1-2 feet per year. I planted it in the back yard, sprinkled 1-2 pounds of Microlife™ fertilizer around it followed by a little greensand and then spread about 2 cubic yards of leaf mold compost around it 3-4 inches thick as a mulch, since a cubic yard of good leaf mold compost has trillions of microbes in it. By the fifth year the tree was over 30' tall, averaging over 6' per year of growth!

There was an interesting article in the journal "The Lancet Planetary Health (2025)". The researchers found that by increasing urban vegetation by 30% would have saved over one third of all heat related deaths. This would have saved 1.16 million lives from 2000-2019 according to the study of increasing greenness of 11,000 urban areas.

This did not include other benefits from cleaning our air, improving the water cycle, sequestering carbon, and many other environmental and health benefits.

To protect our microbes, it is best to use only organic fertilizers. Synthetic or artificial fertilizers are chemically salts and we know that salts kill microbes. That is why we use salt as a preservative in many food products.

Another issue is that many artificial fertilizers are used to dispose of hazardous waste, especially the lower cost ones. The book below talks about how the practice of disposing of hazardous waste in fertilizers was discovered. There has been some improvement since then, but many are still toxic. The use of these toxic fertilizers contributes to the health problems of Americans.

Fateful Harvest by Duff Wilson, Harper Collins Publisher, ISBN 0-06-019369-7, A history of how hazardous waste is disposed of in synthetic fertilizers and ends up contaminating the food supply. Wilson was an investigative reporter for the Seattle Times Newspaper and published a series of articles in July-August 1997-1999.

**A** while back I read an article about a quick way to determine the health of your garden. Go out into your garden at night and listen. Do you have a concert of chips and croaks or is it quiet? Silence in nature is not a good sign.

A garden filled with frogs indicates balance and a healthy ecosystem. However, amphibians such as toads and frogs are going extinct at an alarming rate. One way a gardener can help is to have a frog friendly backyard which helps us and them.

These amphibian predators search out and consume mosquitos, slugs, snails, plant damaging beetles, in large numbers. Hence, they are a very effective natural form of pest control.

So how do we get started in making our garden a home for these beneficial amphibians?

Amphibians have a porous permeable skin that allows them to absorb things

through it. Hence many pesticides, pollutants, artificial chemical fertilizers, are extremely toxic to them. The chemicals are often lethal or cause genetic and birth defects.

Their habitat matters, hence building a frog pond which does not have any minnows or fish in them. Just let nature take its course and as leaves, twigs, and dust fall into the pond it provides food for algae and microbes that then feed the tadpoles. Dragon flies will also lay their eggs in them, and when they hatch into the larval stage they are voracious predators of mosquito larva.

Just like any other animal, frogs need shelter. Ferns and understory plants work well as do many ground covers. One can also make a frog motel. I have used broken pottery saucers turned upside down with a broken area on the side to create an entrance, then covered with soil or mulch to keep it cool and moist. I have had a dozen large toads sheltering under a single 12" saucer. The result was that I never had a slug problem in my garden.



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## LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

### WANT EVENT IN RIGHT AWAY? FOLLOW RULES!

#### GREATER HOUSTON AREA EVENTS ONLY!

3-LINE (max) **EXACT FORMAT** (our re-formatting = *delay!*)

**DAY, DATE: TITLE** (by **NAME if talk**), time, site. Sponsor (*if not in title*).  
website/phone (NOTE CAPITALS VS lower case)

- **Gardening w/plants events ONLY!** No harvest, cooking, shows, etc
- **ONLY events sent SPECIFICALLY TO US FOR CALENDAR** are used!
- **NO events** picked up from flyers. **NO PDFS! TYPE IN EMAIL ONLY.**
- **No city** unless not "Houston" -- Don't add "Houston" or "Texas"
- Submit to: [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com). Check published entry!

WED., MAY 14: HISTORY OF MERCER ARBORETUM & BOTANIC GARDENS by

Jamie Hartwell, Noon–2pm, MA&BG Visitor's Center, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd.  
Free.Register: [pct3.com/MBG](http://pct3.com/MBG)

**FRI., SAT., MAY 16-17: AMERICAN BEGONIA SOCIETY, SHOW AND SALE**, 9am - 4pm, Hilton Garden Inn Willowbrook, 7979 Willowchase Blvd. Free, [begoniahouston.org/](http://begoniahouston.org/)

**TUES., MAY 20: LANDSCAPING WITH BROMELIADS IN HOUSTON** by **JOANNE WOOLSEY**, 7 pm, West Gray Multi-Service Center, 1475 W. Gray, Free, Bromeliad Society/Houston. [bromeliadsocietyhouston.org](http://bromeliadsocietyhouston.org)

**FRI., MAY 23: SHADE GARDENING**, 1-2:30 p.m. Online. Fort Bend MG. Registration required: [fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success](http://fortbend.agrilife.org/landscape-success), 281-342-303

**WED. MAY. 28: BRING BACK THE POLLINATORS** by **ELLIOT GORDON**, (Zoom) program), 7pm, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. Cactus and Succulent Society event. Free. [hcsstex.org](http://hcsstex.org)

**SAT., JUNE 7: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS' OPEN GARDENS DAY**, 8:30–11 am. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd, Conroe. 938-539-7824. Free. [mcmga.com](http://mcmga.com)

**SAT., JUNE 14: SUCCESSFUL CONTAINER GARDENING** by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**. 9-11am AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main (FM 519), La Marque. Free. [Register](#), 281-309-5065

**SAT., JUNE 28: WOODY SHRUBS & TREES**, 9-11am, and **SPECIALTY PLANTS** 1-3pm, by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**. Discovery Garden, 4102 Main St. (FM 519), Carbide Park, La Marque. Free.  
Register: [galveston.agrilife.org/events/](http://galveston.agrilife.org/events/) 281-309-5065

**SAT., JUNE 28: HEAT PROOFING YOUR GARDEN** by **ANGELA CHANDLER**, 10am–noon, 10000 Emmett F Lowry, Texas City, \$29. College of Mainland, 409-933-8461. Register: [Heat Proofing Your Garden online](#)

**SAT., JULY 12: SQUARE FOOT GARDENING – NOT BY THE BOOK!** by **ANGELA CHANDLER**, 10am–noon, 10000 Emmett F Lowry, Texas City, \$29. College of the Mainland. 409-933-8461; register: [Square Foot Gardening](#)

***If your event didn't get in right away,  
PROBABLY NOT In our EXACT - NEVER CHANGING format.  
REFORMATTING (WE WILL!) delays event publication  
and opens doors for errors. Your choice!  
SEE TOP OF CALENDAR FOR EXACT FORMAT.***



If we inspire you to attend any of these,  
please let them know you heard about it in . . .  
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at 936-273-1200 or send an e-mail to: [lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com](mailto: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 general feature 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 later was said to rank 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 general reporting into also doing gardening reporting 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 show on HoustonPBS (Ch. 8) and her call-in "EcoGardening" show on KPFT-FM.

For over three decades, Brenda served 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 had 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.

About her column, Brenda says: "I don't consider myself a 'garden writer.'" I started out 50+ years ago as a very lazy "gardening reporter." I still feel that way today. I hope my columns inspire/help newcomers, but I do not write to them. I write to very experienced gardeners who want to expand their horizons.

### JOHN FERGUSON

John is a native Houstonian and has over 35 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. For years he represented 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.



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