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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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***"Do you know why the Indian Rain Dances always worked?
Because the Indians would keep dancing until it rained."***

-- Sherman Joseph Alexie Jr., a Spokane-Coeur d'Alene-Native American writer



FUNNY HOW TIPS FOR "OLDER GARDENERS" ACTUALLY HELP ALL!

**by Brenda Beust Smith
(aka The Lazy Gardener)**

Between our horrible sporadic rains and even more horrible heat (!), August often becomes a good month for admiring what we have and thinking about the future while inside in the AC! Now that I've reached my 8th decade of life, discovering it's really affecting my gardening. For example, my gardens do have weeds. Some bloom. They get to stay! The others I glower at but may or may not remove, depending on my energy level at that particular nanosecond.

Sharing this with fellow gardeners so you won't take offense if someone in, say, their 8th+ decade, is hesitant to agree when you ask if they need help. Still, be extra thrilled if they say SURE! Chances are many of their plants have multiplied beyond control.

But thinning takes energy, stooping or worse, kneeling, to dig them out or snip off branches. Offer to do that yourself and you might gain lots of fabulous cuttings to try! If so, a wonderful thank you would be to offer to dig/pull out anything they refer to as a "damn weed."

Another trick I started a very long time ago -- SO grateful I did -- deals with fear of falling in the garden, or anywhere in the yard. It's so easy to step on a loose spot and go down in the blink of an eye.

Decades ago, I interviewed an elderly -- or so I thought him at the time! -- gentleman at his garden. He had what I thought was a strange gait as we walked through various beds of bloomers. I asked was he ok? Sure, he said. "Just counting." Turned out, in iffy places (as all gardens are), he was doing what HIS grandmother did: counting.

Through and in between plantings . . . 1,2, 3, step. 1, 2, 3, step. He did this, he said, to give his body -- and mind -- time to prepare for possible, unexpected hard-to-see changes in the ground that might be coming. Maybe a hidden hole filled with easily squashed leaves or a soil-covered branch or loose wire.

Shortly after that, I was tripped by a patch of leaf-covered wet soil. Nearly crashed to ground. Used in Chronicle article, this tip got surprisingly positive responses from readers. Made such an impression, I began doing it myself.

ARE "GARDEN'S DEMANDS" more than you can handle? Even tho you may not qualify for needing "Horticulture therapy," many tips in this category actually lift workloads for all of us. is such a broad approach these days and tips abound online. Even if you're not "a senior," it's never too soon to adopt safety techniques! I'd love to publish more tips to help us "mature" gardeners with challenges, such as . . .

- Think 'lightweight' on tools (great Birthday/Christmas gift idea?). Actually feel before you buy. Lighter-weight and longer-handled tools save energy and help avoid bending. Kneeling pads and benches are easier on older legs!
- Use a wheelbarrow? One with two wheels is easier to push than one-wheel ones.
- Think groundcovers for lawn areas that have to be mowed.
- Consider your own height, size, arm reach, ability to kneel, etc.,when purchasing/planting new plants. One size does NOT always fit all!
- If you want to garden but can't get past some normal challenges, check out "horticulture therapy" resources for new & senior citizens! (www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=horticulture+therapy+tips+for+seniors).
- Do you have any special precautions you take when gardening? Tips on what you did successfully to minimize gardening chores? Do share to lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com. Won't use without your permission!

And, most important for us this time of year, watch the weather! Take advantage of clouds before storms hit, make those yard shadows your gardening friend!

I hope you . . .

1. got rain this past weekend (*for longer than 3 minutes!*). AND ...
2. you watered your most precious plants **BEFORE** it rained on them.

BEFORE? Why water before it rains? During intense heat/droughts, soil automatically develops hard, dry top-crusts. If you want rain to go straight to treasured plants' roots (and not to adjacent weed roots), water just at the base, where stalks/trunk meets soil, BEFORE rain starts to fall. Gardeners of old (and Indians I'm sure) may not have understood why this helped their crops, but they knew it worked.

PS: I always run any soil-mention first by John Ferguson for confirmation! His response to an earlier post on this: *"Looks good, only do add that cheap, low quality mulches also form crusts or grow 'dog puke fungus' — both of which repel water."*

* * *

Potpourri

- **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 A CALENDAR EVENT?** *For best chance of getting it in next upcoming newsletter, submit in exact requested format (see top of calendar below. Reformatting by us may = delay in publication)*

* * *

Address questions, suggestions, and your successes to lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

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



John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL
AND PLANTS #342

Subject: Colored and Dyed Mulches

We started talking about BAD mulches last week. Since it has been a few years since we looked at all the different mulches available in depth, we will revisit all the information on mulches, starting from worst to best.

Researchers have found that healthy, fertile soils with low insect and disease pressure have one thing in common: a 30:1 ratio of carbon to nitrogen. This is an important and common ratio found throughout fertile, productive natural systems. Today, we are going to look at colored or dyed mulches.

COLORED MULCH - Colored or dyed mulch can be found in many colors, from red to green and blue. The most common are red and black. The first problem with the dyed mulches is the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio. To get dyes to stick to the wood, producers use raw wood from pallets, crates, and other trash wood. This type of wood has a carbon to nitrogen (C:N ratio) of over 500:1! Hence, when it is placed on the soil, microbes will start to break it down. To do this, they need lots of nitrogen and other nutrients. To get this extra nitrogen, they pull it from the soil away from plant roots (microbes always eat first). When plants do not have enough nitrogen, they may become chlorotic, and they are far more susceptible to insect and disease issues.

The second problem is the black mulches. Black does not occur in nature except under anaerobic conditions (this means without oxygen), where the soil is sickly and full of bad microbes (pathogens). The most common black colorant is carbon black, which is a byproduct of the chemical industry and a known carcinogen. Many believe that the dyed black mulches may be behind the surge in cancers found in dogs and cats in recent years.

Color: Is often an indicator of potential problems with mulch or compost and other organic materials. A black color *does not occur naturally* in mulches or compost under good conditions, only a deep chocolate brown. Even humus is a deep chocolate brown. However, many people believe black is good, and some unscrupulous vendors like to take advantage of this idea by dyeing raw wood black.

Black organic materials only occur in nature when materials decompose under anaerobic conditions (without oxygen). These conditions favor disease and other pathogens, and use a different set of microbes to decompose the material. As a result, pure “black” compost or mulch does not have good fertility, indicates anaerobic decomposition, and other problems. The sulfur is gone as it has outgassed as hydrogen sulfide; nitrogen is gone (NH_3) or in wrong form, and when organic materials decompose under anaerobic conditions, alcohols are usually present (only 1 ppm can kill a root hair). Note: Conversely good compost and aged native mulch are a deep chocolate brown when dry.

Industrial waste is often used to blacken products for marketing purposes (e.g., even though it is illegal in some states, some companies grind up old railroad ties to help darken mulch material).

Smelter waste is sometimes used as feedstock to blacken products. Copper sulfate (CuSO_4) or other sulfur compounds may be present. As they break down elemental sulfur (S) may be produced, which is a natural fungicide that

kills the beneficial fungus.

Boiler ash (bottom ash) is another industrial waste product used to color or blacken products. Boiler ash tends to be high in salt and extremely alkaline. The alkalinity is so strong that it will chemically burn raw wood black in a couple days. The products produced, in addition to being very alkaline with high salt, have very high C:N ratios of over 500:1. Remember, a 30:1 ratio is required for healthy soil. Some ashes may contain large amounts of heavy metals that contaminate the mulch, exceeding federal regulatory levels for safety. These mulch products will often turn a bleached grayish color in a few weeks after exposure to sunlight. These types of products are very common in many areas in Texas.

After the drought and wildfires of 2011, several universities started researching factors that led to damage from wildfires. The tests were done in hot, dry areas that are regularly subject to wildfires, and some used different species that grow in our area (e.g., Western Red Cedar versus Eastern Red Cedar), but one can reasonably expect similar behavior. Mulches were tested for how easily they ignited, flame height, rate of fire spread, and maximum temperature.

They found that colored mulches were highly flammable. Wood mulches made from pallets and other dry wood, like construction wood waste (i.e., colored mulches), ignited and burned on every test, and were one of the most dangerous. Wood chips treated with fire-retardant chemicals delayed the spread for 5-10 minutes, then the behavior was similar to untreated wood mulches.

Note: Spontaneous combustion of mulches used in landscaping normally does not occur due to the thin layer of mulch used. However, a large pile of dyed mulch (high C:N mulch) on one's property can go into spontaneous combustion if not managed properly.

A lot of you remember Randy Lemon, the host of Garden-line radio show for many years. I think Randy hated dyed mulches even more than me. Notice how chlorotic the plants are; they were dying due to a lack of nutrients from the high C:N ratio of the dyed mulch.

Slide courtesy of Randy Lemon



Another problem with the dyed mulches is that they often leach and stain one's concrete. The slide image below was courtesy of Randy Lemon.

Dyes Leaching Away



Gardeners need to be careful, as there are often more bad products than good, as most vendors just want your money and do not care if you get hurt or have bad results.

So why do soil companies sell dyed (colored mulch)? They like to prey on the ignorance of homeowners to make money. This picture is from an advertisement for making colored mulch says it all.

COLORFUL MULCH = INCREASED PROFITS



Broad range of Colorfast colorants

- ▶ Mold and fungus resistance available
- ▶ Can color in any grinder
- ▶ Most cost-effective coloring unit

Visit our website – mulchcolorjet.com



As you can see from the photo above, dyed mulches are often made from trash wood. If any soil yard sells dyed mulches, they do not care about you, the customer, your health, or safety.

The same applies to landscapers and yard service companies who use these types of mulch; they are very ignorant or do not care if it causes harm, and just want your money.

As the old gardening proverb states: ***"I have no quarrel with a man who has a lower price, who better knows what his product is really worth".***

Or in other words, one gets what they pay for.

Click below to learn more about mulch in detail from Nature's Way Resources.

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LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER CALENDAR EVENTS

WANT EVENT IN RIGHT AWAY? FOLLOW RULES! -- ONLY GREATER HOUSTON AREA NONPROFIT GROUP EVENTS --

Expect delay if we must reformat: 3-LINE (max) **EXACT FORMAT:**

DAY, DATE: TITLE (by **NAME if talk**), time, site. Sponsor (*if not in title*).

website/phone (NOTE CAPITALS VS lower case)

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

SAT., AUG 23: TEXAS SUPERSTAR® - BE A SUPERSTAR WITH ANNUALS,
Discovery Garden in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St (FM 519), La Marque.
Free. Register: txmg.org/galveston/

MON-TUES: AUG 25-26: SUMMER SUNDOWN ONLINE PLANT SALE by
GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 1-3pm. galvestonmg.square.site/

WED., AUG.27: JUDGING SHOW PLANTS by **Josie Watts**. Houston Cactus &
Succulent Society, 7pm, at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1745 West Gray.
Free.

WED., SEPT. 10: EVERYTHING ORCHIDS by **BRANDIE HILL** 12 – 2 pm, Mercer
Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd.,
Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

FRI., SEPT. 12: MERCER GARDEN TOUR by **HORTICULTURE STAFF**, 9–10 am,
Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine
Westfield Rd., Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

SAT., SEPT. 13: TURF FOR THE FALL by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER
GARDENERS**, 9-12am, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe
936-539-7824, mcmga.com

TUES. SEPT. 16: BIRDS AND BROMS OF CENTRAL AMERICA by **KATHY
STAHL**, 7pm, West Gray Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. Bromeliad
Society Houston. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

THURS., SEPT. 18: LEARN TO GROW PICKLES by **ERIKA RUTZ**, 10–11
am, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306
Aldine Westfield Rd., Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

TUES., SEPT. 23: FALL PLANTING GUIDE by **ISABELLA FOWLER**, 10:30
am–noon, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens,
22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

**SAT., SEPT. 27: LEAGUE CITY GARDEN CLUB "BEAUTIFUL BACKYARD
VIBES" GARDEN TOUR**, 10am-4pm, League City, TX, \$20 per person.
leaguecitygardenclub@gmail.com

FRI., OCT. 10: MERCER GARDEN TOUR by **HORTICULTURE STAFF**, 9–10
am, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306
Aldine Westfield Rd. Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

SAT., OCT. 11: GROWING CITRUS by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER
GARDENERS**, 9-11am, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd.,

Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

TUES., OCT. 28: CONTAINER GARDENING by **BRUKENDRA FILMORE**,
10:30–1:30 am, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens,
22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

*If your event didn't get in right away, probably was set aside to be
rewritten in our exact, never-changing format (See top of calendar)!
Your choice!*



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 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 (at that time) 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 (lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)

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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