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**Nature's Way Resources** owner John Ferguson, "The Lazy Gardener" Brenda Beust Smith, and Shelby Cassano welcome your feedback and are so grateful to the many horticulturists who contribute their expertise.



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## Letter from the Editor

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of our dear friend and colleague, John Ferguson, founder of Nature's Way Resources and a long-time contributor to The Lazy Gardener & Friends Newsletter, the voice behind "John's Corner".

For decades, John's thoughtful, science-based articles helped gardeners understand the living world beneath their feet. His passion for soil health, sustainable living, and personal well-being all came from a place of deep faith and gratitude for the natural world. He believed that caring for creation was both a privilege and a responsibility, an act of stewardship that reflected his Christian values and his respect for the life God designed in every handful of healthy soil.

John never stopped teaching. Whether he was writing about soil biology, sharing new research, or exploring the connection between nature and human health, he made complex ideas feel accessible and inspiring. His curiosity, generosity, and conviction changed how countless people think about gardening, ecology, and the world we share.

As we continue this publication, we do so with immense gratitude for all that John taught us. His legacy will live on in the choices we make every day, in how we garden, what we plant, how we care for the soil, and how we treat one another.

We extend our deepest condolences to John's family, friends, and the many people whose lives he touched. He will be profoundly missed, but his influence continues to grow, in every garden, every student, and every person he inspired to live with purpose and care.

-- Shelby Cassano, *Nature's Way Resources*



Left, *Salvia coccinea*, beautiful annual salvia, makes plenty of seed to quickly produce new plants. Above, herbaceous phlox stems makes an excellent candidate for propagation by cuttings

## Beautiful but not alike when creating new plants from old

by Brenda Beust Smith | *The Lazy Gardener*

Most of us now are wondering how long our beautiful garden bloomers will hold once true cold weather hits (seems it's closer than I'd like!). Some sources said warmer weather ahead, but another predicts snow maybe in mid-November. Knowing us, probably both! That's not warmer-than-normal for us -- tho maybe it's becoming so! Whatever, now's a good time for expert advice on making our current plants do double-duty by starting new plants.

***That's what Stephen F. Austin Gardens Greenhouse and Nursery Manager Jordan Cunningham*** is offering in today's Spotlight Article (below). If you don't know the best way to propagate individual common bloomers, you may be missing out on free new plants! (See Spotlight Article below.)

\* \* \*



(Above, l to r, *Magnolia tamaulipana* and *Podocarpus matudae*)

Speaking of our area's Great Gardens: **The John Fairey Garden** in Hempstead (*collections of rare, threatened, and unusual plants that thrive in central/southeast Texas*) has announced it's going to start supplying seeds from selected plants! Keep up with JFG's newsletter ([jfgarden.org](http://jfgarden.org)) or attend the garden's final sale of the year, **Sat., Nov. 8. John Fairey Garden Sale**, 20559 FM 359 Road, Hempstead, TX 77445.



\* \* \*



In case, you didn't know, November's official flower is the chrysanthemum (above) after the Greek words chryos [gold] and anthemion (flower). One of the world's largest plant families, Chrysanthemums have been around (and used!) for over 3,000 years!

Sad we seldom plant mums much here anymore. They bloom twice a year for us, now and in spring. Our once-active Chrysanthemum Society sadly is no more. Can't plant a football mum (too treated) but plants are easily found in nurseries, grocery stores, etc. Lots of kinds now: singles, anemones, decoratives, pompons, spoons, spiders, and standards! Almost everything I know about mums, I learned from the late Jackie Yarotsky (*Houston Chrysanthemum Society president and more!*). HCS is no longer, very sad loss for Houston gardeners.

***But Jackie would be happy to know lots of us still love her favorite plant and are still sharing growing advice. Mums are said to trigger feelings of peace, tranquility, positive energy and good luck. National flower of Japan and medicinal aid in China, not to mention belief dreaming of mums symbolizes good fortune, success and happiness! And this only skims the surface!***

\* \* \*





# DON'T OVERLOOK SEEDS OR CUTTINGS FOR PROPAGATION!

BY JORDAN CUNNINGHAM  
STEPHAN F. AUSTIN GARDENS

*Greenhouse and Nursery Manager*  
[sfasu.edu/gardens](http://sfasu.edu/gardens)

*(SFA photos above and at top of column).*

When you are considering which propagation method to use to produce more of your favorite plants, consider this rule of thumb: annuals are propagated best by planting seeds, while perennials are propagated best by rooting cuttings.

Annuals such as *Salvia coccinea* (Scarlet Sage, *pictured at top*) produce plenty of seeds and their seeds are easier to keep over the winter and plant in the spring.

*Symphytotrichum oblongifolium*, (Fall Aster), on the other hand, is a perennial and can be propagated much faster by cuttings. Collecting and growing seeds is a lengthy process and can only be conducted when seed is being produced. Cuttings can be taken at just about any time during the growing season.

But the rule of thumb doesn't work for everything!

Trees are perennial, they can live for many years, but rooting cuttings taken from woody stems can be very difficult, especially cuttings taken from older branches. Better to collect acorns from your favorite oak tree or samaras from the maple tree at your childhood home.

Remember, when you propagate plants from seeds, the new plants may not have the same characteristics as the plant their seeds came from because each seed is a combination of genetic material from the parent plant. Plants grown from seeds can express many different genetic traits.

If you love the coleus plants in your garden this year and want the exact same color pattern next year, then it would be best to take cuttings from this year's coleus plant. Cuttings are exact clones of the plant they are taken from. Plus, coleus are easy to propagate by cuttings, no rooting hormone required!



Plants like *Rudbeckia maxima* (Giant Coneflower) and *Echinacea* sp. (Purple Coneflower) are perennials, but cuttings can be tricky because the plants grow as rosettes and have very small true stems. Better to collect seeds for planting next year and enjoy the genetic variation!

But the true gardening mantra when it comes to propagation is try it out and see! Plants with plump herbaceous stems will probably make great cuttings. Plants with super tiny seeds may be difficult to collect and easy to lose, try cuttings instead! If it seeds out in the garden, seeds are the way to go. Plants that are sterile or that make very few seeds are good candidates for rooting cuttings!

When propagating plants, the time of year matters too. Even in a greenhouse some annual seeds may wait until the days are longer to start germinating, and cuttings tend to be more successful in rooting during the warmer months with some plants being more sensitive to cooler weather than others. Even a very woody plant may flush out young green stems in the spring that are worth trying for cuttings.

Jordan Cunningham

**SFA Gardens** | Greenhouse and Nursery Manager  
mcgee1@sfasu.edu | sfagardens@gmail.com

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Upcoming events at SFA Gardens. Sign up for sales and other activities

\* \* \*



**WILDFLOWERS NOW? SALLY MISSON** in Fort Bend County asks how she can find out what wildflowers are blooming in her nearest prairie right now. She wants fall bloomers. A good reference book: Coastal Prairie Plant Growers' Handbook (2nd Edition) is published/sold by the Coastal Prairie Conservancy (formerly the Katy Prairie Conservancy), now a joint project that also includes Houston Audubon, Galveston Bay Chapter/Texas Master Naturalists and the National Wetlands Research Center. Related source: Texas Prairie Org's free online upcoming annual meet.

- **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)*

\* \* \*

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*Address questions, suggestions, and your successes to [lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)*



## John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL  
AND PLANTS #245



**In Loving Memory**

# John Ferguson

Founder of Nature's Way Resources, est. 1994

1951 - 2025

***As we take a moment to reflect on John's passing, we would like to share Issue #245 from John's Corner.***

***John's passion was displayed throughout all aspects of his life. In recent years, he and his wife moved to La Grange, TX, to enjoy a well-deserved retirement, but if you know John, he never truly retired.***

***He continued his lifelong pursuit of learning, conducting research on his land and sharing new discoveries with his signature curiosity and enthusiasm.***

***Please take a moment to honor John's legacy by revisiting his words and sharing in the passion that guided his life's work.***

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I have been spending a lot of time at my farm near La Grange this summer as my retirement home is being built.

I have many ancient very large Live Oaks on the property where the limbs stretch and touch the ground, the temperature is near 100 degrees and I walk under the canopy of the Oaks and suddenly it is 10 degrees cooler or more.

Or when I am driving around in my ATV and I drive into a bottom that is heavily forested and suddenly the temperature feels 15 degrees cooler or more.

This experience has me thinking about the importance of planting trees. So, I want to share a little of what I have learned about planting trees in Fayette County.

The pastures of the property were severely degraded when my wife and I purchased it eight years ago. I have been busy planting trees as part of the ecological habitat restoration. There are five distinct soil types on the property that allows for a variety of species. These soils range from sandy loam to heavy clay to limestone rock. To date I have planted a total of 2,400 trees and shrubs of 174 species, each with a purpose (121 trees and 54 shrub species). Originally the property had some Bastrop Pines growing on it as it is on the edge of the Lost Pines area. The pines were clear cut for buildings in the 1800's and the rest cleared to grow cotton. I love pines and the benefits they provide hence I started there.

*{Humorous Side Note: In year one I purchased 1,000 pine seedlings and had a commercial company plant them. As a new land owner, I wanted the agricultural exemption for tax purposes. I was told that donkeys qualified for the exemption and I was given seven donkeys. I discovered later that it was only in some counties and not in Fayette County where I was.*

*I also planted over twenty 10-gallon Bastrop pine trees near where the future home site was. Within two weeks the donkeys had eaten every one of them,*



*even the big trees with 1.5-inch diameter trunks were chewed to the ground! I found out that Pine trees have many times more vitamin-C in them than an orange hence a nutritious food snack for the donkeys. They ate everything else I planted also. Hence, I quickly found them a new home in South Texas where they were used to protect sheep from coyotes.}*

When I was in college my parents had a piece of property in East Texas. I could plant trees there without doing anything and they grew fine. Like Brenda, I am basically a Lazy Gardener. I quickly learned that growing trees on the Eastern edge of the hill country was a different experience than East Texas.

Thus, in year two I started over and I participated in the Texas Forest Service's reforestation program. I purchased 2,000 bare root Bastrop Pine seedlings that had an 8-inch-long root ball, and were about 15 inches tall. I used a battery powered soil drill to create the planting hole that I could drop the seedling into and quickly plant them in a few seconds. Of those trees that survived, some are almost 20 feet tall and some are still only 2-3 feet tall. This is due to different soil types, nutritional density, and quality of the soil. Deer have also killed over 1,000 of the pine trees along with other trees by rubbing the bark off them.

There were also two years of extreme drought during the eight years. My lake went down over 10 feet and I had three hypoxia events that killed all my fish. My small pond went dry. Then as nature compensated for the drought, we had over 16 inches of rain in one day creating a massive amount of flooding. The soil and weather conditions have made gardening tough. I have yet to have the theoretical or mythical "Normal" weather.

### **Planting trees – What I have learned**

Lesson 1: After the experience with the donkeys all the other tree species were planted in cages or had brush barricades around them to keep the deer away.

Lesson 2: At first, I only used mulch around the tree as part of the planting process. As an experiment I used the mulch from the county's recycling center (about 20 cubic yards) and compared it to using aged native mulch from Nature's Way Resources.

For example, I would purchase 10 trees of the same species. Half were planted with the recycled mulch and the other half were with the good aged native mulch. Almost all the plants with the mulch from the recycling center died while those with the aged native mulch, survival jumped to around 50% despite the drought (little or zero supplemental watering). Good quality mulch makes a big difference. Lesson 3: Next, I started adding a good organic fertilizer (Microlife™) to the backfill mix and around the tree on the surface before I mulched.

Results improved; however, animals would dig up the plants to eat the fertilizer.

On a suggestion from Mike Serant the owner of Microlife™, I switched from the regular Microlife (green bag) to the Microlife Ultimate (blue bag) which has



humates in it. The animals do not like the smell of humates hence they leave it alone. As a result, I started seeing improved growth and survival but not good.

Lesson 4: After reading a research paper on how mycorrhizal fungi help plants survive drought, I started adding mycorrhizal spores to the root ball and backfill mix. Again, survival and growth improved some more.

Lesson 5: Since the property was cotton farmed for many decades, until the soil was extremely worn out and would no longer grow cotton. I surmised that it was deficient in minor and micronutrients since cotton is a heavy feeder. So, I started adding Re-mineralizer in the bottom of the planting hole, to the back fill mix and on the surface around the tree before mulching. Again, I saw additional improvements in growth and establishment.

Lesson 6: The soils were very low in organic matter (almost zero) due to the years of farming. So, I started experimenting with adding a 25% compost (I used both the leaf mold and fungal composts and they performed equally well) to the backfill mix in addition to the re-mineralizer, mycorrhizal spores, and fertilizer. I used a 15-gallon metal bucket to break up the soil clods, remove root fragments, and mix in the compost and other ingredients by rolling it till evenly mixed. Survival and growth have both increased again despite another heat wave and drought that we are currently experiencing. Growth rates have significantly increased and survival is approaching 90% of trees planted.

I know that it was not a good time to plant trees but I thought I would experiment. At the end of April, I planted five Desert Willows (cultivar “Bubba”) using the techniques above and they are thriving and have already started blooming, just laughing off the heat and drought.

It has become obvious, that by not being lazy and cutting corners, and by performing the planting techniques above, I could have success in a very difficult environment.

Most of the species that died due to deer or climate have been replaced and using the complete methods above are doing fine.

I now have Willows, Black cherries, Black Locust, Texas Mulberries and more that I planted that are near twenty feet tall. There are five different species of wild plums (multiple plants each) that have begun to sucker and form thickets and many other pleasant surprises from the Buckeyes (both yellow and red) to Redbuds (Eastern, Texas, and Mexican) and Mexican plums that are doing well.

It has been a fascinating journey in learning what works and what does not.

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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](mailto:lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com). Check published entry!

**SAT., NOV. 8: GROWING TOMATOES & PEPPERS** by **ANGELA CHANDLER**, 10am–12:30pm, Mainland City Centre, 10000 Emmett F Lowry, Texas City, \$35. College of the Mainland. 409-933-8461; [Register](#)

**WED., NOV. 12: GROWING CITRUS IN SE TEXAS** by **SCOTT JOHNSGARD**, noon-2pm, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free. Register: [pct3.com/MBG](http://pct3.com/MBG)

**NOV. 15: BAYOU PRESERVATION ASSN.'s Fall Pollinator Workshop** has been temporarily postponed. [info@bayoupreservation.org](mailto:info@bayoupreservation.org)

**Fri.-SAT, NOV. 14-15: MERCER GARDEN TOUR** by **HORTICULTURE STAFF**, Friday 9–10am, Saturday 10-11am, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free, Register: [pct3.com/MBG](http://pct3.com/MBG)

**THURS., NOV. 20: NATIVE SEED & PLANT SWAP** by **NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY OF TEXAS HOUSTON CHAPTER**, 6:45pm, Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, Memorial Park. [npsot.org/houston](http://npsot.org/houston)

**Fri., NOV. 21: TOUR OF MERCER BOTANICAL CENTER** by **HERBARIUM STAFF**, 10 – 11 am, Mercer Botanical Center, 22540 Aldine Westfield Rd., FREE, Register: [pct3.com/MBG](http://pct3.com/MBG)

**SAT. DEC 6: GROWING TOMATOES FROM SEED**, 9-11AM,



by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER**. AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM519), La Marque. FREE.  
Register: <https://txmg.org/galveston/events/>

**FRI.-SUN., MAR. 6-8 (2026): RIVER OAKS GARDEN CLUB AZALEA TRAIL**, 11am-5pm, 5 sites (Tanglewood/Memorial, Bayou Bend, Rienzi, ROGC's Forum. \$35. [riveroaksgc.org](http://riveroaksgc.org).

***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 . . .  
**THE LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS NEWSLETTER!**  
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# *A Legend Has Passed*

## *John Ferguson*



🌱 1951 - 2025 🌱

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, our beloved John Ferguson passed away and is now spreading the Organic gospel all around Heaven. His passing was quick and took us all by surprise. We surmise that God wanted more stimulating conversation around him.

John was (is) a magnificent human being, one of the finest God ever created. For John, it was always about being of service to humanity and to all of creation. John loved people, believed in the goodness of folks and cherished the environment.

John has built his career on helping people and all life that inhabits earth. His company, Nature's Way Resources, set the gold standard for improving our home, Earth, by providing the world's best Compost, Soil and Mulch that could be made. John was a dedicated scholar and relentless teacher about Human Health, Plant Health and Soil Health and how all are related. John believed in people and was devoted to improving the lives of all. His impact will be felt for generations to come.

His son, Ian Ferguson, is continuing Nature's Way Resources and is doing a magnificent job, making sure John's high standards are upheld.

John is missed dearly by the thousands of folks that he touched. John was instrumental in creating and strengthening The Texas Organic Community. One example from hundreds is that he was a co-founder of OHBA, which 23 years later is still the premier Organic education provider in all of America.

How to say goodbye to a Texas legend and someone that is irreplaceable?

*John, we miss you deeply.*

**If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, please contact us 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 (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](mailto: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.

### SHELBY CASSANO

Shelby Cassano is the communications and marketing lead for Nature's Way Resources and the editor of The Lazy Gardener and Friends newsletter. Through her business, Leaf and Ledger, she exclusively partners with NWR to direct all marketing efforts, from campaign strategy and content planning to technical production of the newsletter. Shelby holds a B.S. in Agriculture with a concentration in Horticulture from Stephen F. Austin State University and previously managed the company's nursery.



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