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Nature's Way Resources honors the contributions of our late founder, John Ferguson. "The Lazy Gardener" Brenda Beust Smith, and Shelby Cassano welcome your feedback and remain grateful to the many horticulturists who share their expertise.

LAZY GARDENER AND FRIENDS NEWSLETTER



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*Margaret Byron's African Bush daisy (*Euryops pectinatus*)*

WANTED: MORE PLANTS THAT LAUGH AT OUR DROPPING TEMPS!

By Brenda Beust Smith | The Lazy Gardener

One of many pleasures of living in our semi-tropical area is watching how different plants here march to their own drummers! Much of the rest of the country is bemoaning winter dormancy of favorite colorful garden plants (*tho comforted, of course, by temporary gorgeous fall color*). We here have the luxury of many colorful bloomers that laugh at drops in temperatures. They

know momentary chills will soon be replaced by new buds -- if, that is, you plant for this time period!

Good example, in the Bush Airport area, **Margaret Byron's** full color African Bush daisy (*Euryops pectinatus*, above) has proven over the past decade that she laughs at our occasional, temporary December swings into lower temperatures, blooming happily even if a momentary true freeze arrives. Secret to such success? Patience and willingness to experiment. And understanding that extreme weather is a fact of life. No guarantees in gardening!

Where to even search for such plants? Good places to start: Our botanical sites — [Houston Botanic Garden](#) and Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Garden

Margaret started this lady almost a decade ago in her north-facing back yard. It pouted. She moved it to a partially shady west-facing side. Still wasn't as happy as she thought it should be. Finally a 3rd move to an open south-facing front yard with good afternoon west sun site did the trick.

Even after years of our rollercoaster winters, the now-9-year-old drought-/pruning-tolerant shrub in her well-drained site delights neighbors and passers-by alike! Average height: 6 foot, depending on conditions.

There is care. When deep freezes are forecast, Margaret covers m'lady with a garbage can. In spring, lacy green leaves get a good haircut, and periodic deadheading, all of which encourage profuse, long-lasting flower production that delight butterflies, bees and neighbors alike.

So! Exactly how did Margaret's African Bush Daisy (near-Bush Airport) survive our recent, short-lived, below-freezing temperatures that triggered overall major overnight flight delays? See for yourself . . .



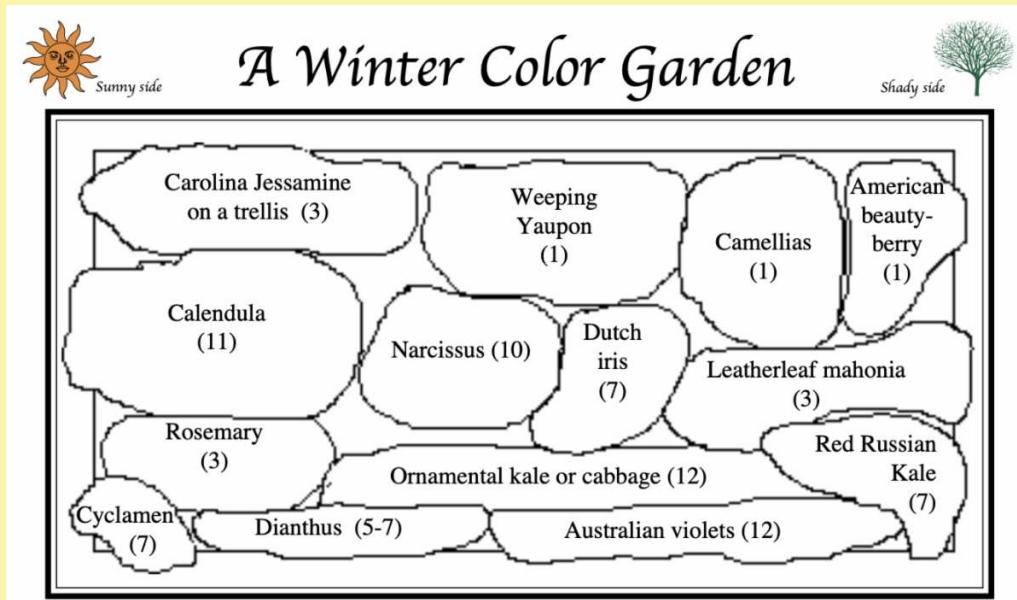
Left, before freeze. Right, morning after freeze!

Good news for the "chionophobic*" among us (translation: fear of snow and icy weather — *I am definitely one!*). Thanks to the current La Niña trend, expect warmer weather for a while at least. However, it would be useful -- especially those new to gardening in our schizophrenic weather -- to hear which of your flowering plants also laughed at our brief cold invasion.

* * *

IT'S DOWNRIGHT DEPRESSING to see plants go dormant for the winter. If it helps any, here's the December chapter garden from my "***Lazy Gardener Guide***." Too many plants for anyone to plant all of them! But mainly it was mainly designed to provide lots of choices by the late **Sally McQueen**

Squire, my publisher, mentor, close friend, and best known as Houston's Bulb Lady for decades. Hope it gives you a variety of ideas for your



Winters are a gamble. Some years impatiens will be in full color at Christmastime. Other years, an early freeze wipes everything out. Whenever a freeze is forecast, water all inground plants well. The drier roots are, the more susceptible they are to cold damage. Mulch heavily. The plants listed need cold weather to "do their thing."

Some of these plants may do beautifully one year, and succumb the next. But they are all worth a try. Unless we have an exceptionally cold winter, they should give color through next spring with just occasional protection. Winter is also a time when we can plant cold-weather annuals in spots too shaded in summer.

Under deciduous trees (lose leaves in winter), plant delphiniums, English and Shasta daisies, foxglove, hollyhocks, larkspur, pansies, poppies, snapdragons, stocks, and sweet peas.

AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY. Wonderful purple or white berries up and down long, arching branches. Perennial shrub.

AUSTRALIAN VIOLETS. Best violet for us. Perennials.

CALENDULAS. Yellow, daisy-like flowers with outstretched greenery. Annual.

CAMELLIAS. One of our most reliable evergreen winter-blooming shrubs, provided you give it slightly acidic soil, excellent drainage, and protection from the hot summer sun.

CAROLINA JESSAMINE. This evergreen native East Texas vine will need to go on a strong trellis or fence; brilliant yellow flowers are usually first sign spring's around the corner. Perennial.

CYCLAMENS. Orchid-like flowers, low spreading greenery. Really need cold weather. Annual

DIANTHUS. Fragrant, sprightly, low-growing flowers in spring and fall; often dormant in summer.

IRIS, DUTCH. Low sword-like foliage, beautiful iris blooms, even known to appear in snow!

MAHONIA, LEATHERLEAF. Evergreen shrub, great yellow flowers, bluish berries.

NARCISSUS. Paperwhites are often in bloom on the coldest January days. Fragrant, perennial.

ORNAMENTAL KALE, CABBAGE/RED RUSSIAN KALE. Grown for their very colorful leaves.

In spring, will sprout yellow flowers on tall stalks if you let them. Red Russian is spectacular.

PRIMROSES. Spritely flower atop slender stalks with low foliage. Annual.

ROSEMARY. Small fragrant bushes that love the cold. Delicate little flowers.

YAUPON, WEEPING. This one has lovely fountaining red-berried branches. There are also yaupons now on the market shaped like Christmas trees!

Other choices: Swiss chard, Red Oakleaf lettuce, nasturtiums, and flowering peas.

From my Lazy Gardener's Guide book, now out of print and available only as a PDF. Request a free copy at lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com.

* * *

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

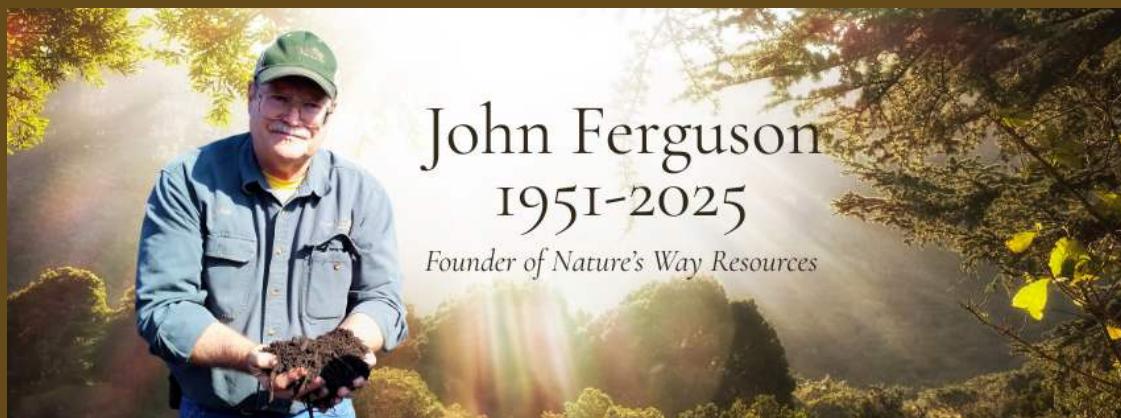
* * *

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*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
#140

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

We encourage readers to request their favorite past articles from John's Corner to be republished.

SUBJECT: Sulfur, Soil Microbes, and Healthy Plant Growth

I have had several inquiries over the past few months about growing cannabis species. As in all plants, members of the cannabis family grow best in soils full of microbes. They also do best when they are inoculated by mycorrhizal fungi. They also like soils full of trace minerals like those in the Re-mineralizer, in addition to a good organic fertilizer like those from Microlife. Hence, a soil that is 33% leaf mold compost, 33% good composted topsoil, and 33% washed

weed-free sand is a great starting point. Then mulch with a good aged (composted) native mulch.

Earthworms love this type of soil and will grow to high numbers in it. Cannabis species are often a target for parasitic nematodes. Earthworms are a natural control of parasitic nematodes, as are many species of beneficial fungi that trap and kill the bad nematodes.

Due to the pandemic, there has been a tremendous interest in growing one's own food. I was asked the other day, "Why do we need sulfur to grow healthy plants, and what is its importance?"

A few years ago, we did a series of articles on all 79 elements found in the human body. Hence, here is the article updated with new information on the benefits of having adequate sulfur in the soil. Sulfur is element number 16 on the periodic table.

MINERALS - The Elements and What They Do Part 9

16) Sulfur (S) - Found in igneous rocks at 260 ppm, shale at 2,400 ppm, sandstone at 240 ppm, limestone at 1,200 ppm, fresh water at 3.7 ppm, sea water at 885 ppm, and soil at 700 ppm, marine plants at 12,000 ppm, land plants at 3,400 ppm, marine animals 5,000-19,000 ppm, land animals at 5,000 ppm.

Sulfur is one of the few elements that is found in pure form in nature and has a yellowish color. It is often found in association with salt domes that create many of our oil reservoirs. Sulfur occurs in several forms; however, in nature, sulfur is most commonly found and used as the sulfur-oxygen compound known as sulfate (SO_4^{2-}).

The mineral pyrite or iron sulfide (FeS_2) is known as fool's gold, manganese sulfate (MnSO_4) is used as a fertilizer and as a supplement in animal feed, gypsum or calcium sulfate (CaSO_4) is often used to release excess sodium in clay soils and is used in many fertilizer formulations, and iron sulfate (FeSO_4) is sometimes used in gardening. When in college, I remember when Lake Nacogdoches was being constructed. As the construction crews built the dam, they excavated several hillsides, exposing the buried layers. In one of them were beautiful, large (3-5" long), clear crystals of a mineral known as selenite, which is calcium sulfate with two water molecules attached.

Sulfur is a basic ingredient of gunpowder. Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) smells like rotten eggs and is dangerous at high concentrations; it is a common ingredient in smog from burning diesel fuel or coal. Sulfur is used in car batteries in the form of sulfuric acid (H_2SO_4). Many of the scents we consider odorous contain sulfur.

Sulfur is found in many enzymes and vitamins; it is a main component of keratin, which composes our hair and nails, and feathers. Sulfur is an important structural element used in most proteins and many amino acids. Sulfur is a component of vitamins, coenzymes, thiamin, biotin, and lipoic acid, and participates in many enzymatic reactions.

Sulfur is found in MSM (Methylsulfonylmethane) found in plants and in animals

that reduces inflammation and decreases joint and muscle pain.

Deficiency of sulfur results in degenerative types of arthritis involving cartilage, ligaments, tendons, Systemic Lupus, Sickle cell anemia, and various collagen disorders. Sulfur helps detoxify the body, increase blood circulation, reduce muscle cramps and back pain, alleviate inflammation, and boost the body's energy levels.

Sulfur has recently been found to help protect the myelin sheath over the nerve endings.

Sulfites, sulfur dioxide (SO₂), and sulfites (SO₃-2) are common preservatives and antimicrobial agents added to foods and medicines (think wine) as they kill microbes. Sulfites can trigger adverse reactions in sensitive people, from asthma issues to behavior in autistic children. The FDA records that several deaths have occurred due to excess sulfites used in foods.

Sulfur is essential for good health: eggs, onions, garlic, cabbage, and other cruciferous vegetables are good sources of sulfur. Nuts and seeds are often good sources of sulfur. However, for proper absorption, one also needs high levels of vitamin C.

The main dietary sources of sulfur include allium and cruciferous vegetables, animal proteins, dairy, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Gardening and Landscaping Problems Associated with Sulfur (S) in soils, up to 90% of sulfur is tightly bound to humus, so SO₄-2 is the major exchange anion. Interestingly, soils around the world have carbon-to-sulfur ratios of approximately 100:1, and most sulfur in soils exists in organic forms.

Sulfur is a structural component of humic and fulvic acids, essential to healthy soils.

Sulfur is considered a primary plant nutrient (.05-1% of a plant's tissue contains sulfur), and it is used by plants only in the sulfate form. Soil microbes are responsible for converting sulfur into a sulfate form that plants can use, and then, plant roots extract sulfate ions (SO₄-2) from the soil.

Nitrogen-fixing plants (legumes) require adequate sulfur for good nodule development. If there is not enough sulfur in the soil or it is out of balance in relation to other elements in the soil, then the plant-microbe system cannot obtain nitrogen from the air and fix it in the soil. All organisms, from microbes to earthworms, use sulfur in the form of the amino acids cysteine and methionine, which are used to build proteins.

Plants use a lot of sulfur as it is required in the production of proteins and seeds, plus it improves the taste of our foods.

A few plants have been found to emit carbon disulfide (CS₂) from their roots to protect them from parasitic nematodes. Excess sulfates in the soil reduce selenium absorption by plants and can create soils that are too acidic for most plants.

Sulfur is one of the easiest leached of all mineral nutrients, and it is easy to

mistake a sulfur deficiency as a nitrogen deficiency, as well as magnesium, iron, or potassium deficiencies. Shortages of sulfur are signaled by sick crops, insect, bacterial, and fungal attack, upper leaves may turn yellow, and stems stay small and woody, roots become long and slender, and the symptoms often resemble a nitrogen shortage.

Sources: compost, native mulches, molasses, sulfates, gypsum, elemental sulfur, feathers, green sand, fish emulsion.

Note: The Re-mineralizer product is 60% greensand and a natural source of sulfur.

The interest in growing one's own food has increased tremendously as a result of COVID, as the best prevention is healthy, nutritious food. The Organic Consumers Association has an informative discussion on why growing our own food is important.

The People's Agenda for Food Democracy

Below is a link to a recorded conversation with Vandana Shiva, Ronnie Cummins, Hans Herren, and André Leu, as we discuss how the poison cartel and tech billionaires have increased their control over our food systems with GMOs, pesticides, and fake, highly processed foods. Their push for digital agriculture is an attempt to mine our data and turn it into the next external input. These billionaires are seeking to deregulate corporations and their tech tools while also pushing to increase policing and surveillance of the people. In the same way that Monsanto tried to make seed saving illegal, the poison cartel is now trying to use the pandemic to shut down small farms that produce healthy, real food. We need to promote agroecology and organic agriculture to regenerate our food and farming systems and empower people to build truly free, fair, and democratic societies. The need for active participation of citizens in shaping Food Democracy, and the duty of governments at all levels to regulate for food democracy and protecting the planet and people, has never been greater.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQTkjsS59lQ&feature=youtu.be>

Another good video on soil regeneration and carbon storage is called "SOIL CARBON COWBOYS" and is only 12 minutes long. If one thinks about it, they will find the answer to why grass-fed beef is so nutritious and good for us.
<https://vimeo.com/244995097>

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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. JAN 10: WEDGE GRAFTING, by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**. 9-11am, AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM519), La Marque. Limited space. Free. Reg. txmg.org/galveston/events/

SAT. JAN 10: GROWING GREAT TOMATOES, by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER**. 1-3pm, AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM519), La Marque. Free. Register: txmg.org/galveston/

THURS., JAN.15: NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER, AUTHOR, BOTANIST JIM MCCORMAC, 10-11:30am, Museum of Fine Arts, Brown Auditorium, 1001 Bissonnet. Sadie Gwin Blackburn Seminar. Free.

TUES. JAN. 20: HYBRIDIZING DYCKIAS by **CHRIS NGUYEN**. 7pm, West Grey Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Grey. Free. Bromeliad Society Houston, bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

SAT., JAN 24: GREAT ROSES TO KNOW AND GROW by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9-11am, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824

SAT., JAN. 31: BRANCHING OUT: AN ORCHARD GROWER'S SEMINAR by **WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-3pm, 811 14th St, Hempstead, Free. txmg.org/wallermg. Register: (opens Dec.15).

SAT., JAN 31: FRUIT AND NUT TREE SALE by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-noon, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020

Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT., FEB 14: VEGGIE GARDENING 101 by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9am-4pm, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT., FEB. 21: GROWING ROSES by ANGELA CHANDLER, 10am–noon, 1411 West Main St, League City, \$29. College of the Mainland. 409-933-8461; [Register](#)

WED., FEB. 25: SUCCULENT TERRARIUMS by JENNIFER HARDY, 6pm–8pm, 1411 West Main St, League City, \$45. College of the Mainland. 409-933-8461; [Register](#)

SAT., FEB 28: ARBOR DAY CONROE by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 8am-noon, Conroe Founders Plaza, 205 Metcalf St., Conroe 936-539-7824

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.

SAT., MAR 14: LANDSCAPING WITH NATIVES by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9am-11am, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT., MAR 21: SPRING PLANT SALE by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9am-noon, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT., MAR. 28: SEED SNAILS by ANGELA CHANDLER, 10am–noon, 1411 West Main St, League City, \$35. College of the Mainland. 409-933-8461; [Register](#)

SAT., APR. 18: HOW TO FERTILIZE FRUGALLY by ANGELA CHANDLER, 10am–noon, Mainland City Centre, 10000 Emmett F Lowry, Texas City, \$29. College of the Mainland. 409-933-8461

SAT., APR. 26, HOUSTON ROSE SOCIETY ROSE DEMONSTRATION & SPRING FLING, Memorial City Mall.

SAT-SUN, MAY 9-10, GALVESTON BAY ORCHID SOCIETY SHOW & SALE, Sat., 9am-5pm. Sun. 10am-4pm. Webster Civic Center, 311 Pennsylvania Avenue Webster. Free. galvestonbayorchidsociety.org

SAT., MAR 14: ARBOR DAY WILLIS by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 8am-noon, HEB Willis, 12350 Interstate 45 N, Willis 936-539-7824

*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!

& please patronize our Newsletter & Calendar sponsors below!

A Legend Has Passed

John Ferguson



1951 - 2025

On October 31st, 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 every 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





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 -- Founder, Mentor, and Friend (1951-2025)

John was a native Houstonian and had over 35 years of business experience. He passed down Nature's Way Resources, a composting company that specializes in high-quality

compost, mulch, and soil mixes, to his son Ian Ferguson. He held an MS degree in Physics and Geology and was a licensed Soil Scientist in Texas.

John 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 its products. He was 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 strategy and 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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