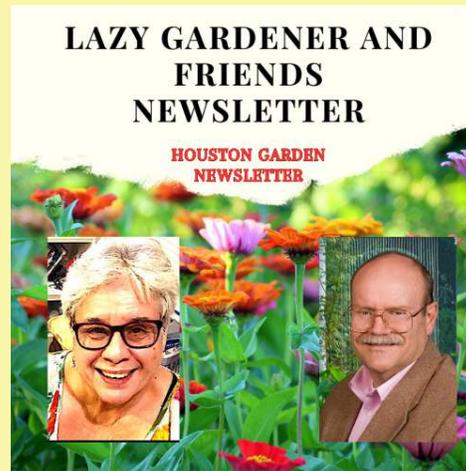


Nature's Way Resources is proud to bring you this free weekly newsletter. While we don't run ads, generous sponsors help support this project as a public service. Their names are listed below, please consider showing your appreciation by supporting their businesses!

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.



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Double-duty photo. First, kalanchoes climbing and thriving on a crape myrtle - - they're beautiful! Second: don't 'crape murder' your tree and lose this fabulous winter bark color"

IT'S NOT SMART TO IGNORE MOTHER NATURE!

By Brenda Beust Smith | The Lazy Gardener

*To cover, or not to cover, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the garden to cover
In hopes of outwitting outrageous cold,
Or to arm tender growth against a sea of freezing currents?
And risk . . . DEATH! **(Apologies to Mr. Shakespeare!)***

After all this passes, if you have plants that laughed at temps in the 20°s, please report in! (lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com)! I and lots of others need to know!

But give cold-weakened ones a chance. Wait at least 2 weeks (*unless they're all shriveled up, fading colors, and prostrate on ground. Send list of those too! We all need to know*). The good news, rains have watered for us. But it's hard to 'cover' large potted plants (along with your pipes, of course). If you can't move them inside, place on a protected south or east side, closely packed together against a heated room's wall. If growing in ground, windbreaks, rigged

teepees, or plastic coverings might help. Keep coverings from lying on top of plants and blocking all air circulation.

First wave of truly lows for us is predicted to last several days. If you can, move plants into sun for just a little while (assuming we have any).

Don't give up cold-damaged plants too soon. But this is probably a beneficial advance notice of increasing weather extremes to come. May change plans on what to plant now.

* * *



Chaden Yafi Woodson's kalanchoes leaning on her eye-popping crepe (or crape) myrtle's wonderful fall-revealed bark, a bonus of sassy, colorful trunks and limbs with sizzling shades of burnt orange, warm brown, or rust red. It lasts as long as the bark exfoliates.

Houston Cactus and Succulent Society's Chaden Yafi Woodson did bring inside all her kalanchoes (sometimes called "Mother of Millions"). although usually kalanchoes. Note: Chaden's plants are "*Kalanchoe Delagoensis*" -- (not to be confused with Mother of Thousands *Kalanchoe Daigremontiana*). "*Kalanchoe Delagoensis*" do best here. (Note: They're not vines, just leaning on her crape myrtle tree. See below.)

Chaden's care advice sounds like a lazy gardener's dream: "*Kalanchoe Delagoensis*" grow best in full sun (especially morning sun) and blooms in January. Chaden uses cactus soil with worm castings, never waters (**rain water only!**). Said to be a cold hardy plant, but Chaden admits she does move hers (potted) inside! They have been reported to easily stand our winters. Any other experience?

Before we leave Chaden, want an eye-popping read? A well-known concert pianist, Chaden actually "**plays MUSIC on her cacti!**" Not on kalanchoes, sorry. But check it out on this "*Lazy Gardener*" column link!)

* * *

NOW, QUIT LOOKING AT THE FLOWERS, and focus on crepe/crape bark. Fantastic, isn't it? Beautiful bark hues and nature's own designs all winter long. We're talking about tree crape myrtles only here, not crape shrubs (*there IS a difference which independent nurseries will show you!*) (Both crepe/crape spellings are correct, take your pick!)

When crape flowers fade and leaves fall in winter, focus turns to one of the most...



. . . sculpturally gorgeous bark we can grow here. Take a good look. When you "top" (cut straight across) the canopy of "tree crapes", this is what you're denying yourself. (Bush crape barks do NOT do this.) Smooth, often dramatic bark with artistic branching patterns really stand out in the bleaker days of winter.

But know "crape murder" (improper pruning) not only robs you of this, it sets the stage for (often fatal) infestations and diseases. The late **Linda Gay** (a treasure beyond words for this community) wrote *an excellent explanation for The Arbor Gate nursery's webpage*, and is now available also on this *link*. Please read (and share!) if you appreciate beautiful bark as well as beautiful flowers!

* * *

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!



- **GOOD NEWS FOR BUSY/LAZY GARDENERS:** Curbside pickup is now available in the [Nature's Way Resources](#) nursery, and we're offering plant preorders for special requests. Call in your order, pick it up when it works

for you, or let us try to source the plants you're looking for on upcoming shipments. *Find inventory sheet [here](#).*

- **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)*

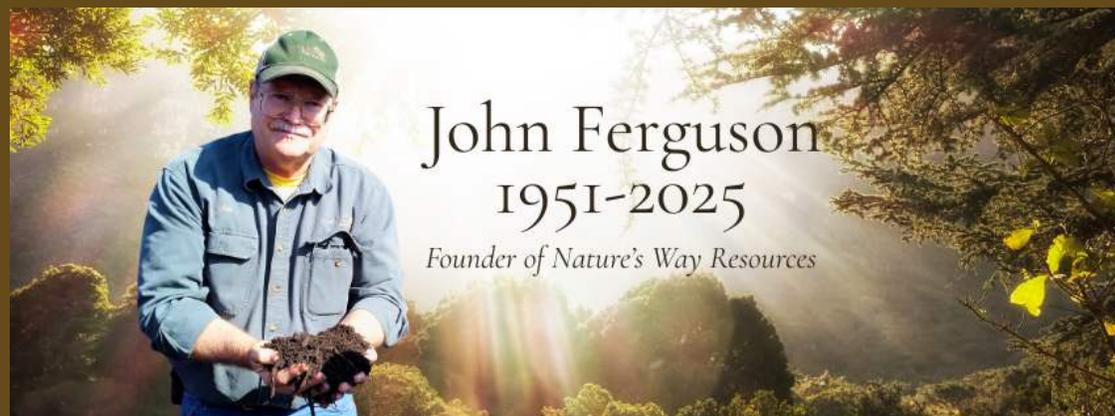
* * *

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*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

Please take a moment to read a past article of John's regarding BioChar, and its place in the garden

Subject: BIOCHAR

This week we are going to talk about another type of ash product that is showing real potential in gardening called Bio-Char (sometimes referred to as black carbon). The interest in Bio-Char started with the work of Wim Sombroek,

PhD and his research on soils in South America that have stayed fertile for thousands of years that are named the “terra preta” soils or Amazonian Dark Earth.

These patches of charcoal rich soils were created by native people living in the Amazon basin. Not only were these soils richer in nitrogen, phosphorous, zinc, magnesium and other nutrients as compared to typical tropical soils, they had up to 70 times the amount of carbon in the form of bio-char.

There is a lot of interest in bio-char as a means of sequestering carbon in the soil and to offset carbon dioxide rise in the atmosphere as well as reduce the effects of global warming. A study published in the Journal Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change (2006) found that more carbon could be stored in the soil in the form of bio-char than is produced by the burning of fossil fuels each year. Additionally it would increase production in agriculture and horticulture and reduce chemical nutrient run-off that is polluting our rivers and lakes. Sombroek called these new soils amended with bio-char, “terra preta nova”.

Bio-char is a charcoal like substance produced when organic matter is burned at a low temperature. There is a lot of research currently being done on bio-char but with two different goals. The first is to convert the bio-mass into synthetic fuels and biogas for energy production. These techniques use very high temperatures (over 500 degrees C) and very fast reaction times. Most of the biomass is converted into bio-fuels with little bio-char produced (around 10% of original biomass).

The second method is to produce bio-char for use in horticulture and agriculture. These techniques use lower temperatures (temperatures below 500 degrees C) and much longer reaction times and produce less syn-fuels and more char.

In both cases a special oven or kilns is used and the burning (pyrolysis) occurs with little or no oxygen present (30-40% of original biomass). The pyrolysis causes the carbon in the biomass to re-form into aromatic carbon rings that are extremely resistant to decay with lots of pore space and surface area (picture below). The pore spaces make good homes for microbes to live in and for water molecules to stick to, which give the char its ability to absorb and hold water till plants need it. They also allow many plant nutrients to attach to the char and prevent them from leaching out of the soil.

Bio-char has a tremendous surface area with only 0.03 ounces (one gram) having a surface area of over 1,000 square yards!

After reading numerous textbooks and studying hundreds of research papers and articles, I have observed one pattern in horticultural and agricultural applications; slow low temperature bio-char seems to almost always give a positive result while fast high temperature bio-char gives neutral and even negative results. The properties and value of bio-char varies greatly and is influenced by the material from which it is produced and its manufacture. Fast high temperature bio-char tend to be alkaline while low temperature low bio-char tends to be pH neutral.

Over time the absorption and cation exchange capacities of bio-char increases and pH becomes more neutral. Bio-char can hold 6 times its weight in water

and can greatly increase a sandy soil's ability to hold and store water.

Application rates depends on the specific soil type and the plants it is applied to. Best results occur in sandy drought prone soils (it does aid aeration in clay soils and reduces cracking and swelling but may reduce water infiltration).

Several studies have shown that bio-char greatly increases the growth and colonization of soils by mycorrhizal fungi that are so critical for a plant's absorption of nutrients, growth and resistance to disease. Other microbes growth is also increased where they absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the air converting it into biomass that eventually turns into humus.

Research has shown that bio-char enriched soils reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 60-80%. It also reduces nitrogen oxides emissions (NO₂) which contribute are 200X worse than CO₂ in its global warming effects. Note: One of the reasons artificial fertilizers have to be applied so often is that most of the nutrients leach out and pollute the air and our waterways.

Often applied with compost (source of beneficial microbes) and to reduce bio-char's dusty nature. It can be mixed into a slurry and applied topically or injected into the soil.

The archeological studies suggest the bio-char produced in the Amazon basin was a mix of bones and skin from animal, fish waste, fruits and vegetables scraps, branches and limbs, manure (both animal and human), hence was also a good nutrient source. For example bones are a good source of phosphorus (P) as well as calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg). Currently I am not aware of any bio-char sold commercially that uses these materials. As a result two different chars may look the same to the eye but have very different properties.

SUMMARY:

Bio-char is a very promising tool for gardeners to have a great beautiful garden. It does not replace a good compost, native mulch or organic fertilizer. However it is a very cost effective way to increase a soils fertility.

APPLICATION:

A good starting point is to apply one cubic foot of bio-char to 48 square feet of soil. Since it lasts a very long time, it is only applied one time (very cost effective).

Several studies suggest that bio-char works best if pre-treated first by soaking with water, composting it, or drenching with compost tea.

PROS:

- increases water retention
- increases nutrient retention (less leaching hence less fertilizer required)
- effects last a very long time
- reduces greenhouse gasses
- improves a soils physical properties
- improves a soils aggregation, porosity, tilth
- acts as a catalyst that enhances a plants ability to absorb nutrients and water
- habitat for beneficial microbes
- high cation exchange capacities (CEC)

- low in tars, resins and other compounds as compared to cooking charcoal
- easy to spread
- renewable resource
- carbon sink
- converts organic solid waste into a useful form
- bio-fuels may be a by-product
- reduces aluminum (Al) toxicity
- increases a soils microbial biomass
- increases biological fixation of nitrogen(N) from the air into the soil
- increases the humus content of soil
- increases some trees resistance to disease

CONS:

- quality, type, and value varies greatly
- tends to be very alkaline and may change the pH of the soil
- very dusty and dangerous to breath in powdered form
- rubs off on hands and clothes
- nutrient content is insignificant (most types currently available today)
- powdered forms blows in wind and can create a mess (avoid windy conditions)
- respiratory dust masks should be used when dry
- low quality biochar has tars and resins that inhibit plant growth
- limited availability
- price varies greatly
- very high temperature (1,000 degree C) has PAH (poly aromatic hydrocarbons) and dioxins which are human health toxins
- some bio-char has been shown to kill algae in waterways (this can be pro or con)

Resources:

Amazonian Dark Earths: Wim Sombroek's Vision, Multiple Editors, Springer, 2009, ISBN: 978-1-4020-9030-1

BIOCHAR: Environmental Management Science and Technology, J. Lehmann and S. Joseph, Earthscan, 2009, ISBN: 978-1-84407-658-1

The Biochar Solution- Carbon Farming and Climate Change, Albert Bates, New Society Publishers, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-86571-677-3

The Biochar Debate, James Bruges, Chelsea Publishing, 2009, ISBN: 978-1-60358-255-1

Journal of Environmental Quality, July-August 2012, Volume 41, #4 entire issue was devoted to research papers on Bio-char.

The International Biochar Initiative (IBI)

www.biochar-international.org

Note: Bio-char IS NOT cooking charcoal. Cooking charcoal is toxic to many plants due to the chemical treatment applied to make it burn better and more even.

To learn more about soil amendments by category, visit our website and choose from the numerous articles that John researched and wrote.

Click Here



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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!

FRI, JAN. 23: GROWING A GREAT LAWN by FBC MASTER GARDENERS, 1-2:30pm online. [Landscape Success 2026 - Fort Bend County Master Gardeners](#)

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

TUES., JAN. 27: SPRING GARDENING & NATIVE PLANTS by HARRIS COUNTY AGRILIFE EXTENSION, 10:30–11:30 am, Mercer Visitor's Center, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

WED., JAN 28: SOME CONSEQUENCES OF ADAPTING TO DESERT LIFE by PROF. JIM MAUSETH, UT Austin. 7 pm, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. [Houston Cactus and Succulent Society](#).

SAT., JAN. 31: BRANCHING OUT: AN ORCHARD GROWER'S SEMINAR by WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9am-3pm, 811 14th St, Hempstead, Free. txmgo.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

WED., FEB. 4: ANTIQUE ROSE EMPORIUM, 9:30-11:30am, Webster Presbyterian Church, 201 W NASA Pkwy, Webster. Parking back of church. Free. Gardeners by the Bay gibt.org.

TUES., FEB 10: RAINWATER HARVESTING by **DOUG WINGATE**, 6 pm, Cherie Flores Garden Pavillion, 1500 Hermann Drive. Free. theplumeriasociety.org

Wed., FEB. 11: CAMELLIA CONNECTION by **CHRISTY JONES & JEFF HEILERS**, noon-2pm, Visitor Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

WED., FEB. 11: THE TREE COLLECTORS by **AMY STEWART**, 10am, Bagby Hall, St. Martin's Episcopal Church, 717 Sage Rd. Free. Nancy Stallworth Thomas Lecture. Garden Club of Houston.

FRI.-SAT., FEB. 13-14: 'PLANTS FOR LOVERS' TOUR by **HORTICULTURE STAFF**, Fri. 9–10am, Sat. 10-11am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Free, Register: pct3.com/MBG

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 14: FRUIT AND CITRUS TREE SALE by **FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-noon, Barn H, FBC Fairgrounds, 4310 Hwy. 36 S. Rosenberg. 281-342-3034 Fruit and Citrus Tree Sale - Fort Bend County

SAT., FEB 14: HOUSTON ROSE SOCIETY ROSE PRUNING PARTY, 2 pm, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 1819 Heights Blvd. Free houstonrose.org/hrsmeet.htm

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: INTRODUCTION TO PLANT PHOTOGRAPHY by **IRWIN LIGHTSTONE**, 7pm, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Gray. Houston Cactus and Succulent Society. hcsstex.com

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

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. 14: 2026 SPRING PLANT SALE by **WALKER COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 8am-noon, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Office, 102 Tam Rd.,

Huntsville. 936-435-2426. txmg.org/walker

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

FRI.-SUN., APR. 17-19: 2026 KINGWOOD GARDEN CLUB GARDENSCAPES HOME & GARDEN TOUR & PLANT SALE.
\$30. KingwoodGardenClub.org

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

***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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