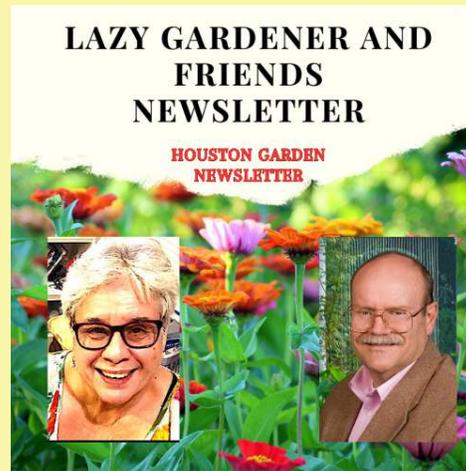


Nature's Way Resources is proud to bring you this free weekly newsletter. While we don't run ads, generous sponsors help support this project as a public service. Their names are listed below, please consider showing your appreciation by supporting their businesses!

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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By Brenda Beust Smith | The Lazy Gardener

Wonderful treat today! Looking ahead to Azalea Trail 2026 (Fri.-Sun., March 6-8), sharing history and tips is Bart Brechter, Houston's leading azalea expert and decades-longtime curator of our Museum of Fine Arts gardens and landscape operations -- including the 14-acre Bayou Bend Collections and gardens. A noted expert on Southern azaleas, Bart generously shares info & guidance on their care, cultivation, and selection for Gulf Coast climates.

* * *



Azaleas from A to Z

By Bart Brechter, Curator of Gardens

Azaleas in bloom are synonymous with springtime in Houston and along the Gulf Coast; however, this shrub is not native to Texas but to the temperate and subtropical regions of Asia. No one really knows who brought the first azalea to Houston: some say it was the local Teas Nursery (now closed), and others say it was Ima Hogg. What we do know is that the Asian azalea plant was not sold in Houston before 1930. That spring, Miss Hogg planted seven *Omurasaki* azaleas north of the Upper Garden (now the East Garden) as an experiment. Her attempt proved so successful that she purchased 250 more azaleas in December 1931. She continued to plant azaleas until she had acquired 43 different cultivars, numbering an estimated 3,000 plants. Clearly, it was Ima Hogg who popularized this East Asian shrub in Houston.

Miss Hogg was influenced by notable estates such as Bellingrath in Theodore, Alabama, Magnolia Plantation in Charleston, South Carolina, and other prominent southern gardens of the time that featured these well-adapted Asian plants. Azaleas were building a reputation like the southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) as being a southern plant. Brought to the United States in the late 1780s from Asia via Europe to Philadelphia, the azalea later found its way to Magnolia Plantation in 1848. It is here that the Southern indica cultivar was hybridized for heat tolerance. Gradually new azalea cultivars, like Formosa, George L. Tabor, and Mrs. G. G. Gerbing, were introduced to the South with similar favorable traits. From South Carolina, the azalea was established in Atlanta and then slowly made its way west to Houston. Along the way new plants were developed, like Mardi Gras, Gulf Pride, and Pride of Mobile, examples that every garden enthusiast in the 1930s desired. The popularity of the azalea in the south led it to be thought of as a southern plant, a notion that continues to this day.

Its evergreen characteristic and ability to be maintained at desired heights allow the azalea to be a perfect plant for the borders of a Houston landscape. Add the beautiful spring blooms and it is no wonder the azalea became the signature shrub of the South. An azalea has many other wonderful qualities: depending on the cultivar, the color pallet ranges from dark pink to light pink, white to red, dark purple to lilac, striped two-tone and three-tone; the shrub can grow as low as two feet or reach a height of twenty feet; and there are numerous choices in blooms, including single and double.

The azalea and its many diverse qualities allowed Miss Hogg to be creative in molding Bayou Bend's fourteen acres into the signature landscape and gardens that we know today. By 1936, the azalea had grown in such popularity that the River Oaks Garden Club organized a trail in its honor. At the time, most Houstonians were not familiar with the azalea since it was not native to the area. The garden club used the trail to educate the public on the flowering shrub and about horticulture in general. Houston's Azalea Trail, the oldest in the country, celebrates the coming of spring each year by opening select homes and gardens for guests to tour at the beginning of March. Miss Hogg was a key organizer and opened Bayou Bend and its gardens for the inaugural trail; since then, our gardens have been a perennial fixture. Now in its 77th year, the Azalea Trail is the premier garden event for Houston and the country. The 2012 Azalea Trail will showcase homes and gardens that center on the "Going Green Theme." Throughout Bayou Bend's gardens, signage will highlight the organic methods used to maintain Miss Hogg's historic formal gardens, the only such public garden in Texas to do so.

How to Care for Azaleas

Especially in Houston's unpredictable climate, novices and skilled gardeners alike wonder how to care for azaleas. Bart Brechter offers a simple approach to growing brilliant, flowering azaleas in your yard.

Basic azalea care requires four key ingredients: the right spot and time of year, mulch, water, and fertilizer. Where and when you plant is as critical as how you plant. Find a spot that receives partial shade and avoid late afternoon sun. The summer afternoon heat is particularly difficult for azaleas. The best time to plant an azalea is in the fall or spring when daytime temperatures are in the seventies. The correct preparation and planting of an azalea is critical for the best health and long-term care. The first step is to mix the existing soil with compost or organic potting soil. Second, plant the root ball one inch above the soil line. Third, cover the root ball and ground around the azalea with mulch, such as leaves or pine needles, to help with moisture control, nutrients, and temperature stabilization. A good mulch layer will help insulate the soil from the harsh summer heat and protect it from the winter cold. Planting correctly and applying mulch will help with watering. Too much water will drown the shrub while too little will dry out the shallow root system. When mulched and planted properly, azaleas will require much less water. Fertilization is recommended three times a year, once in April then again in late May and in June. While azaleas will bloom well with no fertilization, they will perform with greater yield if placed on a regular fertilization schedule.

* * *

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: AZALEAS IN THE SPOTLIGHT!

Fri.-Sun. March 6, 7 & 8, 2026, 11 am to 5 pm River Oaks Garden Club Azalea Trail. \$35/pp includes 4 private home gardens in in the Tanglewood/Memorial area, [Bayou Bend Gardens](#), [Rienzi](#) and [ROGC's Forum of Civics gardens](#).

Google these garden sites if you're new to the area and not aware of the gorgeous azaleas and complementary plants, well worth the entrance fees (primarily used to ensure their continued presence).

NEXT WEEK: Bart Brechtner shares great gardening advice for those who have never tried (or tried and failed) to grow azaleas. Both these articles will be permanently available in *Nature's Way Resources article [archive](#)*.

**Next week: more
Azalea growing advice!**

* * *



*Big Al is 100% accurate!
Big Al, a 13-foot, 1,000-pound alligator at Gator Country in Beaumont, is
always 100% right!*

RATS! TEXAS WEATHER-PREDICTING ALLIGATOR DIDN'T EAT HIS STEAK!

For those of you who don't know, Texas doesn't rely on a groundhog (35% accuracy record) for weather predictions. Our weather-predicting alligator, "**Big Al**", has a 100% accuracy record. The sad news is this year, "Big Al" agreed with Punxsutawney Phil *the 'hog), who also predicted six more weeks of discouragingly-cold weather. Until all heavy winter weather is past, our 93-year-old, 13-foot-4-inch alligator refuses to eat his favorite food (often Kentucky Fried Chicken) at his Gator Country home in Beaumont.

We can trust "Al." The 'hog's accuracy rate is about 35%. Al's accuracy rate is 100%! (Truth in reporting: alligators genetically cannot eat until all danger of frost has passed, and spring is right around the corner.) When Al's handlers tossed in his favorite Kentucky Fried Chicken (or steak), Al wasn't interested. Conclusion: we're in for at least 6 more weeks of cold weather. Poor plants.

* * *

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)*

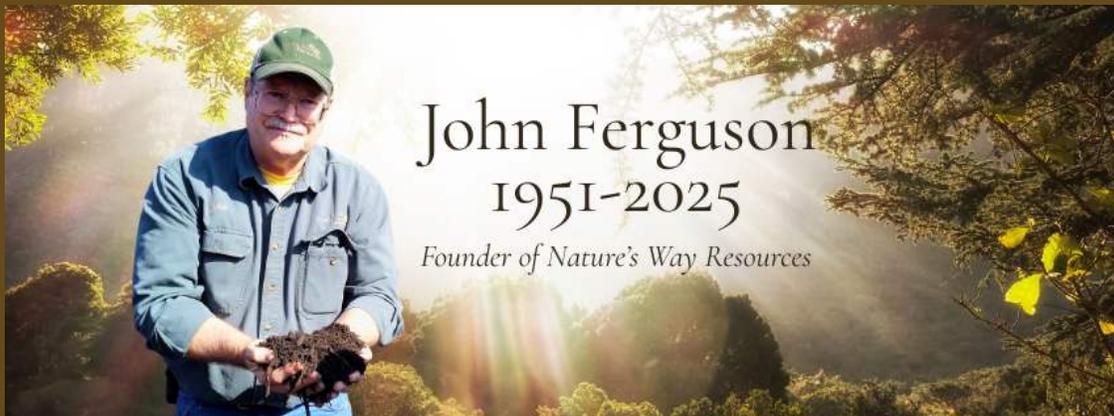
* * *

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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 Brown Patch and Take-all Patch, two common lawn issues in the area, especially in cold wet weather. To read the full article, click the link at the bottom.

Subject: Brown Patch and Take-All Patch

It is extremely well documented that **Brown Patch** is caused by the soil borne fungus (*Rhizoctonia solani*) and **Take-All Patch** is caused by the fungus *Gaeumannomyces graminis* var. *graminis*, both of which thrive in unhealthy soils.

BROWN PATCH: Symptoms include yellowish grass with a grayish ring of wilted grass at the edges of the patch, several inches to many feet across. Grass blades will easily pull off of stolons in the grayish area. The disease damages roots, stolons, and nodes. The disease tends to start in the Spring and become worse in the Fall. **Brown Patch** survives best in turfgrass with excessive thatch (healthy soils do not have thatch). It also occurs most frequently at daytime temperatures of 75-85°F with cooler nighttime temperatures (sometimes in the Spring but most common in the Fall). However, we are now seeing **Brown Patch** starting even during the hot summers.

The cheap fertilizers (ammonium nitrate being the worst) tend to be strong acidifiers, which create conditions that favor diseases like **Brown Patch**. Due to the high acidity that develops from the use of these artificial fertilizers, farmers and gardeners often add ag-lime (crushed/powdered limestone of primarily calcite, not dolomite). Note: In WW-II, the army made runways overnight by tilling in ammonium nitrate and limestone and adding a little water. It would set up almost like concrete in 24-48 hours. People today use the same ingredients and then wonder why they have hardpan and compaction problems.

TAKE-ALL PATCH – This disease is generally found in St. Augustine and Bermuda lawns. However, it will attack Bentgrass, Zoysia, Fescue, Perennial Rye and a few others. Symptoms include yellowing and discolored leaves in the early stages to brown dead areas as the disease progresses. Infected areas are generally rounded from several inches to many feet across but may be irregular in shape. Often the disease is misdiagnosed as iron deficiency or as chinch bug damage in Summer and treating for these problems actually causes the disease to spread faster.

The disease damages roots, stolons, and nodes. Hence, the roots are short, often blackish, and look rotted. Often, a gentle pull will dislodge runners from the soil due to the rotted roots. This disease is slow to get started, and grass may be infected up to two years before symptoms show. **Take-All Patch** often starts in Spring and survives best in turf with excessive thatch (healthy soils do not have thatch). **Take-All Patch** develops and grows best in cool, wet weather; however, the symptoms often show up much later in hot, dry weather. **Take-All Patch** will grow better or even prefers alkaline conditions, while **Brown Patch** prefers or grows better in acidic conditions.

Frequent shallow watering causes the most problems. Much of our area water comes from wells that tend to be alkaline (lots of dissolved carbonates of calcium and magnesium), hence watering tends to create the alkaline conditions the disease favors. When we water the dissolved carbonates (limestone) will precipitate out of the water and cement the soil particles creating hardpan and raise the pH causing alkaline conditions.

To learn more about these issues, read the full article [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!

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: STEGGIE 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

TUES., FEB. 17: 'MYCORRHIZA: FUNGI AND PLANT SYMBIOSIS' by LISA MORANO,UHD.10am. 702 Burney Rd., Sugar Land, Free, sugarlandgardenclub.org.

TUES., FEB 17: BROMELIADS: LEGACY OF PROF. WERNER RAUH/TRAVELS IN PERU by PAMELA KOIDE HYATT, 7pm, West Grey Multi-Service Center, 1475 West Grey. Free. BromeliadSocietyHouston.org

FRI., FEB. 20: WALLER COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS TREE GIVEAWAY, 11am-2pm, Waller County Extension Office, 846 6th St, Hempstead, 979-826-7651, txmg.org/wallermg, wallermgardener@gmail.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: 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: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS & ROOTS FOR CONROE TREE GIVEAWAY, 8am-1pm, Heritage Plaza, 205 Metcalf, Conroe. MCMGA.com

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 7: PLANT PROPAGATION by GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER. 9-11am, AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM 519), La Marque. Free. Register: txmg.org/galveston/events/

SAT. MAR 7: AVOCADOS, 1-3pm, by GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER. AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM 519), La Marque. Free. Register: txmg.org/galveston/events/

SAT., MAR. 14: MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS & HEB WILLIS TREE GIVEAWAY, Parking lot, 12350 I-45 N, Willis. MCMGA.com

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 GARDEN SALE, 9-11AM, Discovery Garden in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St. (FM 519), La Marque. galvestonmg.square.site

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., MAR. 28: SPRING PLANT SALE by **SAN JACINTO COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-1pm, Coldspring Community Center, 101 E. Cedar Ave., Coldspring, . txmg.org/sjmg/

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

NATURE'S WAY
RESOURCES
an organically based service company





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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