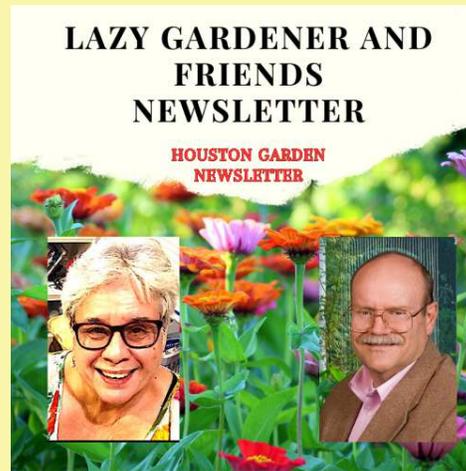


Nature's Way Resources is proud to bring you this free weekly newsletter. While we don't run ads, generous sponsors help support this project as a public service. Their names are listed below, please consider showing your appreciation by supporting their businesses!

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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"MYSTERIOUS SEEDS," "SHADE," & "BLUEBONNETS" (SUCCESSFUL READERS HAVE TIPS!)

By Brenda Beust Smith | The Lazy Gardener

**NOTE: STARTING with embarrassing correction and then . . .
an important warning!**

- *Last week mistakenly listed the wrong date: **Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Garden's huge 2026 MARCH MART WILL be Fri.-Sat., Mar. 20-21, 2026. Online Plant Preview (best place to start!) opened March 1. Happy 48th Anniversary, March Mart!!!***
- **WARNING!** Texas Dept. of Agriculture reports already 1000+ unordered/unsolicited seed mail deliveries (often labeled jewelry from China) have been reported in Texas. Fears are they "*pose risks of invasive species/pests*"! Do not open, plant or discard seeds (may contain harmful pathogens). Keep in original packaging and report immediately to Texas Department of Agriculture at 1-800-TELL-TDA (or your local USDA APHIS office). **NOTE: If you have already planted them, carefully remove plants (and soil) and immediately contact the TDA or your local agricultural extension agent .**

**NOW, SOME GREAT INFO SHARED BY OUR FELLOW (LOCAL!!)
GARDENERS!**



Persian Shield

RETHINKING SHADE GARDENING IN HOUSTON

by **SUMA MUDAN**

In Houston's Zone 9A, shade gardening is rarely a simple low-light equation. It is a dynamic interaction among high summer heat indices, warm nighttime temperatures, persistent humidity, and significant root competition — particularly beneath mature live oaks. Successful shade design in our region requires plant selection and cultural practices calibrated specifically for Gulf Coast conditions.

Emerging plant palettes and refined design strategies suited to experienced as well as mid level gardeners will greatly improve success with structural foliage plants such as acanthus (bear's breeches) for vertical architectural presence; dancing lady gingers and peacock gingers for adaptable tropical understory interest; and hardy calatheas for patterned foliage that tolerates filtered light.

Persian shield (*Pictured*) contributes durable, high-saturation foliage color, while crinum offers bloom potential in bright open shade. Camellias provide evergreen mass and winter floral display, strengthening year-round framework.

Beyond plant selection, updated establishment methods for tree-dominated landscapes -- rather than trenching or heavy soil disturbance -- current best practice emphasizes compost top-dressing, minimal root disruption, smaller plug installation, and targeted drip irrigation during establishment only. Attention to microclimates — including seasonal canopy shifts, reflected heat from masonry, and dry shade zones — significantly improves performance and longevity.

Why do certain temperate-climate shade standards decline in Houston? With fungal pressure, insufficient chill hours, and chronic heat stress, the goal becomes not merely survival but sustained vigor and design integrity.

Finally: ecological layering — canopy, understory, shrub, herbaceous, and groundcover strata — is a framework for creating resilient, visually complex shade gardens with reduced long-term maintenance inputs.

Houston shade gardens can move beyond filler plantings such as calladiums and coleus, toward intentional, performance-driven design. A regionally grounded discussion of advanced plant material, microclimate management, and practical techniques will elevate shade gardening in Southeast Texas.

Suma Mudan will be guest speaker at the open meeting of Fort Bend Master Gardeners, 10am, 702 Burney Rd., Sugar Land. Free. sugarlandgardenclub.org (<http://sugarlandgardenclub.org/>).

* * *

GETTING THOSE STUBBORN BLUEBONNETS TO BLOOM!

TIPS FROM BRENDA TORTORICE

Love the responses to earlier home-growing bluebonnet advice! Hope everyone is successful. Remember tho, our centuries-old advice on these is to plant in the fall, not in spring! Still, good luck and hope the personal successes with bluebonnets in Brenda Tortorice's Rosharon, TX, garden will help you too!

This is Brenda T's 6th year of bluebonnets in her front landscape. She started with 3 plants from Enchanted Forest nursery in Richmond, planted with "puny" results. None returned, but undaunted, Brenda bought 6 new ones and changed her tactics. Let's hear it straight from Brenda T!

"Once the seed pods dried out, before they burst open, I'd harvest pods in an open pan and store in the garage."



Bluebonnets sprouting

"Come September, I used my rolling pin to crush open the pods and separate the seeds from pods. I scraped back an inch of soil in the bed and scattered those seeds. Push the soil back over and gently water. Then let nature take over."

She added mulch in October to the bed, covering the bluebonnet seeds too. Towards the middle of November, seedlings popped up!

"Each year, I did that and never bought another plant again. Seeds do end up in other areas of the landscape bed, and when they're a decent size, I move them to join their other family members!"

Her bluebonnets are "at the end of a raised landscape bed, exposed to full sun, surrounded on 2 sides by concrete sidewalk/driveway, 3rd side is the exterior stone wall of garage, and yaupon shrubs, foxtail ferns, and agapanthus planted in the rest of the bed.

I let the plants die in place and let the seed pods dry up. Then I take scissors and cut the plants at dirt level and set my seed pods aside."



Single bloom (left) is from 2/4/26, only bloom on the plants. Curled leaves on ends of some plants are from cold snap we had. Minimal freeze damage. Right photo is from 2/23/26, 3 weeks later. Blooms are busting out!

* * *

Potpourri

- **NOT SURE** what bluebonnets look like when they sprout? Great place to see sprouts now (and watch them develop) is the [Houston Botanic Garden](#), especially in the parking lot. While you're there, check the gardens for even more ideas on early Spring color!

- **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)*

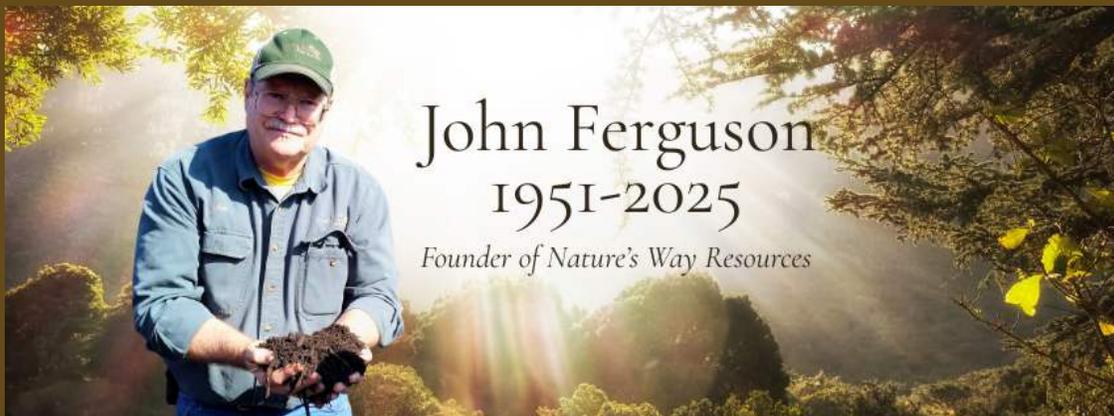
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*Brenda Beust Smith's column in the
LAZY GARDENER & FRIENDS HOUSTON GARDEN NEWSLETTER
is based on her 40+ years as the Houston Chronicle's Lazy Gardener
Email: lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com*



John Ferguson
1951-2025

Founder of Nature's Way Resources

John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

Over the next 3 weeks, we will be exploring what healthy soil is, how to build and maintain it, and more. Please read on to enjoy the writings and teachings of our late founder, John Ferguson.

Subject: What Is A Healthy Soil?

Several times over the last couple of weeks, the question “What is a healthy soil?” has come up.

So, what is a healthy soil, and how do we get there? Almost every gardening book I read has some definition of healthy soil. We go to the garden center, and we see all these colorful bags making wild claims about how wonderful and great the product is. But is it really? How many of us have torn a hole in the bag when no one is looking, so we can see what is inside? Experienced gardeners know that the large majority of these products are worthless.

So again, what is a healthy soil?

Most folks would say it is a mix of sand, silt, and clay (topsoil) with some organic matter mixed in. But is that always true? What about the microbial content or the air and water in the soil? What about the available nutrients? What form are they in, and how are they delivered?

What about the type of organic matter? Is it high-quality humus that one gets from good compost, or is it sawdust from the local sawmill?

In the last 15 years, as our understanding of the tremendous importance of soil microbiology and the role it plays in plant growth and health has changed, our understanding of a healthy soil has also changed. I hope every gardener reading this newsletter has read the book “Teaming With Microbes“ by now.

Is a healthy soil for cactus and succulents the same as a healthy soil for blueberries? Is a healthy soil for turf grass (ex. St. Augustine) the same as for trees? Is a healthy soil for bluebonnets the same as a healthy soil for swamp mallows or gingers?

As you can see from the questions above, the answer varies depending on what we are growing. To have healthy soil, we have learned that three major aspects need to be looked at:

- 1st. We need to define what a healthy soil is in relation to the plants we wish to grow
- 2nd. We need to quit destroying it
- 3rd. We need to nourish and replenish it

Hence, the answer to the question (What is a healthy soil?) is a combination of the components below:

- Organic matter from almost fresh to totally decomposed in the form of humus (humins, humic, fulvic acids)
- Minerals (nutrients, sand, silt, and clay)
- Soil life (microbes and macrobes)
- Air & water
- Plant choices
- Care for and do not destroy the health of the soil one has

We will look at each component in detail. Fall and winter are some best times for improving one's soil.

What Is A Healthy Soil – Part 2 - Coming Next Week

To learn more, read on by clicking below

[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!

NOTE FROM EDITOR: An overwhelming number of event notices are coming in. Those submitted in our exact never-changing format (word order, caps, punctuation, etc) will go in immediately. If we have to retype to format (we will!), they'll get in as soon as possible.

March

MON., MAR. 2: GROWING TOMATOES by **HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 10:30–11:30am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

WED., MAR. 4: LEARN TO GROW PICKLES by **MERCER STAFF**, 10–11:30am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

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 7: GARDEN BASICS, 10 am, LSC-Montgomery; Maverick Conference Center, 3200 College Park Drive, Conroe. Montgomery County PVAMU Extension. Free. [Register](#)

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: WARM SEASON VEGETABLES & HERBS by **FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9 a.m.-10:30 a.m. Bud O'Shieles Community Center 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, <https://fbmg.org/>

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

TUES., MAR. 17: 'SHADE PLANTS THAT GROW IN OUR AREA' by SUMA MUDAN, Fort Bend Master Gardeners, 10am. 702 Burney Rd., Sugar Land, Free, sugarlandgardenclub.org (<http://sugarlandgardenclub.org/>).

FRI.-SAT., MAR. 20-21: HOUSTON ARBORETUM SPRING PLANT SALE, 9 am–2pm, 20 West Loop North (between Post Oak Boulevard & Woodway Dr.). [houston arboretum.org](http://houstonarboretum.org)

FRI-SAT, MARCH 20-21, MARCH MART PLANT SALE, Fri., 8am-4pm, Sat., 8am-3pm, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble. Free. friendsofmercer.org, 713-274-4166

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. 21: CLEAR LAKE NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY PLANT SPRING SALE, 8-10am, Environmental Institute Of Houston,.2700 Bay Area Blvd. npsot.org/chapters/clearlake/

SAT., MAR. 28: NPSOT PINES & PRAIRIES NATIVE PLANT SALE, 8:30am, 2701 Lone Star Parkway, Montgomery. Plant list week prior [Pines and Prairies - Native Plant Society of Texas](#)

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., MAR. 28: GARDEN VILLAS GARDEN CLUB PLANT SALE, 9am-2pm, Garden Villas Park, 6720 S. Haywood Dr., Free

April

WED., APR. 8: GROW YOUR BEST ROSES 2026 by SUZANNE GILBERT, Noon–2pm, Mercer Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

FRI., APR. 10: TOUR "NATIVE WILDFLOWERS" by HORTICULTURE STAFF, 9–10am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

SAT. APR. 11: TEXAS SUPERSTAR® TRAIL & TOUR, by GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS. 9-noon, Discovery Garden in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St. (FM 519), La Marque. FREE. Register: txmg.org/

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 18: SEED STARTING & PROPAGATION by FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9-10:30am. FBC Fairgrounds, 4310 Tx 36, Rosenberg. 281-342-3034, fbmg.org/grow-your-own-2026/

SAT., APR 18: PRESENT PETALS AND PATHWAYS GARDEN TOUR by SJC Master Gardeners, 10am-3pm. Coldspring. <https://txmg.org/sjmg>

SAT., APRIL 18: OPEN GARDEN DAY by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 9am-noon, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd. 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

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

FRI., APR 24: USING IRRIGATION WISELY by FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 1-2:30pm Online. 281-342-3034. fbmg.org/landscape-success-2026/

TUES., APR. 28: COMPOSTING 101 by HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 10:30-11:30am, Visitor's Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. Register: pct3.com/MBG

May

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

THURS., MAY 14: POLLINATORS TO ATTRACT BENEFICIALS by MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, 6:30- pm, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd. Contra 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT., MAY 16: POLLINATORS & COMPANION PLANTS by FORT BEND MASTER GARDENERS, 9-10:30am, Bud O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg. 281-342-3034. <https://fbmg.org/grow-your-own-2026/>

FRI., MAY 22: CONTAINER GARDENING by FORT BEND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS. 1-2:30pm Online. 281-342-3034. fbmg.org/landscape-success-2026/

See more

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!



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**SPRING
KICKOFF!**

AT NATURE'S WAY
RESOURCES
March 7th, 2026
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Kick off the growing season with region-ready plants, quality soils and compost, sip & shop, and local vendors. Get expert help from our team to make your garden thrive this spring!

FREE - ALL AGES WELCOME

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About Us

BRENDA BEUST SMITH

WE KNOW HER BEST AS THE LAZY GARDENER . . .

but Brenda Beust Smith is also:

- * a national award-winning general feature writer & editor
- * a nationally-published writer & photographer
- * a national horticultural speaker
- * a former Houston Chronicle reporter

When the Chronicle discontinued Brenda's 45-year-old Lazy Gardener" print column -- started in the early '70s as a fun side-project to reporting -- John Ferguson called immediately (the next morning!) to ask if she'd continue publishing it for his **Nature's Way Resources**. Familiar with John's international reputation as a soil/mulch expert, she jumped at the opportunity and has been writing weekly for NWR ever since! The name, she says, is STILL 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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