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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.



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By Brenda Beust Smith | The Lazy Gardener

Dear Friends,

I recently lost my closest confidant/godfather/uncle, Bishop Rene Gracida of Corpus Christi diocese (Henry Gracida in his early days). Hard loss, so decided to repeat my first May column for Nature's Way Resources (started as a post-Chronicle reporting assignment to temporarily replace departing columnist editor loved). Not a true gardener then or now. Couldn't find so here - from Nature Way Resources archives, my 4th issue with them, which makes it PRETTY OLD! Amazing how advice hasn't changed in all these decades!

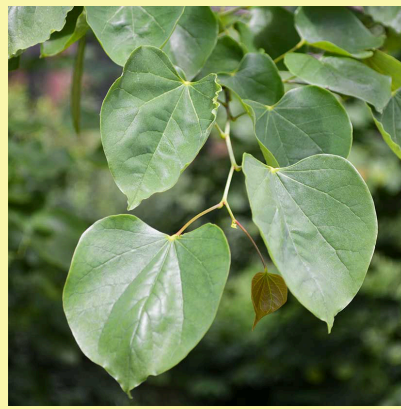
PS. NWR didn't save pictures at the time, so these are the ones NWR picked to illustrate the plants mentioned. Now you can find back issues on their website.

REDBUDS & MONARCHS & GREAT ADVICE

By BRENDA BEUST SMITH

Karen McCarver sent in this picture of a redbud, but it's no redbud I've ever seen. Nor she. It's blooming, she wrote, in the Rice Military area (north of Memorial Dr./west of Shepherd Dr.) Couple of thoughts (with help of research):

1. Not typical Eastern redbud that we normally see around here. Maybe it's a Mexican redbud?



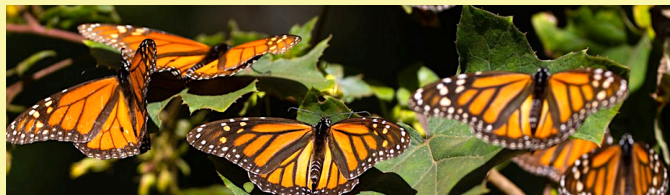
Mexican Redbud (left), source floridaseeds.com, Eastern Redbud (right), source Arbor Day Foundation

2. Last year's drought has prompted incredible blooming this year (trauma-triggered production?) Plants don't bloom for our enjoyment. They bloom to produce seed. After particularly rough-weather season (drought, Ike, etc.), often see unusually-large production - not to please us but to produce more seed because they've been so traumatized by threatening conditions, they think they're going to die. Hence they produce lots of seed to continue the species.

But, since I made all that up, I turned to my plant ID guru (*the now late, great*) Suzanne Chapman at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens for a "real" answer. She quoted (then) Mercer Director Darrin Duling: "Cauliflory is the botanical term that describes the occurrence of flowers and fruits growing directly from the main stem or trunk instead of from new growth and shoots. On young plants it doesn't look that odd since flowers cover the branches, but is amazing to see on trunks of old trees. It is a new term to me, and more common with tropical trees.

Isn't it nice to know our gurus constantly learn new stuff too?

* * *



(A reminder about the April 6 Cockrell Butterfly Center plant sale. While you're at the Museum of Natural Science, do take in the "Flight of the Butterflies" 3-D movie at the Wortham Giant Screen Theater. (STILL PLAYING!) This should be a must-see for the young and the young-at-heart.

I had the great fortune to go on one of the Cockrell's trips to the Michoacan, Mexico, monarch wintering sites. This movie tells it exactly as it is. And the 3-D has butterflies literally flying all around you, an incredible experience.

More importantly, however, the film emphasizes how important it is for us home gardeners to help replace increasingly disappearing "habitat highways" and to support efforts to help save this irreplaceable natural treasure site. Check out the threats on Texas Monarch Watch: <http://www.texasento.net/dplex.htm>.

* * *



Reader Margie wrote: "My husband (while I was gone) cut back my coral vine that had grown wild over our fence. He hated all those dead brown tendrils, but it already had a lot of new green growth on it. Did he kill it?"

I doubt it very seriously. We had a similar situation in our yard. Coral vines (like many other super-hardy vines) may have had top dieback, but be assured the roots continued to grow all through our winter-that-wasn't. All that dead growth is best removed so you can route the new sprouting vines exactly where you want them to go.

Now is, by the way, a great time to plant vines. They need a little cold to get their roots going strong before the hot summer sun starts baking our gardens. In shade, try bleeding heart vine (Rangoon creeper); it loves bright shade areas. For hot, sun-baked areas, it's hard to beat Mexican flame vine.

* * *

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)*

* * *

Want to receive The Lazy Gardener & Friends weekly newsletter?

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Address questions, suggestions, and your successes to lazygardenerbrenda@gmail.com

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



John's Corner

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

Please note that this article has been condensed from its original publishing for clarity and ease of reading.

Earthworms: A Gardener's Best Friend

by John Ferguson

Earthworms are one of nature's most important soil builders. Their tunneling activity improves soil structure, aeration, porosity, permeability, and drainage while reducing runoff and erosion. Research has shown that soils rich in earthworms can absorb water dramatically faster than soils without them, with some studies reporting infiltration rates up to 35 times greater. In healthy soils, earthworm burrows can account for a major portion of the soil's air-filled pore space, helping roots penetrate deeper into the soil profile.

Earthworm castings are biologically active and richer in nutrients than surrounding soil, often containing higher levels of calcium, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and magnesium. Their castings also improve the soil's ability to absorb and retain moisture. Studies from the Bhawalker Earthworm Research Institute found that castings absorb water faster than soil and can even pull moisture from the air in forms plants can utilize.

As earthworms process organic matter, they stimulate beneficial microbial activity throughout the soil. Research has shown bacterial and actinomycete populations near burrows and castings can be 10–1,000 times greater than surrounding soil. Nitrogen-fixing bacteria also thrive in worm-rich soils, helping naturally improve fertility. The earthworm gut acts as a biological reactor that increases microbial density and helps break down organic residues and certain harmful compounds.

Earthworms also help make nutrients more available to plants through chelation and mineral cycling. By bringing minerals up from deeper soil layers and depositing them near the surface as castings, worms help counteract nutrient leaching. Their abandoned burrows become fertile root channels lined with nutrient-rich mucus and plant growth-promoting compounds such as auxins, encouraging deeper and healthier root development.

Research has consistently linked earthworm activity with increased plant growth and crop yields. Studies have reported yield increases ranging from 25% to several hundred percent in worm-rich soils. Vermicompost has also been shown to improve seed germination, root growth, and overall plant vigor, even when added at relatively low rates to potting media.

A healthy earthworm population is one of the best indicators of healthy soil. Organic mulches, compost applications, reduced tillage, and avoiding synthetic fertilizers and pesticides all help encourage earthworm populations. In return, earthworms provide continuous natural soil improvement, fertility enhancement, drainage, and biological activity, functioning as a living underground workforce that supports long-term soil health.

If you would like to read the original article, please click below.

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If you're enjoying these deeper soil insights, there's another way to stay connected to what's happening on the ground at [Nature's Way Resources](#).

[Soil Source](#) is our ongoing update from NWR - sharing what's in stock, seasonal specials, upcoming events, and timely soil and planting tips based on what we're seeing in real time at the nursery.

It's not a separate philosophy from what we talk about here - it's the practical, "what's happening right now" layer that supports it.

No spam. No soliciting. Just real updates, soil insight, and what's happening at Nature's Way Resources.

Sign up anytime and stay in the loop.

Sign-up

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.

May

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

FRI.-SAT., MAY 15-16: HOUSTON CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY SPRING SALE, Fri. 9am-5pm, Sat. 9am-3pm, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center. hcsstex.com/

SAT. MAY 16: NATIVE PLANTS & BENEFICIAL INSECTS, 9-11AM, by GCMG. Discovery Garden in Carbide Park, 4102 Main St (FM519), La Marque. FREE. Register: <https://txmg.org/galveston/events/>

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/>

SAT.-SUN., MAY 16-17 BROMELIAD SOCIETY HOUSTON SHOW AND SALE 1-5 pm Sat., 10am -3pm Sun., Judson Robinson Community Center 2020 Hermann Park Dr. Free. bromeliadsocietyhouston.org

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

SAT., MAY 23: USED GARDEN BOOK SALE, 8am-2pm, Nature's Way Resources, 101 Sherbrook Cir. Conroe. 936-273-1200 <https://www.natureswayresources.com/garden-events/>

SAT., MAY 23: TEXAS ROSE RUSTLERS SPRING MEETING, 10am–1pm, The Antique Rose Emporium, Brenham. Free. Presentation by Dr. Kevin Ong, Plant Disease Diagnostics. www.texasroserustlers.com

June

TUES. JUNE 9: GET THE DIRT, POT, PLUNGE OR PLANT by **PLUMERIA SOCIETY OF AMERICA.** 6-8pm Cherie Flores Pavilion, Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Dr. Free. theplumeriasociety.org/

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!
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NATURE'S WAY
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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.



Lazy Gardener And Friends | 101 Sherbrook Circle | Conroe, TX 77385 US

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