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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.

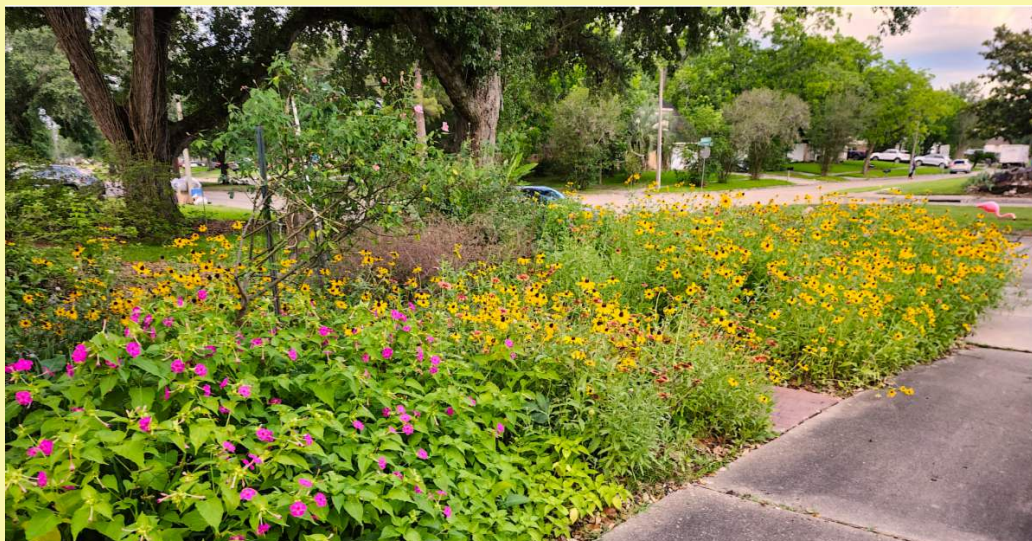


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Pre-storm (L), Post-storm (R)



**NOW, THIS IS SOMEONE I CALL
A "DETERMINED GARDENER"!**

By Brenda Beust Smith | The Lazy Gardener

Remember that old saying: "When someone hands you lemons, make lemonade!"? Top photo: Dale Phillips' azaleas, spread across the front of his home, were a wonderful sight to see, and an annual treat for friends and neighbors alike. When Mother Nature handed a gardening blow (center above), he decided to do things HER way!

Dale and I have been communicating about flowers for decades, a real educational treat for me! I was delighted to receive pictures of his most recent gardening adventures, starting with the picture at top left of his once gorgeous, azalea-packed front yard. And then so sad when he sent the top pictures of the over half-dozen of his plantings (center) that were killed during a freeze. But if there's one thing I've learned about Dale over the years, when Nature 'does him wrong,' he just bounces back with a new approach.

The photos above are a great example. L to r. Beautiful azaleas have adorned 90-year-old Dale's 58-year-old Friendswood home and front yard for a very long time. (*And fortunately, "grandfathered in" decades ago, since this display would not be allowed in his subdivision these days!*) He recalls getting letters from previous HOAs saying his azalea bushes "need cutting back!" He just sent back pictures of past eye-popping azaleas with the note, *"Oh, if I do that, no flowers next year!"* Complaints withdrawn.

When one of our worst freezes took out a huge spread of those magnificent bloomers, it hurt! But even medical challenges didn't stop Dale from responding with something hardier: wildflowers! And the larger photo above shows how perseverance pays off!

All this occurred over two years ago, and his retaliation is now spectacular. Immediate removal of damaged plants was with carefully replaced wildflower seed. For months it was -- and continues to be -- "spectacular!" And, true to his generous, "waste-not" nature, again he's now often found in the gardens "...dead-heading and giving away ... millions of seeds!"

Dale explains it's best to give a lot of consideration before embarking on such a project, adding, *"First, look at the space you want to put them. Then, when ordering, check how many different seeds are offered, depending on the area to cover, choose only 3 or 4."*

The reason, he explains, *"...some wildflowers like Black-Eyed Susans and Coreopsis take over and all the other seeds get shaded out. Conversely, if you have a large area, they all would probably come up. Lastly, only order what you need!"*

Dale finally settled on the **"Lady Bird's Legacy"** mix from **Native American Seed**. *"I just cast out seeds in the fall (September). In the first year, (they) did not cover all the space, but now (are) wall-to-wall!"*

(NOTE: MOST EXPERTS AGREE best time to plant most wildflowers, especially natives like bluebonnets, is Sept. 1-Nov. 30, when Nature does it! (More info on specific species, consult local [Texas Native Plant Society](#) of Texas chapter or [Tex. Dept. of Transportation Wildflower](#).

* * *

DEADHEADING PLANTS: DALE deadheads plants (and gives away) many seeds, explaining one good technique is to use *"an electric hedge trimmer, then pick-up all the seed heads. After that I can bring them in house and shuck the dried heads."*

NOTE: DEADHEADING? WHY DO THAT? *Wilted flowers, often dismissed as useless and pinched off, usually have "pods" attached full of new, developing seeds. Smart gardeners don't just pinch wilted ones off. They look at stems and make their pinch/cut not at that flower's base, but (if needed) down the stem above newly-developing healthy leaves and/or flowers. Why? This nudges plant to continue producing beautiful flowers on that stalk instead of focusing on going to seed.)*

IT'S HARD TO LET GO of a great resource like Dale. He added so many additional tips perfect for one of our "Local Plant Experts" Spotlight Article. See below!

* * *



More treasures from Dale's past & present gardens, l to r, Above: L TO R, Gomphena, Pagoda, Snow Queen hibiscus, Queen Emma crinum, and Frangipani vine

MORE TIPS FROM DALE B. PHILLIPS! (in his own words!)

After all those azaleas (above) finished blooming, it was a yearly ritual to rake all the leaves off into a gigantic pile (had 4 large oak trees, now 2), would go to Southwest Fertilizer and get several 25# bags of their azalea fertilizer, spread it out and then using my lawnmower with the bag mulched all those leaves and spread over fertilizer.

I am a big fan of fish emulation, so would spray the entire azalea bed with fish, my neighbor would complain about smell and I told her, the smell will be gone in several hours!!

I had some friends bring me fresh green seaweed from Galveston. I had heard that the old timers down there used it for fertilizer. I spread it out on driveway and hosed the salt off (now bear in mind, please, no idea what I was doing!)

Well, talk about nasty smelling and flies — yikes! I let it dry and raked it up and put on garden beds. Never did that again.

One of my co-workers was a big fisherman and asked if I wanted a cooler full of fish heads and guts. Oh, yeah, for sure! Like the Indians, I dug holes in the garden and put some in each hole, then planted my tomatoes.

About a day later, I went out and every tomato plant was dug up. Raccoons had come up from Clear Creek, via the drainage pipes and had a feast...!

From Brenda:

Thanks, Dale, for letting us know even the gardeners we totally envy have great stories of disappointments!!!

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?

Subscribe

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

This article has been condensed for clarity and ease of reading, find the link to the original article below.

Bio-Remediation – Nature's Way

by John Ferguson

One of nature's greatest strengths is its ability to heal itself. Through healthy soils, compost, fungi, bacteria, worms, and even certain plants, many pollutants can be naturally broken down, immobilized, or removed from the environment. This process is known as bio-remediation.

Over the past several decades, researchers have documented the remarkable ability of compost and healthy soil biology to clean contaminated soils and water while improving plant health.

Compost: More Than a Soil Amendment

Research has shown that compost can:

- Reduce harmful compounds such as polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) found in creosote.

- Encourage beneficial bacteria that naturally break down many pesticides and other contaminants.
- Bind toxic metals such as aluminum into stable compounds, reducing their harmful effects on plants.
- Reduce the toxicity of salts, heavy metals, and other plant poisons in soils rich in humus.
- Improve nutrient availability while increasing beneficial elements in crops and reducing uptake of certain toxic metals.

Compost has also become an important environmental tool for:

- Stormwater treatment
- Erosion control
- Watershed restoration
- Wetland reconstruction
- Mine reclamation
- Revegetation of degraded soils
- Green roof filtration systems

Compost Can Help Break Down Many Pollutants

Numerous studies have shown that composting can significantly reduce or degrade many contaminants, including:

- Creosote compounds (PAHs)
- Carbofuran and simazine pesticides
- Pentachlorophenol
- Dioxins
- Cyanides
- DDT
- TNT and other explosives
- PCB and TCB compounds
- Coal tar
- Diesel fuel
- Gasoline
- JP-4 jet fuel
- Petroleum hydrocarbons
- Mineral oils and grease

In many cases, reductions of 80-100% have been reported under properly managed composting conditions.

Nature's Cleanup Crew

Healthy compost supports billions of microorganisms that naturally consume or transform pollutants.

Researchers have identified bacteria, fungi, and earthworms capable of breaking down pesticides, petroleum products, nitrates, explosives, chlorinated compounds, and many other contaminants.

One of the most remarkable organisms is White Rot Fungus, which naturally decomposes wood while also breaking down difficult pollutants including:

- Dioxins
- Creosote

- Coal tar
- Cyanides
- DDT
- Pentachlorophenol
- TNT

Some studies have reported destruction of more than 90% of certain contaminants within 60 days.

Scientists have also discovered that adding simple carbon sources, such as used vegetable oil or molasses, can stimulate naturally occurring soil microbes, allowing them to remove contaminants from groundwater and polluted soils even more efficiently.

Plants That Clean Soil

Many plants are capable of absorbing contaminants from soil and water, a process known as phytoremediation.

Research has identified several especially effective species:

- Indian Mustard - absorbs lead, cadmium, chromium, nickel, zinc, and copper.
- Alpine Pennycress - hyperaccumulates cadmium and zinc.
- Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) - removes groundwater contaminants such as trichloroethylene (TCE).
- Sunflowers - remove radioactive materials and heavy metals from water and soil.
- Lemon-Scented Geranium - accumulates lead, cadmium, nickel, copper, and hydrocarbon contaminants.
- Chinese Brake Fern (*Pteris vittata*) - one of the best-known plants for removing arsenic from contaminated soils.

These plants have become valuable tools for restoring contaminated industrial sites at a fraction of the cost of traditional excavation and disposal methods.

Biofilters

Researchers have also demonstrated that biofilters made from compost, pine bark, poultry litter, and beneficial microbes can effectively remove airborne pollutants and odors from:

- Stormwater systems
- Wastewater treatment plants
- Meat processing facilities
- Industrial operations

In many cases these biological systems perform as well as conventional treatment methods while costing significantly less.

The Bottom Line

Healthy compost is far more than an organic fertilizer.

It is a living biological system capable of improving soil health, reducing erosion, filtering water, supporting beneficial microbes, and helping break down a remarkable variety of environmental contaminants.

As our understanding of soil biology continues to grow, bio-remediation is becoming one of the most practical, economical, and environmentally friendly tools available for restoring damaged ecosystems.

Selected References

Research summarized above includes work published by the EPA, USDA, Department of Energy, Rutgers University, the University of Guelph, BioCycle, Compost Science & Utilization, Organic Gardening, American Nurseryman, Journal of Environmental Quality, and other scientific publications from the early 1990s through the early 2000s

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

[Click Here](#)

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- ✓ Improve existing garden beds
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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.*

July

FRI., JUL. 10: MERCER GARDEN TOUR by **MERCER STAFF**, 9-10am, Visitor Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free.pct3.com/MBG

SAT. JULY 11: CONTAINER GARDENING by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9-11pm, AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM519), La Marque. Free. txmg.org/galveston/events/

SAT. JULY 11: HEALTHY LAWNS by **GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 1-3pm, AgriLife Extension Bldg., Carbide Park, 4102-B Main St. (FM519), La Marque. Free. Register: txmg.org/galveston/events/

SAT., JUL 11: TEXAS ROSE RUSTLERS SUMMER MEETING with **DEBORAH BIRGE**, 10am-1pm, Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble. texasroserustlers.com

SAT. JULY 18 : Plumeria Society of America Sale, Bay Area Community Center , 5002 E NASA Parkway, Seabrook, TX, 77586. Free Admission & Parking. 9 am - 1pm theplumeriasociety.org/

SAT, JULY 25: LOVE OF TREES by **TEXAS A&M FORESTRY SERVICE and MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9:00am-11:am, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

FRI., JUL. 31 – SUN., AUG. 2: CACTUS & SUCCULENT SHOWCASE, 8 am–5pm, Visitor Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. <http://pct3.com/MBG>

AUGUST

THURS, AUG 6: WEED MANAGEMENT by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 6:30-8pm, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT, AUG 8: CARING FOR TURF by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-11am, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

FRI., AUG. 14: MERCER GARDEN TOUR by **MERCER STAFF**, 9-10am, Visitor Center, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. Free. <http://pct3.com/MBG>

SEPTEMBER

SAT, SEPT 12: SEED HARVESTING by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**, 9am-11am, Texas A&M Agrilife Extension, 9020 Airport Rd., Conroe 936-539-7824, mcmga.com

SAT., SEPT. 19: FALL GARDEN FESTIVAL by **NATURE'S WAY RESOURCES**, 8AM-2PM, 101 Sherbrook Cir., Conroe. 936-273-1200. <https://www.natureswayresources.com/garden-events>

SAT. SEPTEMBER 26: GARDEN WALK: ESCAPE INTO THE GARDEN by **LEAGUE CITY GARDEN CLUB**, League City, 10-4 pm, Tickets \$20, www.leaguecitygardenclub.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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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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