

*“The Earth  
Laughs  
in Flowers”  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson*



# *“The Lazy Gardener’s Guide”*

*— Revised and Updated by Brenda Beust Smith*



*“Above all,  
our gardens  
should be fun!”*

*— Brenda Beust Smith*



*Let's get something straight right off the bat. People always say I must have a beautiful yard. Truth is, I don't even have what I would call a "landscape." I have a "Lazy Gardener's Laboratory" ...*

The "Lazy Gardener" column started when I was a Chronicle reporter. Alice Hodges was gardening columnist. I had a new house and plants from my grandmother and mother. When Alice left, the managing editor, Don Pickles, asked if anyone could write the column until he could find another "real horticulturist." I was successfully growing elephant ears and monkey grass. I said, "I'll do it!"

Since it was a temporary assignment, Beverly Harris, my editor, gave me permission to do a humorous column, "The Lazy Gardener" — a la Erma Bombeck. Don didn't care as long as I gave him what-to-do-each month tips, like Alice did, to tape to his refrigerator.

I wrote of my gardening successes (and failures) and interviewed plant society members. What an education! The column continued, I became a Master Gardener and, later, I teamed up with Sally McQueen Squire, the Bulb Lady, a master horticulturist and a stickler for doing things right. (Through her River Bend Co., my horticultural education continues to this day.)

Back then our plants came mainly from California and Florida. Weakened by our heavy spring/fall rains, intensely hot summers or prolonged droughts, they were prey to insects and disease. No wonder we sprayed so much! But, as a reporter, I knew the potential liability of recommending toxic chemicals. I took the easy way out. My motto became:

***"If a plant has problems, get rid of it. Get a plant that doesn't have problems."***

Nowadays — thanks to incredible local growers — we have super hardy plants for this area that are virtually carefree once established. Still, I take seriously my obligation to ignore my plants. I can't tout a plant as good for "lazy gardeners" unless it really is.

I don't have a sprinkler system or hired help. I water by hand, when the spirit moves. I fertilize, but not that often and certainly not on a regular basis. Plants that survive are touted in my column and in this book. When I say a plant is blooming, I know folks envision great masses of color. But what I really mean is: "Hey, it has a flower on it!"

I think Kathy Huber, Chronicle Garden Editor, and I make a perfect pair. She tells you how to do it right, and I tell you how to get away with doing as little as possible.

My best advice to you: Get to know your neighborhood nurseryman. This area has so many wonderful, knowledgeable nursery professionals. If you aren't crazy about, or can't find, plants recommended in this book, ask your nurseryman to help you find them or to suggest substitutes. Remember, he shares your growing problems and he wants your repeat business!

*Above all, have fun! Brenda*



PS. One last note on the use of botanical vs. common names. I wrote this book for novice gardeners (and experienced-but-too-busy gardeners) who need gentle, painless reminders of what to do when in Greater Houston area gardens. Most of my readers are familiar with commonly used botanical names, but prefer common-usage names. That's why (along with space restrictions) you will find mostly commonly used names here, with double references only where both names are used or for clarification.

# The Lazy Gardener's Motto

*If a plant has an insect or disease problem,  
don't treat! Replace that plant with one  
that doesn't have insect or disease  
problems in your area!*



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January						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Photo by Sally McQueen Squire



## One of the joys . . .

*... of living in our unique, subtropical pocket is that, while the rest of the country is blanketed with snow and ice, with only occasional frost covers we can have delightful scenes like this outside our windows.*

# January

## This month, you really should . . .

- Plant new rose bushes. They need 6-8 hours of full sun every day. (Valentine's Day is the traditional day to prune roses.)
- Fertilize established trees and shrubs, except azaleas, camellias.
- Keep a water source in the yard for birds wintering in your area.
- Mist indoor plants. They like humidity. Set outside on sunny days.
- Feed perennial bulbs (when they start showing greenery) with bulb food, superphosphate or bone meal. (Squirrels may dig up bulbs to get at bone meal.)
- If a freeze is forecast, water all plants. Dry roots are more susceptible to freeze damage.
- Think about it: is your landscape negatively impacting the greater ecology through water runoff or use of garden chemicals?



Rose

## If the spirit moves . . .

- Feed established trees if you didn't feed them in December.
- In water garden, add underwater plants as forage for fish.
- Plant agapanthus, allium, crinum, iris, hyacinth, montbretia.
- Fight snails/slugs by planting fennel, garlic and rosemary.
- Plant seed for arugula, beets, bok choy, cabbage, carrots, cress and watercress, endive, mustard, parsley, peas, red radish. Set out either plants or seed for collards and kale.
- Set out plants/sets of garlic chives, leeks, multiplying onions, Irish potatoes, turnips. Start broccoli, collards, eggplant, lettuce, tomato, pepper seeds in flats; protect on cold nights.
- Set out winter annuals like calendula, cyclamen, nemesia, pansies, snapdragons and primroses and narcissus for spring color. Plant chamomile, coriander, tansy, lamb's ear, feverfew. Narcissus will bloom this month!



## If you're really feeling energetic . . .

- Scrub pots well with detergent and bleach to prepare for spring annuals.

- Call Extension Service for information on best vegetable varieties.
- Plant dianthus, delphiniums, hollyhocks, larkspur, petunias, columbine, snapdragons and stocks under deciduous trees (lose leaves in winter). These need cold to establish roots. Dianthus and columbine need summer morning sun and afternoon shade.



Narcissus

## Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- Don't overwater dormant roses, bulbs or hibiscus.
- Don't panic over yellow azalea leaves. Azaleas (and other evergreens) drop leaves to make room for new ones.
- Don't set out late spring or summer perennials and annuals yet.
- Don't prune deadwood out of trees or shrubs yet. If you hit live wood, you may trigger new growth that will be susceptible to freeze damage.
- Don't prune crape myrtles unless absolutely necessary (see page 6).

*Using this Book:* This book is arranged for month-by-month gardening, but some questions come up at the oddest times! Use the index in the back for a general information reference. Great LOCAL books can give you more details on all the plants listed here. Look for these books at better nurseries. Most bookstores tend to carry only statewide or national books — fine for enjoyment, but always check growing advice against a LOCAL source. We are closer in ecology to Louisiana than we are to the rest of Texas. This book is intended to be a fun, relaxed, nonthreatening guide to gardening in the Greater Houston area. Enjoy!

*Treasure Our Climate:* Almost every section of the world has good and bad points when it comes to gardening. Off the upper West Coast, where my brother David lives with his wife Sara and children Alex and Annie, they grow the most incredible rhododendrons. How I envy them — until I remember how short their growing period is. In our unique little subtropical pocket, we can literally have blooming plants year-round and yet we also have changing seasons — the best of both worlds. I can't tell you how often I have heard folks who move here from northern climates moan that "Nothing grows here!" My answer to them: Use the right plants! Forget what you tried to grow "up nawth," and plants promoted in national magazines and on national TV shows. Learn about the plants that do best here (many of which are unknown above the Mason-Dixon line).

*Use the Internet with Caution!* The easiest way to find internet information on plants? Go to: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and type in a plant name. But for our unique subtropical pocket, the best plants may not even be mentioned and information may be more applicable to areas with more cold, less rain and fewer droughts — including areas in our same zones. Check advice against a local source. A must website: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>.

*Horticultural Therapy* promotes techniques good for lazy gardeners as well as anyone with mobility, reaching and bending limitations. HT books, for example, will teach you how to build gardens up high and narrow (to reduce bending/reaching stress), how to make pathways wide enough for easy mobility, materials to use to make cleanup and movement

easier on tender bones. Container gardening is a low-stress route for those with physical challenges. Vertical gardening brings vegetables, fruits and flowers within easy harvesting reach. (*The American Horticultural Therapy Association — www.ahta.org — is a great resource.*)

**Pruning/Crape Murder!** With the exception of grafted roses, **NO** ornamental trees or shrubs here must be pruned. Trees and shrubs will bloom, bear fruit — whatever — without being butchered. Pruning leaves an open wound on trees and shrubs, inviting insects and disease. Prune only when absolutely necessary.

*When is pruning necessary?* Correct pruning of fruit trees does improve production (even though the right varieties also produce without pruning). Remove branches growing out of bounds, spoiling the look, hitting the house or rubbing open wounds on other branches. Prune off dead branches. *Never “top” a tree (cutting across crown).* This weakens plants, inviting insects/disease. So why do people butcher crape every winter? Probably because up north they prune severely to promote quick blooming since they have such short growing seasons. We don't! This month — only if absolutely necessary — prune althaeas, crape myrtles, hibiscus, plumbago and other summer-blooming trees and shrubs and evergreen trees/shrubs. *Prune AFTER they bloom:* azaleas, camellias, climbing roses, dogwood, hydrangea, jasmines, pittosporum, oleander, redbud, spirea, viburnum, wisteria and other spring bloomers.



*Wisteria*

**Raising Beds:** Many landscape plants (not trees) do better if planted in a raised bed. Use organic matter to raise the area 8-12 inches. Never add more than 2 inches a year over tree roots. Border area with timbers, bricks, plants, etc., to stop soil from washing away during heavy rains. If you use a solid border, leave “weep” areas so excess water can drain off.

**Roses** are now so confusing, I find it easiest to think of them as “grafted” or “own-root.”

1. **GRAFTED:** To get magnificent typical “rose” flowers, growers graft plants with fabulous blooms onto hardy root stock. Grafted roses usually have upright branches with often sparse foliage. They prefer their own raised beds (no nearby plants). Prune back to a two foot high “vase” shape in January. Expect blackspot on most grafted roses. It only kills weak plants. Two grafted roses, ‘Belinda’s Dream’ and ‘Knock Out’ earned EarthKind™ honors in Texas A&M trials that rival any torture a lazy gardener could devise. (*For more information, contact EarthKind™ roses, 17360 Coit Road, Dallas, TX 75252; website: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkindrose>.*)

2. **OWN-ROOT:** These are roses grown on their own rootstocks and include antiques as well as new roses. More shrub-like and usually easier to maintain than grafted roses, some are evergreen and some everblooming. Warning: some “carpet-style” own-root roses are nicely contained in colder climates but spread like snakes in our long growing season!

“Antiques” — roses documented pre-1867 with a known history — have softer, multi- or single-petaled blooms in pastel reds, pinks, yellows and whites. Not all antiques are carefree in all areas, so buy from a nurseryman you trust. Most grow larger and wider in this region than labels indicate. Generally, they do not need pruning unless they grow out of bounds.

‘Caldwell Pink’ and ‘Climbing Pinkie’ are two antiques favored for City of Houston public plantings. Other good choices are ‘Maggie,’ ‘Souvenir de la Malmaison,’ ‘Katy Road Pink,’ ‘Perle d’Or,’ ‘Mutabilis,’ ‘Annie’s Red,’ ‘La Marne’ and ‘Gartendirektor Otto Linne.’

All roses appreciate full sun and a well-drained bed. Rose tip: Bury coffee/tea grounds and

banana peels around roses or sprinkle Epsom salts around the base stalk to improve blooming. (For more advice, consult the Houston Rose Society — [www.houstonrose.org](http://www.houstonrose.org) — the nation's largest rose society. The Texas Rose Rustlers — [www.texas-rose-rustlers.com](http://www.texas-rose-rustlers.com) — focus on antique roses. See "Antique Rose Garden" design, page 21.)

**Shrubs & Trees:** Plant trees and shrubs in January and February so they can set strong roots before summer. Prune branches slightly to compensate for root loss during transplanting. Know their sun/shade and drainage needs! Before planting, loosen the roots, especially those growing in a circular pattern. If you don't, they may continue circling, eventually killing the plants.



*American beautyberry*

*Evergreen vs. deciduous (loses leaves in winter)?* Our winter down time is, at most, only 1-2 months. Some deciduous plants are evergreen in warm winters. Take time to appreciate the beauty of exposed winter barks. For a hardy shrub, consider American beautyberry, ardisia, dwarf Barbados cherry, hawthorns, hollies, pineapple guava (feijoa), possumhaw, wax myrtle, yaupon and other berry-bearing shrubs and trees to attract birds to your garden. Two hardy evergreens: Walter's viburnum and Chinese witch hazel. Azaleas require a well-drained spot with noon/afternoon shade and slightly acidic soil. Plant with roots fanning outward along top soil layers. Mulch well; keep well watered and do not plant anything else close by them.

**Trees:** Most problems with trees (and shrubs) result from planting wrong varieties. Choose from wonderful native Southern shade trees, including bald cypress, bur oak, Drummond red maple, green ash, parsley hawthorn, Southern magnolia, swamp chestnut oak and white oak, to name just a few. Two other good landscape trees are fringe tree and parsley hawthorn.

Plant large trees at ground level. Dig the hole the size of the root ball. Fill hole with water. Wait. If water is still in the hole 2-3 hours later, find another, higher spot. If not, break up removed soil. Do not add anything to it. Replace enough soil so root ball sits 4-6" above ground level. (Everything sinks slightly along the Upper Gulf Coast.) Set tree in hole, fill in loosened soil, mounding it up over the above-ground level. Mulch well, leaving a small open "collar" at tree base. Never cover this area with mulch or plantings.

Do not feed newly planted trees the first year. Use a root stimulator. Mulch a 3-foot circle to keep grass from competing with young roots for nutrients. Keep well watered, but not wet.

**Flowering Trees** add charm and elegance, pulling the eye upward, helping to expand our shrinking yards. Some require excellent drainage, so learn each one's needs before you plant. And make sure its water/drainage requirements are the same as surrounding plants. Don't put a drought-tolerant orchid tree (*Bauhinia*) or vitex near Louisiana irises or azaleas (both need regular summer watering). Fruit trees, especially dwarfs, have beautiful flowers and delicious fruit. Nurseries and organization fruit tree sales carry best varieties. Talk with your neighborhood nurseryman, or consult a local growing guide, before making a major investment. Here are a few hardy small trees to consider (heights are approximate):

BAUHINIA. Native orchid tree. 15', native, various colored flowers.

CHERRY LAUREL. 20', white flowers, evergreen, shiny green leaves.

CRAPE MYRTLE. Variety of heights. Named variety are more insect/disease resistant.

FLAME LEAF SUMAC. 20', white flowers, red fruit, fall color.  
 FRINGE TREE. 20', attractive, fragrant fringe blooms.  
 LEATHERWOOD. 12', large white flowers.  
 MEXICAN PLUM. 20+', white pink flowers in spring, reddish purple seed pods. A great tree.  
 MIMOSA. 30', pink feathery flowers that attract hummingbirds, umbrella-shaped.  
 PARKINSONIA. 30', fernlike foliage, yellow flowers.  
 PARSLEY HAWTHORN. 15', white/pink flowers, red berries, very hardy.  
 POSSUMHAW HOLLY. 18', red/orange berries all fall, winter, spring.  
 PRIDE OF BARBADOS. 12', red/orange/yellow flowers. Needs excellent drainage.  
 REDBUDS. Texas, Good choices for us: Mexican and Oklahoma redbuds; excellent drainage.  
 MEXICAN BUCKEYE. 20', Mexican has pink flowers and needs to be extremely well drained. Red or scarlet buckeye has red flowers and tolerates slightly wet soils. Bloom March through May.  
 SWEET OLIVE. 20', white flowers, incredibly fragrant, pretty foliage.  
 VITEX. 12', drought tolerant, lavender spiked flowers.  
 DWARF SOUTHERN MAGNOLIAS. 18', smaller versions of the native magnolias with the same large white saucer-shaped flowers.  
 SAUCER (PINK/JAPANESE) MAGNOLIA. 20', pink/mauve "tulip" flowers in spring before leaves. In my Awesome Plant Hall of Fame. (See page 41.)

Two wing silverbell and styrax are two additional blooming trees recommended by naturalistic landscaper Mark Bowen. His two books, "Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas" and "Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast" include more hardy recommendations for trees and shrubs.

Remember, if a tree is touted as drought-tolerant, plant it in a site with excellent drainage and don't overwater it!

*God is the experience of  
 looking at a tree and  
 saying, "Ah!"*

-- Joseph Campbell



*Come Spring, everyone wants to plant azaleas and dogwoods. And no wonder. They are so spectacular. Both are certainly worth trying. But please don't take it personally if yours don't make it — especially the farther south and west you live.*

*Azaleas and dogwoods prefer a slightly alkaline, very sandy soil with an overhead canopy of oaks and/or pines. They do best north and east of downtown Houston, although they will grow west and south in exactly the right locations and conditions.*

*This scene above was shot in the Rose City yard of my in-laws (Porter B. "Dick" & Emma Lu Smith) where my sister-in-law Bess Allen lives now. This little city, between Vidor and Beaumont, is absolutely gorgeous in the spring when dogwoods the size of oak trees, camellias and azaleas topping 15 feet or more, wisteria and bridal wreaths are all blooming at once.*

*Go soon if you want to see splendid native dogwoods in East Texas (start at Woodville). Late March is the best viewing time. The beautiful Piney Woods of East Texas are fast disappearing as a result of our heavy demand for lumber.*





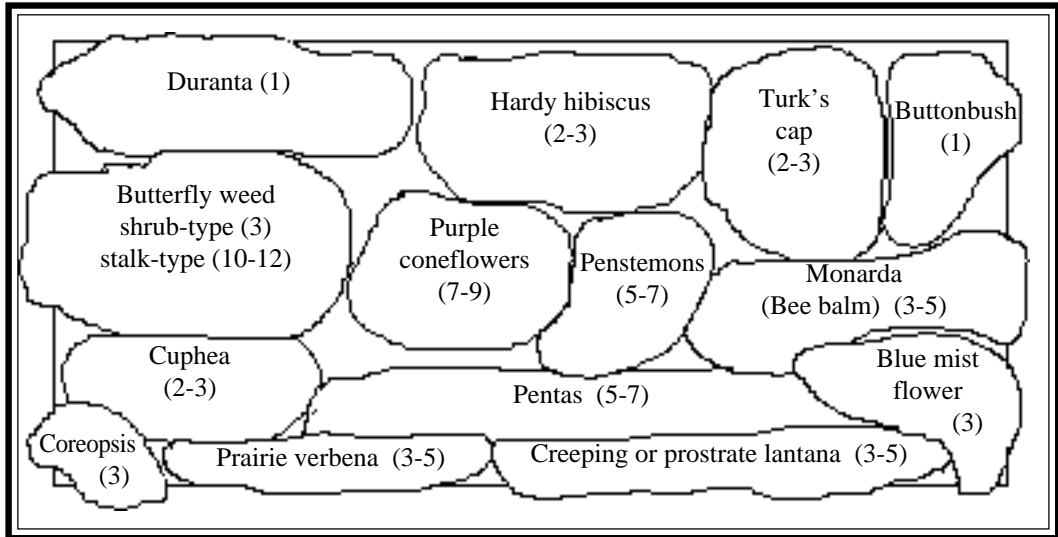
Sunny side



# A Butterfly Garden



Partially Shady side



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 12' x 8' garden.

**To attract butterflies**, provide them with a water source (bird bath or pond with sloping edge), nectar (food), host plants on which to lay eggs and nearby shrubs for shelter. Don't kill caterpillars! Identify butterflies in your garden. This garden needs sun, so even the "shady" side should get at least some sun. Butterflies like to feed in the open where they're protected from enemies. (H = plant extra high; needs to be EXTREMELY well drained or may not bloom.)

**BLUE MIST FLOWER** (*Caryopteris*). 2' tall perennial with small flower clusters.

**BUTTERFLY WEED** (*Asclepias*). Orange/red flowered shrub or stalk variety (Mexican oleander) with yellow/red/orange flowers. Host plant for Monarch butterfly. **H**

**BUTTONBUSH** (*Cephalanthus*). Large shrub, creamy white flower balls.

**COREOPSIS**. Native, yellow, daisy-like flowers on 1-3 foot stalks. **H**

**CUPHEA** (Cigar plant). 2' with dark green leaves, orange/red cigar like flowers. **H**

**DURANTA** (Golden dewdrop). 6-8', purple/white cascades of orchid-like blooms. **H**

**HARDY HIBISCUS** (mallows). Native, 4-6', root-hardy. Pink, red, white flowers.

**LANTANA**. Super hardy. Don't overwater. Pinch tips to make bushier. **H**

**MONARDA** (bee balm). Fluffy red or lavender flowers, 1-2' stalks.

**PENTAS**. Multicolored flowers on 1-3' stalks; nice foliage mounds.

**PENSTEMONS**. Native, delicate flowers on 1-3' stalks. **H**

**PURPLE CONEFLOWERS** (*Echinacea*). Purple flowers with large brown center cones. **H**

**TURK'S CAP**. Native, 4'-6', red hibiscus-like flowers.

**VERBENA, PRAIRIE**. Low, spreading blooming groundcover in variety of colors. **H**



Butterfly weed (also pictured on cover)

**More good butterfly plants:** black-eyed Susans, cassia, citrus, dill, fennel, flame bush, jatropha, joe-pye weed, Mexican heather, parsley, phlox, plumbago, porterweed, rue, salvia, senna, shrimps, verbena, vitex and yarrow.

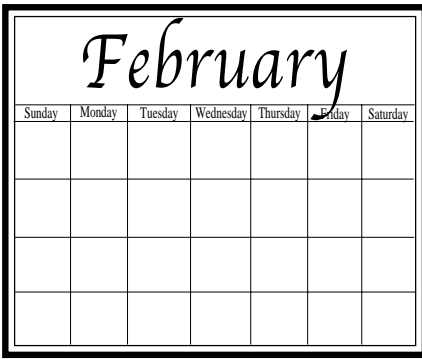
**Annuals:** asters, cosmos, petunias, sunflowers, zinnias — to name a few!

**Vines:** butterflyvine, Carolina jessamine, coral honeysuckle, coral vine, crossvine, Dutchman's pipevine, Mexican flame vine, passionvine, thunbergia, trumpet vine.

With the exception of butterflyweed and passionvine, these are all nectar plants. Also include host plants, such as dill and fennel. For a list of which plants attract which butterflies, consult "*Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas*" by Mark Bowen (River Bend Co., Houston).

(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)

A BUTTERFLY GARDEN



*Bluebonnets . . . Yes, they are!*  
*Some call these Aggie maroon bluebonnets but they look more like University of Houston Cougar Reds to me. Whatever, put plants in now!*

## February

*This month, you really should . . .*

- Cover plants, water well if a freeze is forecast. Coldest days usually occur this month.
- Remove covers first thing in the morning if it's above freezing. Heat builds under covers.
- Mow the lawn once now to allow sun to reach roots.
- Prune grafted roses; Valentine's Day is traditional time — to trigger healthy new growth.
- Plant later-blooming bulbs, corms and tubers like amaryllis, canna and gladiolus.
- Appreciate the beauty of bare bark. Show kids how you can see bird and squirrel nests.

*If the spirit moves . . .*

- Root vine cuttings now. They should grow quickly. (See Vines, page 13).
- Plant Louisiana phlox and oxalis around late-appearing shrubs like lantana and hamelia.
- Plant beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, chard, collards, green onions, Irish potatoes, lettuce, mustard greens, turnips. In pots, start crookneck and zucchini squash.
- Divide crowded perennials like daylilies and daisies.
- In the water garden, raise potted water lilies closer to the warmer surface water.

*If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Pinch the tops off groundcovers to make them spread faster.
- Apply a time-release fertilizer to bonsai.
- Pot plumerias. Set them outside on pretty days; move inside at night.
- Put in plants, not seeds, of alyssum, asters, delphiniums, hollyhocks, larkspur, marigolds, poppies, snapdragons, stocks — they need cold. (Most fade when it gets hot.)
- Remove spent blooms on pansies, daffodils, dianthus, calendulas, cyclamens, snapdragons and other early-bloomers so they will produce more flowers.

*Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Don't fertilize lawn yet. Wait until it needs to be mowed again. That way you know the

grass roots, and not winter weeds, will make use of the fertilizer.

- Don't fertilize plumerias yet either.
- Don't remove greenery from fading daffodils and other naturalizing bulbs. Dying foliage replenishes bulb. If too unsightly, just roll the foliage up, anchor to ground.
- Don't prune climbing roses. Wait until after they bloom.

## Our Gardening Year Starts This Month . . .

. . . so I'd like to share with you some observations I've made over the 30+ years I've been writing the "Lazy Gardener" column for the Houston Chronicle:

- Watch pecan trees. They bud after all danger of freezes have passed. (Smart old wives!)
- Quit looking north or west for gardening advice.
- If a plant is recommended by local experts, don't write it off just because you've never heard of it. Many of our hardiest, most spectacular plants are now coming up from Mexico.
- Put drought-tolerant plants in beds 10-15" above ground level. Don't overwater them!
- County Extension offices have beautiful demonstration gardens manned by Master Gardeners and lots of free gardening literature. Your taxes pay for these benefits. Use them! Texas Cooperative Extension offices are listed under Counties in the telephone book.
- Make the soil your primary focus. Healthy roots make healthy plants. Use tons of compost. Stimulate soil activity with boosters like FosterSOS, Medina, seaweed extract or fish emulsion. Follow label directions. With these, as with fertilizers, too much can be deadly.

## Color in Our Gardens:

- Red, yellow and hot pink make us more energetic. Reds increase appetite. Yellows make us happy. Soft pinks, lavenders, blues and greens soothe, relax. Pink looks sweet and fragrant. It's said it is difficult to argue with someone in pink! Green is restful, especially on tired eyes. Blues and lavenders are cooling.
- To make a small yard look bigger, plant "hot" colors (red, orange, fuchsia) close in. In back of the yard, use pastels and white (they look farther away than they actually are). To make a too-large area look more intimate, do the reverse: "hot" colors in the back of the yard and pastels close in.
- For eye-popping front yard displays, use yellow, hot pink, fire engine red and white. These are easier to see from a passing car than lavender and muted red or pink. Use lower-growing yellow flowers around uneven pathways where folks might trip. Yellows and oranges draw the eye faster than any other color.
- When possible, coordinate garden and house colors. When gardens adjacent to the house "just don't look right," clashes may be to blame. White and/or gray flowers or foliage with colors help create harmony. White also intensifies colors of nearby flowers and plants.
- Use white flowers/foilage around areas used in evenings when white is all you can see.



*Orange and yellow always draw the eye which may be one reason why one of my favorite gardeners, Dr. Charles Squire, used to plant marigolds (and zinnias) in his front yard every spring.*

In areas of blasting hot sun (such as near water), pale pastels often become washed out. Variegated plants may look like they're dying if used all alone. Strong solid greens, reds, oranges, yellows, etc. may compete better.

Color has a much greater impact when coupled with hardscapes (rocks, birdbaths, fences, benches, etc.). Large rocks pull us back to nature by anchoring us to Mother Earth. Their strength offers sort of a metaphysical protection from the stresses of everyday life. Locate at least one large interesting rock somewhere near the site where you sit outside at night.

## *Azaleas — Some Can ... and Some Can't*

My longtime neighbor-across-the-street, Jerry Smith, had HUGE azaleas growing at the top of the ditch in front of his house. Attempting to copy his success, I planted a row of 13 azaleas along the top of our ditch. They all died. I planted 13 more, working peat moss into the soil. That's what he said he did. They all died.

I tried some more. By that time, I had started writing the Lazy Gardener column and I knew (finally) how to plant them correctly. I dug my holes, and made little mounds of soil in the center. I loosened the azalea roots and draped them over the mound so half the root ball was above ground. I carefully mounded the soil up over them and mulched them well with pine bark. I fed them azalea food and kept them watered in summer. They all died.

Gradually I began planting other — far more successful — things in that area. One day I was out working in that garden when another neighbor walked by. “Ah, ha!” she said, “I see you're working in your azalea graveyard today!” Oh, well. Some folks can grow azaleas. Some can't. If you're a “can't,” don't fight it. There are plenty of other beautiful plants out there better suited to lazy gardeners.

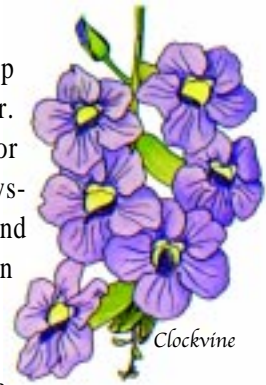


*Tomatoes:* Some societies called this a “love apple,” an aphrodisiac! Serious Tomato Growers already have plants in pots protected from freezes. Better nurseries get plants in this month. Good varieties for us at this writing: ‘Champion,’ ‘Celebrity,’ ‘Dona,’ ‘Early Goliath,’ ‘German Johnson,’ ‘Hawaiian,’ ‘Sweet Chelsea’ (cherry) and ‘Texas Wild’ (tiny native). New varieties come out all the time; ask a nurseryman you trust. Plant in pots with room for roots. In March, transplant into raised (1-2') beds in full sun. Master Gardener sales offer proven and new varieties of tomatoes and peppers. Watch newspapers for details.

*Eliminate (Reduce) the Lawn!:* Lawns are *de rigueur* in today's suburbs and civic groups get suspicious when anyone veers too far from the norm. But a typical suburban St. Augustine lawn uses more water than all other plants and trees on that yard combined. Change is in the air! Start slowly if you want to reduce, or eliminate, lawn area so it's not such a shock to neighbors. Every year, gradually curve existing beds outward, adding flowers or striking plantings in front of shrubs. Flowing lines and a neat, trim, distinctive border say “this area is planned” and planned gardens are psychologically easier to accept. If flowers get scraggly in off seasons, fill in with colorful annuals. Or, stick a fun, decorative little sign in the middle of the patch that says “*Wildflowers At Rest. Please Don't Disturb.*” Invite visitors in by putting little identification stakes in each different plant grouping.

Use humus-enriched topsoil to raise beds 8-12" above ground level. Large stepping stones

and/or pathways gravel, coarse sand or even layers of pine needles keep expanding gardens from looking unkempt and make maintenance easier. The more area you dedicate to a garden, the more potential there is for weeds — and you know how neighbors feel about weeds. Several newspaper layers under a thick mulch makes an area look more planned and eliminates many weeds. Mulch keeps plant roots cool and moist in summer, so you water less often. In winter, it keeps soil warm and moist, helping plants to survive very low temperatures. Organic mulches gradually decay, replenishing the soil so plants are as healthy as possible.



**Roses:** St. Valentine's day is (on the average) the best time to prune roses (see page 6). All roses perform best if they have good air circulation around the branches. On hybrid teas, prune back to three strong canes, 24 inches high, in a vase configuration. Prune away any side branches growing toward the center of the plant. Most antique varieties will do just fine whether you prune them or not. But pruning may help improve blooming and make plants more attractive. Prune out any weak or crossing branches.

**Favorite Lazy Gardener Vines:** Vines create vertical interest and, on lattice, provide privacy screens in narrow areas. Vine-covered arbors beautify entryways. Great vines for sun include butterfly vine, butterfly pea vine, cape honeysuckle, coral honeysuckle, coral vine, cross vine, cypressvine, 'Don Juan' rose, evergreen wisteria, Mexican flame vine, passionvines, Rangoon creeper, 'Mortensen Hardy' grape, Dutchman's pipe vine.

Partial or very bright shade: bower vine, clockvine (also a *Thunbergia*), Carolina jessamine, Confederate jasmines (or any of the fragrant jasmine vines), crossvine (*Bignonia*), solanum, sweet autumn clematis, thunbergia (Mercer Blue or grandiflora). In deeper shade, try potato vine with its striking heart-shaped leaves, ivies, climbing ferns or Confederate jasmine.

Annual vines for eye-popping summer color (often reseed or may be root hardy in mild winters): alamanda, black eyed Susan vine, hyacinth bean vine, mandevilla, morning glories.

**Fertilizing:** The Gulf Coast is a subtropical region with an 11±-month growing season. Nutrients can be quickly depleted. Fertilizers are labeled with 3 numbers. Very simply put: the first stands for percentage of nitrogen, to promote green growth; the second is phosphorus, to promote flower/fruit production; the third potash, for strong roots and overall health.

Never overfertilize blooming plants with a high nitrogen fertilizer. Conversely, using a high middle number fertilizer on lawns encourages blooms on weeds, spreading weed seeds around. While most flowers need a high phosphorus fertilizer, a few flowers — most notably hibiscus — prefer a low phosphorus or low middle number fertilizer.

If you want to use a single fertilizer for everything, use a balanced one — all numbers equal. Use a balanced fertilizer on everything this month, to promote overall health.

Ultrahigh middle number fertilizers promote blooming but be forewarned: phosphorus does not break down as quickly as other elements. If a phosphorus buildup occurs in soil, plants can't take in other nutrients. Spray water-soluble, extremely high middle number fertilizers only on leaves. Never apply to the soil. Alternate with a balanced fertilizer and Epsom salts. Use soil stimulators to keep soil microorganisms active and healthy.

Fertilizers come dry, water-soluble or slow-release (dry). If the ratio is correct for the plant, they are equally beneficial. Dry fertilizers are easiest to apply and least expensive. Water-soluble fertilizers, mixed with water and sprayed on, are absorbed by leaves for quicker results. Slow-release fertilizers are usually the most expensive, but need be applied only 2-3 times a year. Plant society members often apply a slow-release in spring, alternating with supplemental dry and water-soluble during the growing season. With all fertilizers, water well first, fertilize, then water again. Do not allow dry fertilizers to touch plant leaves or stems.

*Soil pH* stands for “potential of hydrogen” or “the negative logarithm of the hydrogen ion concentration or, more precisely, of the hydrogen ion activity.” With soil, pH refers to a 0-13 soil alkalinity/acidity scale. 7.0 is neutral. Higher is more alkaline; lower, more acidic. Most plants prefer a neutral soil. Some (notably azaleas, camellias, hydrangeas, magnolias, roses and tomatoes) like a slightly acidic soil. Soil is a complex universe. Man has only explored a small portion of it. If you’re going to mess with individual elements, get professional guidance, or you can make a mess. Compost is the safest route to healthy soil. Good quality compost is the way Nature takes care of soils. As it decomposes, it corrects whatever’s wrong.

*Feng Shui in the Garden:* For feng shui enthusiasts, establishing good chi (or energy) in the garden is the ultimate goal. Feng shui is an ancient, very complex approach to creating harmony in your personal universe as well as in the world at large.

According to feng shui (simplifying a very sophisticated concept), wavy and curving lines encourage the flow of good chi. Straight lines create negative flow. If you want to know more, you’ll have to delve deeper yourself. Books abound on applying feng shui techniques to the garden and you can make them as complicated, or as simple, as you wish. Feng shui is both a fascinating and fun study that might (who knows?) lead to a much more successful landscape!

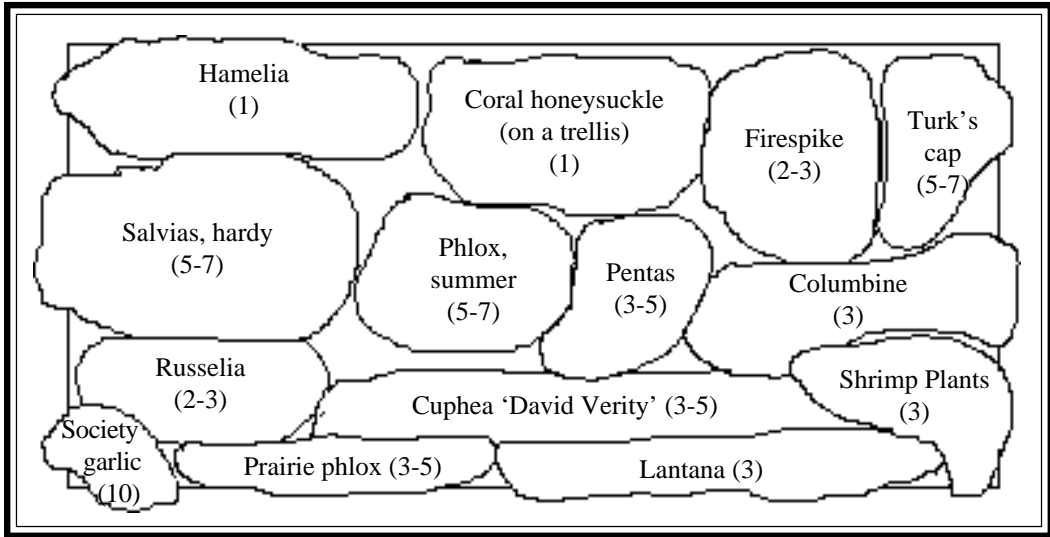
*Fireflies:* Maybe good feng shui would bring back fireflies. Why have they disappeared? Some experts say pollution or mosquito spraying; others say it’s all the competing night lighting now. Maybe they’re there, but we just don’t see them. Still, sightings are reported around Houston. If you want to check out those who are searching around Houston for them, log onto: [www.burger.com](http://www.burger.com), and click on “Fireflies.”

*Gnomes in the Garden:* In times past, gnomes were viewed as good friends to gardeners. One ancient German folktale says gnomes are the offspring of a socially scandalous marriage between a mythical dwarf and a fairy (see page 52). From their fairy mother, gnomes inherited a love of flowers and plants and they especially delight in statues of themselves. All gnomes, say those who know these things, have rosy red cheeks called gnomes and wear pointy hats. Some say they worked in mines and filled the hats with grass to protect their heads from falling rocks. Most legends agree these little people are easy-going, fun-loving creatures who are a big help to gardeners. But they don’t have much use for those who think gnome statues are as gauche as pink flamingos in the garden. They aren’t known for being spiteful, but if you say bad things about gnome statues and then a plant dies...





# A Hummingbird Garden



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

*To attract hummingbirds,* feeders are very effective. Solutions should be changed every 2-7 days, depending on the weather. How much easier it is just to let flowers do the work for you! A pond or birdbath will provide the necessary water, and shrubs help hide their nests.

**CORAL HONEYSUCKLE.** Vine, needs trellis. Red cigar-shaped flowers; bright red fruit.

**CUPHEA 'DAVID VERITY'.** All cupheas or cigar plants are great, this one's considered the best.

**COLUMBINE, 'TEXAS GOLD'.** Ferny foliage, delicate yellow flowers.

**FIRESPIKE.** 5', lush upright foliage, red spike flowers. Can take shade as well.

**HAMELIA (HUMMINGBIRD BUSH).** 4-6' if it likes you. Can take all day hot sun, needs at least 6 hours. Orange or red flower spikes summer/fall.

**LANTANA.** Prostrate lantana is low and spreading. Don't overwater. Pinch tips to make bushier.

**PENTAS.** 2-3'. Cluster flowers. Multi-colors. Annual.

**PHLOX, PRAIRIE.** 8-12". pink/lavender blooms, may go dormant in summer.

**PHLOX, SUMMER.** 2-3' mounds, large flower clusters.

**RUSSELIA.** 2-3'. Coral fountain plant, orange flowers.

**SALVIA, HARDY.** Multiple varieties, multiple colors — tall, short, summer bloomers and fall bloomers.

**SHRIMP PLANTS.** 2-3', red or pink shrimp-shaped flowers.

**SOCIETY GARLIC.** 1-2'. Lavender flowers on tall stalks.

**TURK'S CAP.** 5', red flowers on upright stalks, look like unopened hibiscus flowers.

*Other choices:* beebalm, buttonbush, coral bean, duranta, halberd-leaf hibiscus, four o'clocks, Mexican bush sage, pineapple sage, prairie phlox, red yucca, scarlet buckeye.

*Annuals:* cleome (spider flower), delphinium, flowering tobacco, foxglove, geranium, larkspur, pentas, poppies, sweet peas, zinnias.

*Vines:* Carolina jessamine, cypressvine, gloriosa lily, honeysuckle, jasmine, morning glory, thunbergia, trumpet vine (get a named variety like Mme. Galen — not the invasive native!).



*Trumpet vine*

*(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)*

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March						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



*My Mother's Larkspur . . .*

*(See Page 20)*

## March

*This month, you really should . . .*

- Put tomatoes in the ground early this month.
- Mow the lawn when it needs it, then feed.
- Watch out for bluebonnets. They look like clover. Don't mow them down.
- Fertilize everything. Water first, feed, then water again.
- Gradually move hibiscus and other container plants into more light.
- Remove flowers on newly-purchased plants so they will set stronger root systems.
- Unwrap banana trunks and keep well watered. Want bananas? Remove baby plants.
- Plant Louisiana phlox around late-appearing shrubs like hamelia, lantana, dishplate hibiscus, etc. This perennial groundcover is green in winter, blooms in spring and goes dormant (almost disappears) in summer.
- Give hibiscus a slight haircut, then feed with hibiscus food to encourage lush growth.
- Attend area programs to learn about new-to-us hardy, low-maintenance flowers.

*If the spirit moves . . .*

- Continue pinching perennial tips to make them bushier. Stop when they produce buds.
- Dig up, thin out and transplant perennials so crowded they no longer bloom properly.
- Feed azaleas, spirea, climbing roses and other shrubby spring bloomers after they bloom.
- Remove spent flowers on spring bloomers to promote more bloom production.
- Work 1/2 cup of Epsom salts around roses, hibiscus and other bloomers for more flowers.
- Remove fading daffodil blooms so they won't go to seed. Leave fading foliage on.
- Feed plumerias with fish emulsion and superphosphate.
- Plant bell peppers, cucumbers, green beans, pumpkins, squash, tomatoes and watermelon — but cover if a late freeze is forecast. Start eggplants in pots.
- Put bluebonnet plants in raised, containers and/or hanging baskets. (Sow seed in fall.)
- In the water garden, remove leaves and muck from pond bottom if not done last fall. Remove toad eggs if you see them.



## *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Landscape with a wide variety of plants, instead of large masses of all the same kind. Masses of the same variety attract insects and disease.
- Donate excess plants to school, nursing home or community garden.
- Check grocery stores for white-flowering oxalis (clover) around St. Patrick's Day. It should be perennial in shady areas. Goes dormant in summer; reappears in winter.
- Plant antique roses, four o'clocks, gingers, jasmines and mock oranges for fragrance.
- Prune poinsettias; keep spent blooms picked off mums. Mums bloom spring and fall.
- Make a note of beautiful spring bulbs (tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, ranunculus, anemones, etc.) now in bloom. Fall is the time to purchase and plant most of them.
- Remove tulip bulbs after the flowers fade. Discard; they won't bloom again.
- Watch tree trunks for webworm eggs in limb crotches on susceptible trees. Remove!
- Try crushed egg shells, coarse sand in ring around plant stem to discourage snails.
- Give all the plants a manure tea treat: Mix in washtub: 1/2 rotted (or bagged) manure and 1/2 water (preferably rainwater). Let it sit overnight. Drain off water and pour over plants. This tea is high in nitrogen, so don't use more than once a month on blooming plants.

## *Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Don't prune off freeze-damaged limbs or remove what looks like freeze-killed plants just yet. Wait until April. They may come back out.
- Don't prune crape myrtles unless they are causing damage, have grown out of bounds or have dead limbs. (See page 6.)
- Don't cut foliage off bulbs that naturalize after they finish blooming. They use the fading foliage to set next year's blooms.
- Don't plant caladiums yet. It's still too cold.
- Don't put out any tender tropicals, like plumerias. We may have a late freeze.

## *Evergreen Privacy Hedges for Horizontally Challenged*

Homes are getting so close together, privacy is at a premium. Good evergreen hedges include hollies (Nellie R. Stevens), Will Fleming yaupon holly, upright junipers, newer lower- and tighter-growing varieties of cherry laurel. Carolina jessamine, thunbergia and evergreen wisteria are three good evergreen vines to use on chain link fences or wood fences with wire supports. For strips between houses, how about decorative pillars with vine-covered ropes strung between? Or vine-covered lattice screens? In December, when coral vine dies back, seed sweet peas along the fence. By the time they finish blooming, the coral vine will be coming back out. Or, alternate a variety of annual vines with evergreen wisteria.

*Children's Gardens:* If you don't have a child of your own to introduce to gardening, consider offering a container or spot in the garden to neighborhood children or a niece or nephew. I remember vividly the enthusiasm of a woman who lived on Palm St., three or four houses east of Sauer in the Riverside neighborhood where I grew up back in the early 60s. She had a yard full of flowers and always took time to talk to us about them. Start a children's garden with fast-growing seeds such as cosmos and zinnias. Add started plants (petunias and

blue daze) for quick color to hold their attention. Include quick growing vegetables with easy-to-pick-and-eat choices like cherry tomatoes. A fun idea: A “house” of tall sunflowers planted in a circle or “teepee” of green bean or sweet pea vines on tall stakes. Teach children not to eat any plant unless you are with them. Even many “edibles” have nonedible parts.

*Cut Flowers:* To keep flowers from wilting prematurely, cut early in morning. Inside, cut stalks again under water. Use a solution of 1/2 water and 1/2 flat lemon-lime soda. 1 tsp. regular Listerine often revives faded cut flowers. Add 2 tsp. of gin in the water to make cut tulips stand up straighter. (Houston’s Bulb Lady, Sally McQueen Squire, says cheap gin will do — tulips aren’t connoisseurs.) To prolong cut flowers, recut stem, set in solution in dark spot at first. Condition daffodils separately. Their sap clogs stems of other flowers.

(Consult Sally’s book, “A Gardener’s Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast” — River Bend Company.)

*Chrysanthemums:* Their scents take me back to my high school days at St. Agnes Academy and football games at St. Thomas High. Any plant that triggers such memories deserves a place in my garden. Mums bloom spring and fall, but they may become leggy. Pinch back. For more spectacular fall displays, in spring root new plants from old ones. Cut 8-10” stalks, strip leaves off lower 4-6” and plant to that depth. Pinch tips off new shoots until August to force branching. (The Greater Houston Chrysanthemum Society — [www.mums.org](http://www.mums.org) — is a wonderful resource for learning more about growing these on the Gulf Coast.)

### *Favorite Lazy Gardener Plants:*

(All are perennials except starred ones. But even starred annuals may reseed or return after a mild winter. Most need excellent drainage. Raise bed 1+ ft. above ground level by adding organic matter.)

FOR SUNNY AREAS: Amaryllis, antique roses, beebalm, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, bulbine, butterfly bush, bush daisy, butterflyweed, caesalpinia (poinciana/pride of Barbados), canna, cassia, cat whiskers, celosia\*, cestrum, chrysanthemum, cleome\*, coneflower, cosmos\*, cuphea, daylily, duranta, hamelia, globe amaranth\*, gaura, Indian blanket, lanceleaf coneflower, lantana, lion’s tail, lycoris, Mexican mint marigold, Mexican poinsettia, Mexican zinnia\*, morning glory bush/tree, nandina, natal plum, oleander, pavonia, plumeria, pride of Barbados, purslane, prairie verbena, purslane, salvia, russelia, scaevola, skullcap, spirea, yarrow, yellow bells (esperanza), zinnia\*.

FOR PARTIAL SHADE AREAS: Abelmoschus, althaea, American beautyberry, agapanthus, blood lily, coral bean, coreopsis, crinum, four o’clocks, hibiscus (hardy and tropical\*), hydrangea, Louisiana iris, melampodium, mock orange, penstemon, pentas\*, plumbago, porterweed, scabiosa, shrimp plants, summer phlox, yesterday-today-and-tomorrow.

FOR SHADY AREAS: Abutilon, balsam, banana shrub, Barbados cherry, barlaria, begonia (cane or rhizomatous), Brazilian red cloak, caladium\*, calla lily, chocolate plant\*, clerodendrum, coleus\*, columbine, erythrina\*, firespike, gingers (all!), hosta, impatiens\*, indigo, jacobina\*, mahonia, narcissus, nicotiana\*, oakleaf hydrangea, oxalis, Persian shield\*, pigeonberry, pink polka-dot\*, ruellia (old tall ones are invasive), spring snowflakes, strawberry bush, toadflax\*, torenia\*, Turk’s cap, viburnums, viola, violet. (To learn about new varieties, visit our living plant library, Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine-Westfield; 281-443-8731; [www.cp4.hctx.net/mercer](http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercer).)



*Firespike*

*Lawns:* St. Augustine is our hardiest, most traffic-tolerant, most shade-tolerant lawn grass — provided you don't weaken it by overfertilizing and overtreating for normal problems. Ignored lawns tend to withstand harsh temperatures better than those that are pampered.

But the average St. A. lawn uses more water than all the other plants in an average suburban lot landscape combined, including trees. For tips on reducing lawn, see page 12. Before you try other grasses, remove all St. A. Once you start watering or feeding the new grass, the St. A. will take over. All these grasses need full sun all day or weeds will invade:

- Bermuda — Low maintenance, tolerates traffic but not shade. Needs sun! Dies back in winter.
- Zoysia — A beautiful green, often called the Cadillac of lawn grasses. Is fairly winter hardy, but must have all day sun. It is a slow grower, but must be cut with a reel mower.
- Buffalograss — Highly promoted as very drought tolerant, but that means it is weakened by our heavy spring/fall rains. Needs to be incredibly well-drained. Full sun, slower growing than St. A., but does grow faster on Gulf Coast than in central Texas.

*Perennial Borders:* These “kaleidoscope gardens” — rainbows of colors with a quiltwork of textures — are wonderful “organized chaos,” yet their spontaneity makes them intimidating. If you have a long strip garden, give it a go but remember, plants recommended in national or English gardening books usually bloom here in winter and early spring. For summer flowers, consult a local gardening book for heat tolerant varieties. Some tips:

- Start with tried-and-true flowers so you can be certain of at least some blooms.
- Taller plants usually look best in back, or in the center of a freestanding strip. Medium plants go next, then lower growers at garden's edge.
- Some folks like a hodgepodge of colors; others single, or limited colors. The British horticultural legend, Gertrude Jekyll, who taught us to create these “garden pictures,” particularly liked long, drifting border plantings, as opposed to “patches” of flowers.
- Use borders to draw the eye to a focal point, or even to an attractive off-site view.
- Use a wide variety of flowers. If one doesn't work, you only have a small hole to fill!
- Include white and gray flowers/foilage —especially where you look or sit outside at night. Other colors fade at dusk. White is cooling in summer; white and grey intensify other colors.
- Planting tight helps cut down on weeds, and distracts the eye when flowers go to seed.

*Roses:* Blackspot in spring is inevitable on hybrid varieties and can kill a weak plant. Remove infected leaves. Fungal spores may be splashed onto healthy leaves by rain. Some antique varieties get blackspot, but most just laugh it off.

*Vegetable Gardens:* Row cover is an ultra-lightweight, fibrous material many gardeners anchor over plants, especially tomatoes, right up to harvest time to protect vegetables from insects, wind, disease and sunburn. No room for a vegetable garden? Plant them among existing landscape shrubs or in hanging baskets. *(To learn about great vegetable varieties for this climate, and growing organically, join Urban Harvest — [www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org))*



## *The Best Thing You Can Do This Month? Lighten up!*

Gardens should be fun. I love it when my sister Judy Harrington tells folks (especially “real” farmers) that she planted her “Lower 40” in corn. She means the 40-ft. strip along her back

fence! We need to learn to appreciate beauty in bare barks instead of insisting on a yard full of evergreens. Take a closer look at weeds you hate. Wild strawberry vines often pop up in the lawn this month. This “winter/spring” groundcover is actually sold in nurseries. It’s like a winter friend coming to call. The red berries are a favorite fruit of robins. It’s very pretty with the little lawn violets that also appear now. When it warms up, the strawberry vines will get weaker and the St. Augustine stronger. Keep St. A. well watered and mow it often (once, twice a week in that area). I promise you the strawberry vine will be overpowered and go away.

Speaking of appreciating natural beauty, this month a rare East Texas treasure comes into full bloom. The Wild Azalea Canyon just outside Newton is a delightful (albeit somewhat steep) descent into a world of fragrant scented wild azaleas and dogwoods.

This beautiful natural canyon was once almost destroyed by plant thieves. But now the good people of Newton provide walking sticks and try to keep an eye on things. It’s free, so it would be nice to stop in Newton and say thanks by buying gas or having dinner there. From Houston, take I-10 east to Hwy. 87. Go north to Newton. Stop at the Chamber of Commerce building for a map, or continue north to 1414. Turn east (right) for about 15 miles to the canyon. Signs mark the way. This area all used to be beautiful woods, filled with wild dogwoods. Clear cutting for lumber has turned many of these woods into bald prairies.

*My Mother’s Larkspur:* Our house on Sauer Street in the neighborhood of Riverside shared a fence with the old Sutton Elementary playground. Every year my grandmother (Matilde “Mimi” Gracida) grew the most beautiful larkspur next to that fence. My mother (Carmita Beust) grows beautiful larkspur (see page 16) in her yard by the Astrodome. Me, I plant larkspur seed every December, January and February. They never sprout. I put in plants every spring. They disappear. I can’t grow larkspur to save my soul.

We have a wild rabbit that lives in the berm behind my pond. I wonder if he likes larkspur? I know he’s the reason all my pansies disappear. But, I don’t mind. I love him. After one flood, he disappeared. When he (or another rabbit) reappeared several months later, I bought him some black-eyed Susan plants as a welcome home gift. He really loves black-eyed Susans.

*Don’t Be fooled!* When I first planted cutleaf coneflowers (*Rudbeckia lanciniata*), before I had seen them bloom, they made such lovely low spreading foliage, I planted more at the front of another bed. To my amazement, they started sending up flower stalks that topped out at around six feet! Not a plant you want at the front of a bed, but fabulous for the back. Chinese witch hazel (*Loropetalum*) is another plant often sold, and planted by professionals, as a lovely low shrub for the front of a bed. This evergreen shrub, which is especially beautiful in winter, will eventually reach 6-8+’ high and wide!



*Cutleaf coneflower*

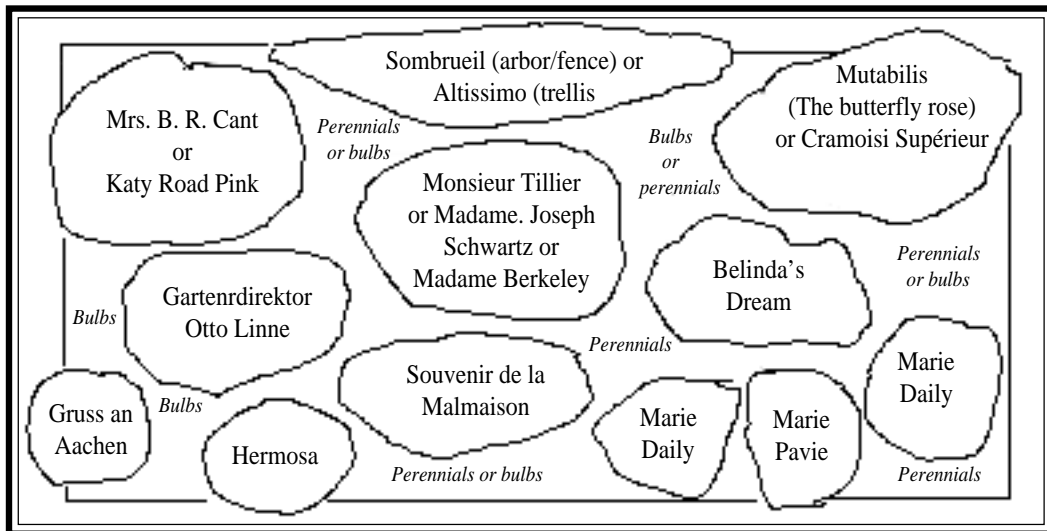
There is no such thing as a dwarf hibiscus. These are treated with growth retardant hormones. Once you get the plant home and in the ground, it may even go through an adjustment period when some leaves fall off. Then it will gradually resume its normal height. Likewise, some folks will try to tell you pink and blue hydrangeas are different plants. They aren’t. The color depends on the soil. Slightly alkaline soils produce pink flowers. Slightly acidic soils produce blue flowers.



# An Antique Rose Garden

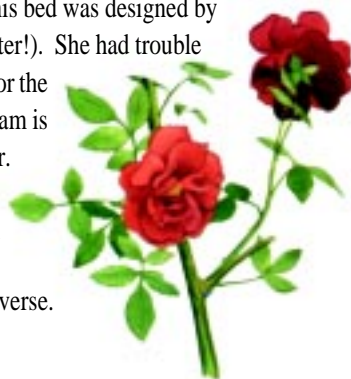


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Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

**Antique Roses** and similar own-root roses (see page 6) may grow much larger than the labels say. The label may have been written in an area with a shorter growing season, or the grower is trying to tell you the size at which the plant performs best. Raise this bed at least a foot off ground level for best flowers. Antiques mix well with other plants. See the list of suggested bulbs and perennials at the end. This bed was designed by Audrey McMurray of the Texas Rose Rustlers (who just happens to be my sister!). She had trouble deciding with so many roses from which to choose, so she gave some choices for the same spot. All are fragrant and most are almost everblooming. *Belinda's Dream* is an EarthKind rose (see page 6) and *Marie Daly* is a "Texas Superstar" winner.



**BELINDA'S DREAM.** 3-6', full pink blooms, long bloomer, bluish green foliage.

**CRAMOISI SUPÈRIEUR.** 6' high and wide, velvety crimson with silver reverse.

**GARTENDIREKTOR OTTO LYN.** 4-5', pink clusters.

**GRUSS AN AACHEN.** 3-4', peachy pink buds open to pink, fade to white.

**HERMOSA.** 3-4', pink, low compact form ideal for smaller gardens.

**KATY ROAD PINK.** 4-5'; large pink with almost nonstop blooms.

**MARIE PAVIE.** 2', pink to white blooms for a massive display, thornless!

**MADAME BERKELEY.** 3-4', salmon pink.

**MADAME JOSEPH SCHWARTZ.** 4-6', white sport of Duchess de Brabant.

**MARIE DALY.** 3' tall and wide, double pink sport of Marie Pavie.

**MONSIEUR TILLIER.** 5-7' , pale rose, salmon and purple mix. A real winner.

**MUTABILIS (Butterfly rose).** 6', yellow to pink to crimson, so looks like is covered with butterflies.

**MRS. B. R. CANT.** 6-8' tall and 6' wide, silvery rose cabbage-type blooms with dark rose reverse. Steady bloomer.

**SOUVENIR DE LA MALMAISON.** 3-5', large flat lush pale pink blooms, almost everblooming.

**Audrey's favorite companion plants**

- Agapanthus
- Baptista
- Cat whiskers
- Chrysanthemums
- Convolvulus
- Evolvulus
- Gladioli
- Strawberries
- Torenia
- Purple Creeping Lantana
- (great under roses looking bare underneath)
- Verbena
- (Homestead, Pinwheel Princess and Apple Blossom)

For more on antique roses, log onto the Texas Rose Rustler website: [texas-rose-rustler.org](http://texas-rose-rustler.org)

(If you don't like, or can't find these plants, ask your nurseryman to suggest substitutes)

April						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



*Wildflower month! So the Lazy Gardener heads for Bolivar Peninsula. See page 25.*

## April

*This month, you really should . . .*

- Move orchids outside in shady spots. Use in baskets, or hang from fences, limbs or walls.
- If necessary, prune spring-blooming shrubs, such as azaleas, quince, wisteria, forsythia and climbing roses after flowers fade. Don't plant wisteria near trees!
- Keep grafted roses well watered, but make sure none of your water runs off into the sewers. (Fertilizers & other lawn chemicals are damaging our bayous & Galveston Bay).
- Feed all container plants. Feed hibiscus with hibiscus food or a low phosphorus fertilizer.
- Plant caladiums in slightly acidic soil with good drainage.
- Plant new shrubs before it gets any hotter and keep newly set-out plants well watered.
- Cut flowers to extend blooming season.
- Pinch tips from coleus, copper plants to make them bushier.

*If the spirit moves . . .*

- Fertilize azaleas, magnolias, hydrangeas, irises with azalea food.
- Plant Easter lily bulbs in the garden after they finish blooming inside.
- Consider ornamental grasses in among your flowers. These add eye-interest by providing varied leaf textures and shapes. Nurseries carry many new varieties now.
- Water, mow often to make St. Augustine fill in dead areas more quickly.
- Plant bush beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, eggplants (plants), peas, peppers, pumpkins, squash, watermelon. Put in large, well-established tomatoes so they bear fruit quickly.
- Seed bare sunny areas with fast growers such as cosmos, tithonia and other sunflowers.
- In the water garden, fertilize hardy lilies after they start to grow. If they aren't blooming as well as they used to, they may need dividing and repotting.

*Coleus*



*If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Start an herb garden with basil, chamomile, mints, thyme, sage. Plant basil and chives around plants susceptible to whitefly. Plant squash on small hills to discourage problems.



- For larger caladium leaves, remove the largest “eye” or bud.
- Give tomatoes a light feeding of nitrogen when fruits are golf-ball size.
- Mulch tomatoes, peppers, eggplants. Newspaper under mulch slows weeds.
- Try shredded sandpaper, crushed egg shells and/or seaweed at base of plants to discourage snails/slugs. (Better yet, get rid of plants eaten by snails/slugs.)
- Check with County Extension Agents about pecan grafting workshops this month.



*Caladium*

## Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- Don't panic over silky white webs on tree trunks. Bark lice — good bugs at work!
- Don't treat for problems before you see actual damage. (See Insect Removal, Page 29).
- Don't seed bluebonnets or most other wildflowers now. Put in plants. Plant seeds in fall.
- Don't remove spent foliage from amaryllis, daffodils, irises, lilies. Let it die naturally.
- Don't overfertilize. Leaf spots, dark areas on older plants may result.
- Don't overwater. Leaf drop can result. (Also is a sign of underwatering!)
- Don't plant larkspur, hollyhocks, stocks, delphiniums or snapdragons now. It's too hot.

*African violets:* Some folks can grow African violets and some cannot — it's a simple fact of life. For the lucky, African violets flower almost continuously on a windowsill or under fluorescent lights. Overwatering and overfeeding African violets are the two biggest mistakes beginners make. Wick systems take guesswork out of watering. Use an African violet fertilizer. To be on the safe side, use it in half-strength doses twice as often as recommended. They must have good light and high humidity, with temperatures in the 67- to 80-degree range. (To find local African violet societies, log onto [www.avsa.org](http://www.avsa.org), or ask your nurseryman.)

*Lawns:* My friend Dan Snyder of Nitro Phos Fertilizers says lawns are to men today what a mammoth kill was to ancient man — a symbol of virility. Maybe he's right. It is beyond me why men get so panicky over a few weeds. My friend Beverly Harris thinks more like I do. She notes that a mowed weed looks just like mowed grass. Healthy St. Augustine will crowd out all weeds so weeds indicate a weak lawn. Water often (St. Augustine uses volumes of water), raise area if water stands after a rain (it can't tolerate wet feet) and mow often, twice weekly to force it to fill in dead or sparse areas. If the problem is too much shade, see Dead Areas Under Trees on Page 49. Do not use lawn/garden treatments — chemical or biological — on windy days. Warn neighbors before treatments. Protect your skin. Allergic reactions or illnesses that appear later may be the result of contact with treatments. Treat only damaged areas. Keep pets away from treated areas.

*Plant White:* Plant white, fragrant flowers in areas where you sit outside at night. White is not only cooling and elegant, it remains vivid as other colors fade and makes all surrounding colors, including green, look more vibrant. Try white angel's trumpet (datura), butterfly bush (*Buddleia*), clethra, crinum, dianthus, flowering tobacco, four o'clock, grape hyacinth, ginger, hyacinth, jasmine and jessamine vine, mandevilla vine, mock orange, moonflower vine, plumeria, summer phlox, sweet olive, sweet pea, sweetspire, tuberose or wisteria.

White fragrant antique roses include 'Sir Thomas Lipton' and 'Mary Manners' (two large shrubs), 'Marie Pavie' (4' shrub) and climbers 'Sombrueil' and 'Mermaid.'

*Snakes:* Snakes eat rats, mice and roaches. That alone puts them in my Good Guys book. But I don't like being surprised by them anymore than you do. I once turned over a big rock and a huge snake reared up, flaring his jowls (or whatever they're called on snakes). I flapped my arms like a frightened goose and screamed: COBRA! COBRA! My neighbor Jerry came running over and nearly died laughing. It was a puff adder, he said. Perfectly harmless. So what did it mean puffing its cheeks out like a cobra? Jerry lifted it with a stick, pointed out that the poor snake was less than 2 feet long, and carried it off to the woods.

Snakes like cool, damp places. They don't like people. Given half a chance, they will leave the minute they even suspect you're nearby. Learn about the snakes that inhabit your area — especially if you have children. Give the snakes a chance to leave before you pull out the semiautomatics. That's more effective than killing every snake. If children see you killing snakes, they will try it. And in trying to do that, they could get hurt.

Before working in thickly grown areas, like ferns, whack the foliage with a big stick first. If you eliminate snakes for good, don't complain if you have roaches, rats and mice.

*Fungus Among Us:* White and/or black mildew shows up like clockwork on roses, crape myrtles and photinias. Blackspot on hybrid roses is as natural as hurricanes in the Gulf. Blackspot looks like a burn from a cigarette tip. Watering at night and prolific rains encourage warm, humid conditions fungus love. Remove fallen infected leaves. Rain splashes spores up on healthy leaves. Water in morning or early afternoon. Give susceptible plants good air circulation. Don't plant too closely together. Blackspot won't kill healthy plants, but is unsightly and saps strength needed for growth and flowering. Sometimes it is temporary and will go away when the weather changes. If it is a major problem, you can treat it, but problems will return. Better to replace that plant with a plant that doesn't have fungal problems.

*Planting to Help Cut Utility Costs:* Plants can help keep the house cooler in summer and warmer in winter. Plant trees, large shrubs or vines on lattice sheets to shade the west side in summer, and allow warming sun rays through in winter. Use deciduous trees and shrubs that are thick in summer and shed leaves in winter. Use a native if you opt for a large shade tree. If you don't have room for a tree, try a reinforced lattice wall with a deciduous vine, such as coral vine or hyacinth bean vine. These allow winter sun in. Do not allow lattice to touch the ground. Build a strong frame, using treated lumber. Attach the lattice to the frame.

*Mulches:* Mulch, a lazy gardener's best friend, is an organic (or synthetic) material applied as insulation on top of soil over plant roots. Mulches keep soil and roots moist and cool in summer and warm in winter. Organic mulches breakdown, replenishing soil nutrients. The coarser a bark mulch, the slower it decomposes. Finer shredded barks decompose more quickly, but also allow more rainfall to penetrate through. Five to six layers of newspaper under mulch, butted up against stalks, discourage weeds. Do not use a heavy mulch on seeded areas, or around plants that reseed. You can now buy Texas pine mulch from East Texas.

Fallen leaves and pine needles make excellent mulch. Oak leaves and pine needles provide azaleas, hydrangeas, tomatoes, Louisiana irises, roses and magnolias with the slightly higher acidic property which they prefer. Use liberally around the base of these plants. Pecan leaves contain a natural herbicide that begins to break down as soon as the leaves fall. This is why



plants or grasses often refuse to grow under a pecan tree. If they are extremely well-dried, pecan leaves make an excellent mulch. But to be on the safe side, put them in the compost pile.

One summer my sister Audrey and I decided to “landscape” a plot of the barren coastal prairie, the retirement home of my uncle Rene Gracida in sunbaked South Texas. We planted a flower garden in front of his “Rancho Milagro” home. Then in the unplanted areas — to stop the incessant weeds — we laid layers of feed bags under a heavy mulch, a clever recycling project, we thought. What we didn’t appreciate was the force of the intense Gulf winds blowing inland from Corpus Christi. Rene didn’t discourage us from planting more flowers when most of our imports died. But after days spent clearing feed bags off his fences, he did decree that particular technique was forbidden! Among the plants that thrived in spite of his sandy soil, frequent gale-force winds, brutal sun and constant drought were bulbine, butterfly-weed, coral honeysuckle (magnificent!), crinums, Louisiana iris (they’re in a low spot where the infrequent rains do gather), oleanders and Silverado sage.

*Louisiana Iris:* Like crinums, these are extremely hardy and are seldom bothered by insects or disease. Plant in late fall, in full sun or partial shade, in regular beds or even where water stands after a rain. Work in peat moss, compost and/or rotted manure, plus a general fertilizer like 8-8-8 or 10-12-10. If soil is alkaline, add soil sulphur or an acid-type fertilizer (i.e., azalea food). Cut foliage back to 6-8 inches. Mulch during summer. After blooming, cut stalks back. They usually bloom best if divided every third year. LA iris are often hard to find in nurseries because they need to be kept moist when out of the ground. The Bulb & Plant Mart in fall and Mercer Arboretum’s March Mart in spring are good sources.

*For information on the Society for Louisiana Iris, log onto: [www.louisianas.org](http://www.louisianas.org)*

*Native Notes:* We are closer to Louisiana in ecology than to the rest of Texas. Take this into consideration when planting Texas natives. Central/West Texas natives and even those from the Gulf Coast touted as “drought-tolerant” or good for “xeriscapes” (see page 40) MUST be planted in extremely well drained sites. Subsoils in most suburban yards, unless they are well raised, stay too wet during heavy spring and fall rains. Unless beds are 8-12” above ground level, these plants will never perform well and, after a few seasons, may die. Among the Texas natives that love our clay soil and easily tolerate our heavy rains are bald cypress, Carolina jessamine, coreopsis, clasping leaf coneflowers, crinums, Gulf Coast penstemon, halbard leaf hibiscus, hymenocallis (big white spider lily), Louisiana iris, mayhaw, mist-flower, parsley hawthorn, river birch, Southern blue flag iris, strawberry bush, Virginia sweetspire and yaupon holly. (*Native Plant Societies — [www.npsot.org](http://www.npsot.org) — are wonderful resource.*)

*My World of Wildflowers:* Next to trees, I consider wildflowers the most awe-inspiring plants on earth. They bloom in the worst possible conditions, with no one to water or fertilize them. They are my favorite flowers — all of them — and I see plenty in some very remote areas. Husband likes to visit old abandoned forts and other remote historic sites, which generally involve a lot of walking. “Give me one wildflower every 30 yards,” I tell him, “and



*Lantana grows wild all over Bolívar Peninsula and is a great attractor for butterflies*

*I'll follow you anywhere.*" When April arrives, most folks head west and north to see bluebonnets, Indian paintbrushes and other wildflowers lining Texas highways. I head to Bolivar Peninsula.

My favorite (non-wildflower) view is looking eastward from the peak of the Intracoastal Canal Bridge at High Island. The Canal snakes up a God-stretched canvas, weaving through marsh grasses that become one with an incredible unobstructed horizon. On sunny days, it is a breathtaking, never-ending palate of whites, greens, blues, browns. On rainy days, it's a fascinating study of grays. It is a scene for people who like to look up, who appreciate clouds and everchanging skies.



Bluebells

It's a scene for people who like to stretch their elbows full out, and for people who take great delight in spotting a single wildflower among the weeds. As you drive northward off the bridge, watch the ditches for Texas swamp lily (see page 54), white marsh-mallows with deep maroon centers, and blue pickerel weed. Turning west onto Bolivar peninsula, Indian blankets (*Gaillardia*), coreopsis and black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*, page 22) create scattered masses of color, blending with pink and white morning glory-like vines, bright red Turk's cap and coral bean, pink evening primroses, honeysuckle, huge native sunflowers, cannas and lantana growing in fields. If you're willing to look more closely, you will find Bolivar is also home to native passionvines, bluebells, seashore mallows with delicate pink hibiscus flowers on slender 3-5' stalks and blue coastal butterfly pea vine.

We have a beach house and, perhaps frustrated by all the gardens at home, Husband has decreed NO plantings in that Bolivar yard. I balked at first, but his stubbornness turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Husband and neighbor Doris Robinson tend to mow down everything in sight, so plantings wouldn't last long anyway.

To my delight, native wildflowers — with awesome persistence — now cover our lot with blooms on 1 inch stalks, creating everchanging carpets of color (at least, if you look closely). There are almost always fuchsia-colored verbena, white lazy daisies, pink powderpuffs and red and yellow Indian blankets, to name just a few.

Doris's husband John used to say when he died, he wanted to come back as a brown pelican, because of the wonderful way they soar through the air. Now, when we see brown pelicans, we say, "*Maybe that's John!*" I'm coming back as a snowy egret. They are tall and skinny and spend their lives in ditches up close and personal with so many incredible wildflowers.

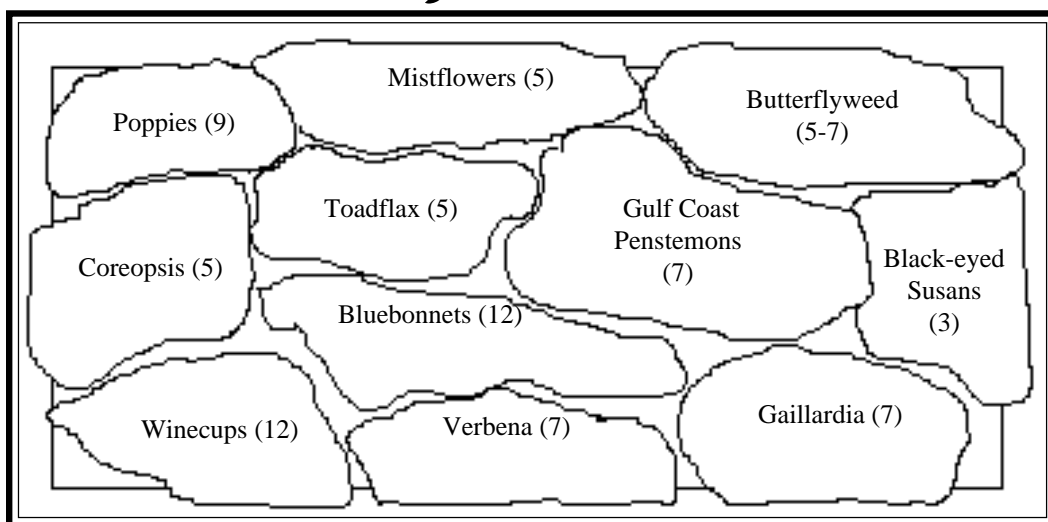
Remember, bloom time is the worst time to dig and transplant wildflowers. They usually die and you deplete a native stand for no good reason. Instead, toward the end of the bloom cycle, collect seed. Let it dry thoroughly. The top of the refrigerator is a great drying spot for any kind of seed. Spread them out on sheets of newspaper. Plant them in late fall. That will give you the best chance to grow them at home.

*"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."*

Luke 12: 27



# A Wildflower Garden



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 12' x 5' garden.

*This bed must be extremely well drained.* Locate it on a sunny slope, or raise the bed 8-12 inches above ground level. If you don't, heavy spring and fall rains may wipe out all these plants. Most wildflowers do best in all day sun, but will tolerate late afternoon shade. Wildflowers tend to look somewhat scraggly when not in bloom. Plant so that summer bloomers help hide the fading foliage of spring bloomers. It also helps, if this planting is in your front yard, to add a cute sign that says "Wildflowers at Rest."



**BLACK-EYED SUSANS** (*Rudbeckia*). Yellow daisy-like flowers with black centers. Hardy. Bloom spring-frost. 'Indian Summer' is spectacular; 'Goldsturm' seems to naturalize best.

**BLUEBONNETS.** Good in hanging baskets. Pink and white available, but if planted with blue, will revert to blue. Bloom in March, April. Should reseed.

**BUTTERFLYWEED.** 3' stems from perennial roots, bright orange/red flowers; Monarch host plant.

**COREOPSIS.** Sprightly little yellow daisies that bloom strong in spring; off and on rest of year. Perennial. May look peaked in summer, but should perk up in fall.

**GAILLARDIA** (Indian Blankets). 1-2'. Red/yellow blooms with serrated edges.

**MISTFLOWERS.** Feathery blue flowers on 1-2' stalks. Bloom spring through frost.

**PENSTEMON, GULF COAST.** Delicate, bell-like flowers on 2' stalks spring through frost.

**POPPIES.** Tall, cup-shaped flowers in brilliant colors. Bloom spring, early summer.

**TOADFLAX.** Delicate blue flowers up and down 2-3' stalks. May reseed. Also likes shade.

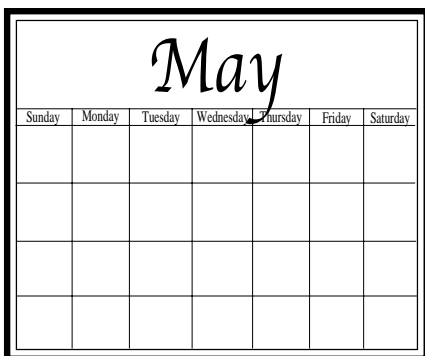
**VERBENA.** Low-growing, fast-spreading with red, purple or white flowers. Bloom from early spring through first frost. Perennial.

**WINECUPS.** Violet to red cupped spring flowers, low-growing, spreading.

*More good wildflowers:* In extremely well drained sites, try beebalm, bluebells, butterflyweed, crimson clover, coneflowers, hardy hibiscus (mallows), lazy daisies, Mexican hat, native phlox, rainlilies, hardy salvias and sunflowers. Be careful. Some wildflowers, like physostegia (obedient plant) and wild ageratum are beautiful, but become invasive very quickly. This may be fine if you're seeding a big field; but not if it's in a limited space garden.

*For more help, log onto [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org), website of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.*

*(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)*



## Clarence Pleasants Oleander

May is Oleander Month, time for Galveston's annual Oleander Festival. See page 30.

# May

*This month, you really should . . .*

- Remove flower buds from caladiums, coleus, copper plants for larger leaves.
- Move potted orchids, bromeliads outside.
- Pick tomatoes at first pink blush. Bright red attracts birds. Ripen on windowsill.
- Replace spring annuals with summer flowers such as gaura, Mexican zinnia and scaevola.
- Prune off any remaining freeze-damaged limbs and stalks.
- Buy Mother a pretty plant for Mother's Day.

*If the spirit moves . . .*

- Feed amaryllis (after blooming), caladiums, Louisiana iris with bulb food, bonemeal or superphosphate. If squirrels are a problem, don't use bonemeal.
- Feed crape myrtle, hummingbird bush, barlaria and other summer blooming shrubs.
- Plant cantaloupe, cucumbers, eggplant, okra, peppers, squash, sweet potatoes, Swiss chard and watermelon. Cage, rather than stake, tomatoes to keep the fruit from bruising.
- Plant impatiens deeper than they were in pots for more drought tolerance in summer.
- Plant new shrubs before it gets any hotter.
- Watch hibiscus for yellow spots (spider mites). Hit leaves with strong water stream.
- In the water garden, remove decaying water lily leaves and spent flowers.

*If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Mow, water often to encourage the grass to spread into thin areas.
- In very hot, dry, sunny spots, try bulbine, Copper Canyon daisies, flame acanthus, rock rose, trailing lantana, scaevola and yarrow.
- Remove early althaea buds and crape myrtle seeds to make flowers larger overall.
- Prune summer-blooming shrubs after flowers fade (only if they're growing out of bounds).
- Pinch nonblooming perennial and shrub tips to force bushier growth.
- Consider moving nonblooming roses and daylilies into more sun.
- In shade, try barlaria, gingers, firespike, hosta, indigo, pigeonberry, Virginia sweetspire.

## *Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Ignore silky whitish webs covering tree trunks. These are good insects at work!
- Don't take it personally if bluebonnets, calendula, dahlia, delphiniums, geraniums, gerberas, hollyhocks, larkspur, tuberose begonias, marigolds, nasturtiums, nicotiana, petunias, poppies, snapdragons and other spring bloomers fade. It's the heat, not you.
- Don't cut back fading wildflowers if you want them to reseed. Let them die back naturally.
- Don't remove St. Augustine clippings. These replenish the soil, shade roots.
- Don't prune azaleas unless absolutely necessary. They are setting next spring's buds.
- Don't let anyone sell you "pink" or "blue" hydrangeas. Hydrangeas bloom blue in slightly acidic soil, pink in alkaline soils. Rusty nails, pine needles or soil acidifiers turn pink blue.

*Bird's Nest in the Hanging Basket:* You'd be surprised how often this comes up! What to do? Nothing. When you water the basket, aim the hose high overhead so the water fall softly down, like rain. Don't fertilize until the little birds have hatched and are gone. In the meantime, enjoy! Few folks get to help birds out like this.

*Bougainvillea Won't Bloom?* Let it completely dry out, to the point you worry about it surviving. Then water liberally. The plant thinks it's dying and produces seed (flowers) to insure species survival. Works on other plants too — sometimes.

*Insect Calling Cards:* Grasshoppers and caterpillars chew leaves. Aphids, thrips and mites cause leaves to shrivel up, curl and/or yellow. Red spiders curl leaves. Spider mites leave speckled or "bronzed" leaves. Tea scale leaves white specks. Fungi cause white mildew or black sooty mold. Whitefly will billow like powder when an infected stem is shaken. Wilted or curled leaves indicate too much or too little water. Black or brown leaf edges on leaves may be sunburn from too much sun. Long snaky branches mean the plant needs more sun.

*Insect Removal:* One of the great mysteries to me is how we cheerfully accept caterpillar destruction on butterflyweed (Monarchs!), but if similar damage appears on other plants, we grab insecticides. How do you know it's not another butterfly-in-the-making? The vast majority of insects are beneficial, keeping harmful insects in check. Eliminate beneficials, and you create worse insect problems down the line.

Is the damage killing the plant? Or only making it look temporarily sad? Check leaf undersides early in the morning. Blasting plants with a hard water spray, especially leaf undersides, eliminate many harmful insects. Soap kills all insects. Spray with solution of one tablespoon of Ivory or Palmolive liquid soap in a water-filled, well-cleaned Windex-type spray bottle. (Soap dissolves their protective waxy coatings.)

**BENEFICIAL INSECTS/SOLUTIONS:** Many beneficials are available in nurseries. Ladybugs and green lacewings eat aphids, spider mites and lacebugs. Praying mantis come in egg cases that germinate in warm areas. Don't leave eggs unobserved inside the house! Diatomaceous earth is ground-up, razor-sharp fossils that stops slugs, snails, fleas, ticks and roaches. *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a fungus, controls bagworms and caterpillars. Apply these, and organic treatments, to problems only. They eliminate beneficial insects too. Ask your nurseryman for other new organic or natural solutions on the market.



*The lark's on the wing,  
The snail's on the thorn  
God's in his heaven —  
All's right with the world*



If poet Robert Browning pictured a snail impaled on a thorn in this verse, he's of one mind with a lot of Houston area gardeners. Those who recommend upturned grapefruit rinds and jars full of beer have obviously never tried to cope with a true Houston invasion. These techniques solve the problem only if the snails and slugs die laughing at you. If you want to try, go ahead. These, plus hand removal, diatomaceous earth, shredded sandpaper, crushed eggshells, copper strips, seaweed and/or coarse sand might make a noticeable dent in their numbers. Or, they may not. Pay kids by the coffee can-full to collect them. Kids love that. You dispose of them later. Best solution? Replace plants snails and slugs eat with plants they don't eat.

*To learn more about organic gardening, join Urban Harvest, [www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org).*

**Oleanders:** Few flowers are as tied to the history of our area as is the oleander. My father, Walter Beust, liked to tell about growing up in Galveston, when he and his brother George had a Model T. The brakes, like everything close to the coast, rusted quickly. To stop the car, he and George would aim it at the largest oleander they could find. Another great tale: during a severe hurricane, one Bolivar Peninsula family tried to ride out the storm at home. When it became evident their beachhouse would not survive, they drove to Fort Travis on the peninsula tip, aiming their car right into the middle one of the huge ancient stands of oleanders. There they safely weathered the rest of the storm, buffeted by that extraordinary foliage.

Oleanders blooming around Galveston today are the same plants, or descendants, of cuttings started after the 1900 Hurricane nearly destroyed the island. Incredibly stalwart women started the project to provide employment and raise spirits. The fabulous oleander collection at Moody Gardens was the life's work of Clarence Pleasants. For years, I kept a picture of Clarence over my computer to remind me to try and be as nice a person as he was. Clarence traveled Galveston on foot and by bus, snippers ready, taking cuttings of every oleander he could find. These he identified and propagated for all the rest of us to treasure and enjoy. True, oleanders should not be eaten. But neither should 90% of our other landscape plants.

*To learn more about oleanders, log onto [www.oleander.org](http://www.oleander.org), website of the International Oleander Society, which is based in Galveston.*

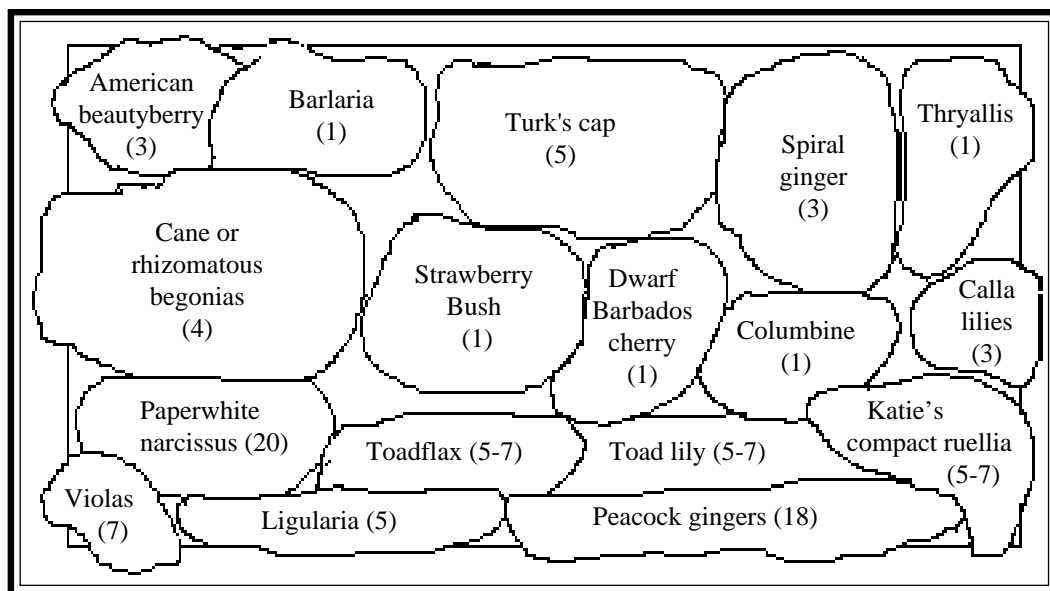
**Gardenias:** These are a lot like azaleas. They want afternoon shade and slightly acidic sandy soil with lots of organic matter added. The newer smaller gardenias now available seem to have more trouble here than the larger old fashioned shrubs (with slightly smaller flowers) often called cape jasmines. When I was at UH, huge 12 foot cape jasmines surrounded the old armory buildings at the corner of Wheeler and Cullen. My roommate, Judy Cerny, and I filled our dorm room with them until the housemother decided the overpowering scent would affect our brains. She made us throw them out. I can't get a gardenia to grow in my yard, but I have two cape jasmines that are doing quite well.

*"Gardens are not made  
by singing 'oh, how beautiful,'  
and sitting in the shade".*

*-- Rudyard Kipling*



# A Garden in Shade All Day (No Direct Sun)



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

*Shade can be bright*, sun-dappled or deep. Watch area carefully for brightest spots. If recommended flowers will not bloom, ask your nurseryman for other suggestions. Under deciduous trees, seed or plant larkspur, snapdragons, pansies, delphiniums, cyclamens and/or primroses in Nov. or Dec. These need cold, fade in heat. Most of these aren't in your national gardening books!

**AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY.** 5-8'. Cascading branches with purple or white berry-laden clusters.

**BARBADOS CHERRY, DWARF.** 3'. Pink flowers, red berries.

**BARLARIA.** 6-7'. Upright shrub, nice oval leaves; purple flowers.

**BEGONIAS, CANE or RHIZOMATOUS.** Winter hardy. Mulch well.

**CALLA LILY.** White are hardiest. Elegant blooms on 18" stalks.

**COLUMBINE.** 3' shrub, yellow flowers. Look for "Texas Gold."

**GINGERS, PEACOCK.** Wide striking leaves, blue/purple flowers.

**GINGERS, SPIRAL.** Wonderful curving stalks, Longlasting blooms.

**LIGULARIA.** Low, spreads, striking green/yellow-spotted leaves (leopard plant), delicate flowers.

**PAPERWHITE NARCISSUS.** Fragrant white blooms on tall stalks in late winter/early spring.

**RUELLIA, KATIE'S COMPACT.** 1' mounds. Blue, pink or white barlaria-like flowers.

**STRAWBERRY BUSH.** 6-8', Gulf Coast native, great red berries look somewhat like strawberries.

**THRYALLIS.** 4-6' shrub, light airy foliage, yellow flowers, trims easily into a small ornamental tree.

**TOADFLAX** (Butter & Eggs). Baby snapdragon-like flowers on 1' stalks.

**TOAD LILIES.** 2'. Very unusual lilac and brown flowers with upright foliage.

**TURK'S CAP** (*Malvavicus arboreus*). Texas native, 4'-6' tall. Red hibiscus-like flowers.

**VIOLAS.** (Johnny-Jump-Ups). 6" high, purple/white blooms. Feed with bonemeal.



*Barlaria*

*Annuals to try:* Balsam, chocolate plant\*, caladium, coleus, forget-me-nots, geraniums, heliotrope, impatiens\*, jacobina, Joseph's coat, lobelia (cardinal flower), nicotiana, Persian shield, polka-dot plant and torenia. (\* May reseed or return after mild winters.)

(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)

June						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



### *St. Fiacre . . .*

*may be much better choice for home garden statuary than St. Frances. Know why? See page 36.*

## June

### *This month, you really should . . .*

- Move hibiscus into less afternoon sun if they wilt excessively, drop buds or sunburn.
- Watch water gardens; levels may drop dangerously low due to evaporation.
- Raise the lawnmower blade. Cutting grass too short exposes the roots to heat and drought.
- Clean hummingbird feeders every 3-5 days.
- Keep azaleas well watered. They're setting next year's flowers now.
- Deep water plants to force roots to grow downward instead of sideways.
- Put a bird bath near tomatoes if birds peck at the fruit. Often they are looking for moisture.
- Keep an eye on trees. If they show stress, rich compost spread beneath the canopy has been known to produce dramatic results. For large old trees, seek professional help. Large trees may die from the inside out, producing new foliage even though the core is dead.

### *If the spirit moves . . .*

- Plant cantaloupe, okra, squash and, early in the month only, sweet potatoes.
- Pinch poinsettia and mum tips off to promote bushier growth.
- To banish ants, blend garlic, liquid dishsoap, hot peppers, water; strain and pour over mound.
- Webworms and bagworms are best removed by hand from trees.
- Seed or plant heat-loving annuals: coleus, cosmos, globe amaranth, mistflowers, nasturtiums, pentas, purslane, yarrow and zinnias. Seed morning glories along bare fencelines.
- Feed perennials, like bee balm, regularly to increase bloom production.
- In the water garden, keep the water level up and fertilize lilies every two weeks.

### *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Remove weeds. They steal valuable nutrients and moisture.
- Pinch flower buds off coleus and copper plants for prettier leaves.
- Stake or use flower cages around perennials that tend to fall over, such as montbretia.



- Pinch hydrangea leaf tips after blooms have faded to encourage more lush growth.
- Consider night lighting to make the yard safer, evenings outside more enjoyable.
- Hit insect-infested plants (especially leaf undersides) with a hard water spray early in day.
- Divide crowded crinum and daylilies if they stop blooming.
- Observe nonblooming roses; they need 6-8 hours of sun per day.
- Remove spent crape myrtle flowers to prolong the bloom period.
- Try herbs, vegetables in hanging baskets.
- Sprinkle earthworms over lawn and gardens. They work wonders!



## Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- Don't overwater bougainvillea, buddleia, durantas, hamelia, heather, lantana, portulaca, purslane or other drought-tolerant plants; they will stop blooming.
- Don't get upset if early spring bloomers fade. They may not be able to take the heat.

*Going on a long vacation?* The best protection: exchange watering chores with a neighbor. If that's not an option, here are a few suggestions. Don't fertilize anything before leaving town. Feeding plants will stimulate new growth that will need regular watering at first. Move hanging baskets and container plants into deeply shaded areas. These dry out faster than inground plants. Mulch everything well. Mulch keeps roots cooler and helps slow evaporation. Pick all the blooming flowers and about-to-open buds. Take these to an elderly neighbor or nearby nursing home to enjoy. It takes a lot of energy for plants to produce flowers and then seed. Better they should expend this energy protecting their roots while you're gone.

Turn your bathroom into a greenhouse for the indoor plants. Set a plastic bench or low table in the bathtub (one that won't be damaged by water). Fill the bathtub to just below the top of the table. Set the plants on the table. If they are plants that dry out quickly, make a wick out of an old stocking. Poke one end as far down into the soil as you can, and let the other end drop into the water. It should reach to the bottom of the tub since some water will evaporate. Use an electronic timer to turn a lamp off and on all night long in the bathroom. As an added security device, you could hook a radio up to the timer too, and turn it to a talk show.

*Armadillos, deer, rabbits, raccoons, squirrels and other critters:* First, the bad news: squirrels are here to stay. Nothing you can do about them. Half your neighbors are feeding them. Learn to live with them. Squirrels often strip branches bare of bark to get the hormone trees produce in order to replace the bark squirrels eat.

Armadillos come to gardens when it gets dry. A bright lamp and loud radio where they dig at night may make them go away. This is true of raccoons too, if they get in the attic. Raccoons sleep days, so stick lights and a radio up there in the daytime. Find the hole they're getting and seal it after they're gone.



I love the wild rabbits in my yard. I've been known to set out black-eyed Susans just for them to eat. But they can be a problem. Rabbits don't like human hair. Collect hair from a beauty salon and sprinkle it over the gardens. Rabbits also dislike cats. I have to admit, I envy those with deer problems. Oh, to have deer outside your window! But I understand the frustrations. Deer return to a "tasty" dining spot and consume whatever's there before they discover you

have replaced a plant they like with one they supposedly don't like. Check neighbors' yards to see what the deer aren't eating. Check with Master Gardeners at your County Extension office for more deer-unappetizing plants. *(For a free list of such plants, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to No Deer Plants, River Bend Company, 9039 Katy Freeway, Suite 502, Houston, TX 77024.)*

If all else fails, new motion-triggered sprinklers squirt extremely strong streams of water in the direction of movement. Set them up in the combat zones. Most critters will move on if conditions become uncomfortable or unpleasant.

*Begonias*: These are one of our most underused plants for shade. Tuberose begonias — the ones most often advertised — do not last through Gulf Coast summers. But cane and other shrub-type begonias, such as thick-stemmed Angel Wings, are root hardy in a semi-protected area under a thick mulch. They cannot take hot sun, and prefer a loose, rich soil. Work in plenty of compost. Plant under trees, or under outstretched branches of other shrubs. In winter, pile on mulch. *(For more information, and links to our many local Begonia societies, log onto [www.begonias.org](http://www.begonias.org).)*

*Bromeliads* have a major drawback: They're addictive. These striking, sculptural plants, with incredibly vivid, longlasting blooms, need excellent air circulation and drainage. Use a bromeliad mix if transplanting. Usually bromeliads can be left in the medium in which they were purchased. Since bromeliads differ in how they like to be fed and watered, know which variety you have and how to care for it. Most bromeliads reproduce easily, with mother plant producing numerous "pups." *(Bromeliad Society/Houston — [www.bsi.org](http://www.bsi.org) — is a wonderful resource for learning more about growing these plants.)*

*Crawfish Towers and Mushrooms*: After a wet spring, crawfish towers appear in lawns. These are the same crawfish in restaurants, only smaller. Their harmless presence is a sign of poor drainage and/or a too high water table. Kids like to tie a piece of bacon on a string, drop it down the hole and pull up the crawfish that latch on. To discourage crawfish, remove towers. Don't kill them. They aerate soil, leaving rich organic matter.

Mushrooms pop up in rich soil and stay only a short time, enriching the soil when they go. Some folks welcome their presence. If you don't, or have children around who might eat them, remove them. Don't kick or mow them. Wearing throwaway gloves, pick them up and throw them in the trash. Many local mushrooms are edible; some are not.

*Daylilies* ought to be in every Lazy Garden. These magnificent flowers are reliable bloomers no matter how ignored they are. Feed and water them occasionally and they reward you with even more flowers. Rust on leaves may be a problem on newer varieties. But like blackspot on antique roses, it usually doesn't affect flowering. Daylilies like well drained soil and all day sun, but will bloom with just morning sun, or sometimes even in a bright shady area. They have few insect or disease problems. Overcrowding reduces blooming. Dig the clumps, separate individual plants and start a new bed somewhere else. *(Daylily societies are wonderful resources for learning more about growing these. For local chapters, log onto [www.daylilies.org](http://www.daylilies.org).)*



*Daylilies*

*Hibiscus* are getting as confusing as roses. Tropical hibiscus have glossy green leaves on small shrubs with fabulously colored blooms. Hardy hibiscus are larger shrubs with flat



Hardy  
Hibiscus

green leaves. Many, but not all, tropicals need winter protection. Some tropicals survive mild winters in the ground if heavily mulched. Hardy hibiscus die back and return in spring. Some hardy hibiscus, but not all, seem immune to the white fly so devastating to tropical hibiscus. Bleached areas on topmost leaves of tropical hibiscus mean too much sun. Generally, white, yellow and light pink tropical hibiscus like full, hot sun. Most darker-colored and double tropical hibiscus prefer filtered light. The more exotic the hibiscus, the more likely it is to flower only in spring and fall. Don't let hibiscus dry out to the point of wilting. Feed lightly with a hibiscus or low-phosphorus fertilizer. As a rule, hibiscus don't need pruning. If you must, prune off 1/3, wait a week or two, prune 1/3, etc. To display or wear hibiscus, pick buds early in the day. Seal in plastic bag. Refrigerate 8 hours. Take out 1-2 hours before displaying or wearing. They'll last all evening without water. (*The American Hibiscus Society/Lone Star chapter — www.lonestarahs.org — is a wonderful resource for learning more about growing these.*)

**1015Y Onions:** These are the delicious Texas onions that should have been planted on October 15 (1015 - get it?). Harvest when 50 percent of the tops fall over. Longtime gardeners say to "walk on the onions" first. (Stepping on the leaves is supposed to squeeze juices back into the onions.) Dig, shake soil from the roots and dry them 4-8 days in the shade. After leaves shrivel, cut off 2" above the bulb. Store in a cool, dry, well-ventilated spot.

**Orchids:** Many orchids love the Gulf Coast, including cattleya, dendrobium, phalaenopsis and oncidium. You don't need a greenhouse. Keep plants inside in a bright window in winter. In summer, move them outside. Provide humidity inside by placing pots on a shallow dish filled with pebbles and water. Don't let water touch the pot. Outside, mist often. Allow cattleya, dendrobium and oncidium to dry out before watering. Keep phalaenopsis moist, but never wet. Feed monthly half strength with a balanced fertilizer (20-20-20). Orchids are happiest with light- to medium-green leaves. Lush dark green leaves mean too little light. Yellowing leaves indicate too much light. Never use potting soil. Orchids prefer open, fast draining potting mediums like bark, charcoal or tree fern. Mount them to hang on walls, fences or trees during the summer. (*The Houston Orchid Society — <http://orchidweb.org> — is a wonderful resource.*)



**Thatch:** The Great Controversy! To dethatch or not to dethatch — that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler to leave those grass clippings on, and suffer the thatch that results, or, to remove them by hand and, by removing them, rob the soil of the riches they contain. Pro-thatchers say leave them on, they decay, providing protective mulch for grass roots, keeping soil cool and moist in summer, warm and moist in winter. Anti-thatchers say they form a non-nutritious layer (thatch) in which roots will grow, weakening the lawn. Thatch is usually not a problem with St. Augustine — unless you cut off 7-10+ inches at a time. Dethatchers have to be used very carefully, or they may destroy the runners. I say: removing clippings is stupid. They are a rich source of vital nutrients for the soil.

**Tomatoes:** Leaving tomatoes on the vine until they turn a deep color actually decreases production. Harvest at first blush and ripen at room temperature. They are



just as tasty, the plant increases its yield and fewer are lost to birds. Some birds are looking for moisture. Try a birdbath. A child's pinwheel or red Christmas balls tied to the tomato cage discourage some raiders. Birds peck away at the hard red balls until they get discouraged and leave the bush alone. Or, cover the whole bed with a mesh cloth. Irregular watering (difficult to control with our spring rains) will cause all sorts of problems, like splitting skin and dropped fruit. This is one reason they must be in raised beds. *(For more information on growing the best varieties of vegetables, log onto Urban Harvest's website: [www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org).)*

**St. Fiacre vs. St. Frances:** Poor St. Francis of Assisi. One can't help but suspect he would not like being the most popular statue in home gardens. It is said St. Francis didn't believe any land should be privately owned or that man should ever kill any of God's creatures (including aphids, fire ants and roaches). The bird on his shoulder symbolizes the freedom he believed animals should have to come or go at will.

St. Fiacre is actually the patron saint of gardeners (see page 32). He's also the patron saint of cab drivers. He was born in Ireland (it is believed) near the end of the 6th Century, about five centuries before St. Francis of Assisi. An ordained priest, he sought solitude in France. Legend has it St. Faro, then bishop of that city, told St. Fiacre he could have as much land as he could till from sunup to sundown in a forest near Breuil in the French province of Brie.

St. Fiacre pointed his staff at the ground and began walking. Miraculously the soil turned by itself, clearing away all briars and trees in his path. It was the first of many miracles attributed to him. St. Fiacre established culinary, medicinal, flower and herb gardens and a hospice to which many came for his famous cures. They, in turn, brought him new seeds and plants, so that his gardens became famous throughout Europe and, who knows, may have been the inspiration for Brother Cadfael's gardens.

It was said he refused to allow women in his chapel. Legend explains that a woman, who coveted the land given to St. Fiacre, claimed sorcery, not a miracle, caused the staff to furrow the soil. The bishop became so angry with the woman, he banned all women from St. Fiacre's chapel. But, to be honest, women in those days were never allowed inside monasteries.

Ah, but you're thinking: What about cab drivers? In Paris, an enterprising 17th Century innkeeper, owner of the Hotel Saint-Fiacre in the Rue St-Martin, came up with the idea of renting coaches. The coaches, or cabs, became known as fiacres, and still are so-called today.

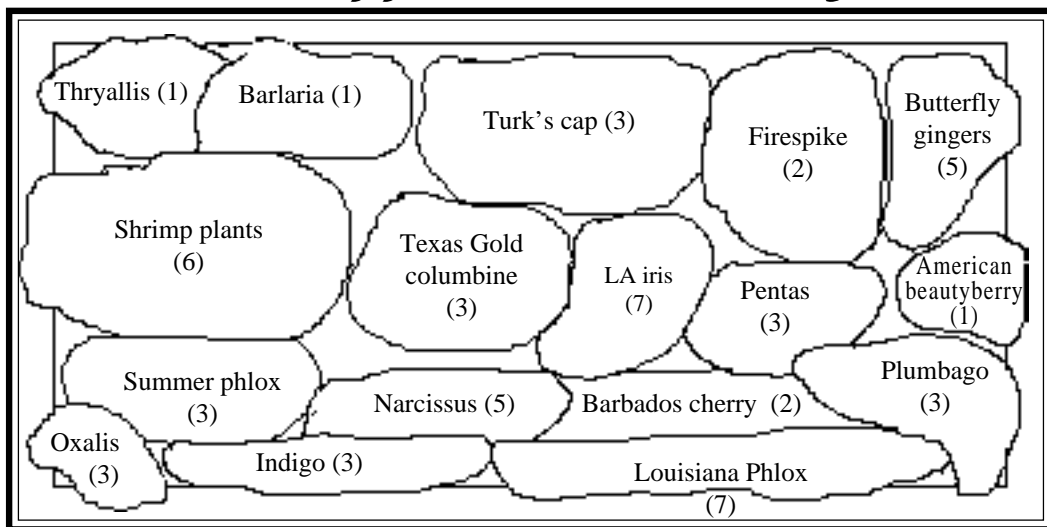
St. Fiacre's feast day is celebrated on August 30 or September 1, depending on which source you believe and he is also considered the patron saint of herbalists and florists.

Before you throw out your statue of St. Francis, he did urge gardeners to set aside space within their gardens for flowers and fragrance. Who else would tell you these things?

*"I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in."  
--George Washington Carver*



# A Garden in Filtered, Partial, or Dappled Sun All Day



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

*Watch this area.* Pinpoint areas where sun penetrates at different times of the year. You can put plants requiring slightly more sun in those areas. If this garden is under a tree, never add more than 2" of soil per year over tree roots. Don't bank soil up against the trunk. Always leave an open collar around the tree base.



**AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY.** 4-5'. Native. Pink, white or red summer blooms, fuchsia or white fall berries. Attracts birds.

**BARBADOS CHERRY.** 2-3', compact, pink flowers, red berries.

**BARLARIA.** Upright foliage, attractive leaves, lilac flowers.

**COLUMBINE, 'TEXAS GOLD'.** Fernlike foliage, with wonderful yellow flowers. Blooms early spring. Mulch in summer.

**FIRESPIKE.** Brilliant red spikes, attractive upright foliage. Hummingbirds and butterflies. 5-6'.

**GINGER, BUTTERFLY.** Upright 5' foliage with very fragrant white cluster flowers.

**INDIGO.** Weeping delicate foliage with pink wisteria-like flowers. Easily tolerates our spring and fall floods. 2-3' low-growing, spreading mound.

**LOUISIANA IRISES.** Gulf Coast native, 1-6' flower stalks with blooms 3-7" across. Wide color range. Good for areas where water stands after a rain but will work well in a regular garden too.

**LOUISIANA PHLOX (Wild Sweet William).** 18" plants covered with blue flowers in early spring. Plants are evergreen, light green in spring, darker in summer. Will need watering in summer.

**NARCISSUS.** 1-2'. Bulbs, bloom January, February. Very fragrant white flowers.

**OXALIS.** 8-12", avoid the invasive common pink; go for the purple leaf oxalis or white blooming clovers sold everywhere around St. Patrick's Day or other less common varieties.

**PENTAS.** 2-3', upright perennial with cluster flowers great for butterflies.

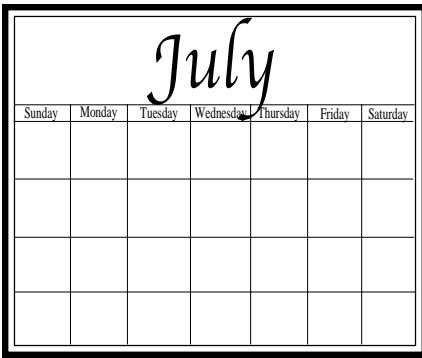
**PLUMBAGO.** 3-5', branches that tend to "fountain" over. Prolific blue flowers spring through frost. **SHRIMP PLANTS.** 2-3', longlasting red, pink or white flowers that look like shrimps. Blooms spring through frost. Pinch back for bushier growth.

**SUMMER PHLOX.** 2-3', big globe flower clusters atop upright stalks.

**THRYALLIS.** 6-8', airy treelike shrub with beautiful yellow-gold flowers.

**TURK'S CAP.** 6-7', upright branches with red, pink or white blooms; hummingbirds.

*(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)*



## *Fernleaf lavender . . .*

*isn't easy to find, but if you do, it's the perfect plant for beachside or lakeside plantings, especially in sandy soils or highly raised beds. (See page 40)*

# July

## *This month, you really should . . .*

- Open tent caterpillar webs in trees. Birds will eat worms. Worms won't kill healthy trees.
- Water bulbs with greenery showing. Caladiums may disappear if not well watered now.
- Mist plants in early morning. Blast bugs off with a harder water spray. Many plants go semi-dormant to conserve energy. They return when temperatures drop. Evening wilting is normal, self-preservation. If they are still wilted in the morning, water.
- Drink lots of water yourself when you are working outside in the garden.
- Cut off rolled up canna leaf at the base and destroy it to kill the insect larva inside.
- Keep pecan trees well watered to protect developing pecans.
- Watch hibiscus for crimping leaves. This means they're getting too much sun.
- Ignore fairy rings that pop up after rains. These circular-growing mushrooms simply indicate there is plenty of organic matter in your soil. They'll go away.
- Use gray water (washing machine) on your plants, if possible.

## *If the spirit moves . . .*

*Plumbago*



- Pinch tips of nonbudded branches on annuals/perennials to encourage bushier growth and more flowers. Keep spent blooms picked off all plants.
- Renew mulches if getting thin in spots.
- Check plants for too-lanky growth from too much shade. They need more sun.
- Check azaleas, camellias, hydrangeas and magnolias for pale leaves due to too-alkaline soil. Use soil acidifier and/or mulch with oak leaves and pine needles.
- Feed plumerias one application of bonemeal or superphosphate and Epsom salts.
- Mist and dust houseplants frequently to compensate for drying action of air conditioners.
- Check overhead shade now if azaleas didn't bloom well. They may need a little more sun.
- Start tomato, pepper and eggplant in pots, summer squash and Swiss chard in ground.
- In the water garden, remove decaying leaves and spent blossoms. Fertilize every 2 weeks.
- Divide overcrowded perennials like summer phlox.

## If you're really feeling energetic . . .

- Try rosemary and wormwood to deter snails; catnip, chamomile and wax myrtle for fleas.
- In shade, try firespike, jacobina, ruellia, hosta and toadflax.
- Cut utility bills with vines on a trellis to shade the west side of your house. Try black-eyed Susan vine, coral vine, mandevilla, Mexican flame vine (right), passionvine, trumpetvine.
- Remove crape myrtle seeds to prolong blooming period.
- Protect tree trunks and exposed roots from lawnmower nicks with loose plantings and/or mulch. Leave an open ring adjacent to the tree base.
- Attack powdery mildew on crape myrtles with a superstrong water spray early in the morning. Hit leaf undersides. Newer named varieties tend to be more mildew-resistant.



## Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- Don't panic if oleanders lose some leaves now. It's normal. If a lot fall off, it could be a sign of overwatering. Trees also lose leaves now in reaction to the heat.
- Don't overwater azaleas and camellias. Some wilting is normal now at midday.
- Don't do any heavy fertilizing. Light feedings are okay.
- Don't touch white, stocking-like webs on tree trunks. These are beneficial bark lice.
- Don't mow the lawn too short or too often. Longer blades protect roots from the hot sun.
- Don't water bulbs with no greenery showing. They are dormant. Overwatering rots them.
- Don't plant flowers that need summer water in beds with bulbs that lose greenery now.
- Don't pinch back poinsettias and blackberries any more.
- Don't water in the evening if you can help it. Morning's the best time. On the other hand, watering at the wrong time is better than not watering at all.

*Too Much of a Good Thing?* Some plants may like us too much. Although they are great in the right spot (like, surrounded by concrete), in an open bed area they may quickly take over. These include cashmere bouquet (*Clerodendrum bungei*), obedient plant (*Physostegia*), standard and running ruellia, wedelia, to name a few. I remember vividly our aunt Cryilla (Cindy) Simpson begging me not to transplant Peruvian lily (*Alstroemeria*) from her yard to mine. Twenty years later, I'm still regretting I didn't listen to her!

*Poolside Plantings:* If the pool is visible from inside, think of it as a work of art on that wall and plantings as the frame. Plan landscaping from inside and out for maximum enjoyment. Children run around pools so containers must be heavy enough not to tip over. Avoid "messy" trees like crape myrtles and magnolias. Keep high maintenance plants (need regular watering, etc.) close to pool for easy care. Use a vine-covered trellis to hide unsightly-machinery. Water chemicals shouldn't hurt plants. If they do, have water levels checked.

*Shoreside Gardens:* Hot sun, constant wind, salt coatings — gardening at the beach or by the bay can be such fun. The primary criteria for a garden close to water should be low-

care, especially if the garden is at a weekend home. Water adds a dimension that enhances any landscape. At the same time, the intensified light may make variegated leafed plants and pastel flowers look sickly if used alone. These often look best when used in groupings with nonvariegated green leaves or strong colored flowers and foliage. Use plantings to frame, and thus enhance, your view, even if just a narrow strip of water is visible. If, for example, your water view is between two houses closer to shore than you are, use taller shrubs to obscure the houses, and lower colorful plantings between them to create a “bottom” to the living frame.

Arbors and windbreaks provide protection from wind and intense sun, which increase evaporation. Large shrubs provide shelter for salt-sensitive perennials and annuals. Plants that tolerate salt water spray include bougainvillea, Dahlberg daisies, daylilies, hibiscus, hymenocallis (large spider lilies), lantana, oleanders, palms, plumbago, purslane, verbena and many antique roses. Two that bloom year-round in the close-to-the-surf Crystal Beach garden of Doris Robinson are fernleaf lavender (*Lavandula multifida*, on page 38) and Katie ruellia.

All beach landscape plants benefit from early morning mistings to eliminate salt buildups. Keep plants with like fertilization/water requirements together, or you may find it difficult to meet their individual needs without harming surrounding plants. Watch tender plants closely for disease or insects. Replace plagued plants with others more adaptable to the environment. Add organic matter to sandy shoreline soils to help them retain moisture.

**Watering:** Even the most drought-tolerant of plants need some watering during Gulf Coast summers. Water early in the morning. It is cooler, so less is lost to evaporation. Plants dry quickly, making them less susceptible to insects that like moist conditions when they eat.

Overhead sprinklers lose a large percentage of water to evaporation in summer. But they cover the greatest area at one time. Pulsating systems lose less water than a constant stream. Soaker hoses cover a smaller area but lose less to evaporation. Buried systems are the most efficient, but the least flexible. Once installed, they cannot be easily moved around.

A hand-held hose is better than no watering. But it is difficult to hold the hose in one position long enough to wet lower soil layers. Depth is the key to successful watering. Daily light waterings may do more harm than good. Only upper levels are wetted. Roots grow upward, reaching for moisture. The sun bakes these upper levels, damaging the roots. If you must water by hand, let the hose nozzle rest close to the soil, at the plant base. Leave it on each plant base as long as possible. This way, at least you aren't watering nearby weeds. Sprinklers should be left on long enough for water to penetrate at least 5-10 inches down.

**WaterSmart vs. Xeriscaping:** Xeriscaping, or low water landscaping, may be a smart gardening approach in Central and West Texas, where rainfall is scarce and the soil is porous. Along the Gulf Coast, WaterSmart landscaping is a better route. This technique incorporates our heavy spring and fall rains by advocating bog gardens (see page 43) to funnel rainwater into subsoils for use by tree roots during summer drought. WaterSmart promotes raised beds for the type of plants recommended for xeriscapes, such as bauhinias (native orchid trees) and cassias. These often cannot tolerate our heavy rain periods if planted at ground level. Both are great here in the right spot.

In late summer and fall, cassia's airy foliage becomes blanketed with electric



*Bauhinia is a great drought-tolerant tree that must be in a raised bed or extremely well drained site in the Houston area.*



yellow flower clusters. I planted one at the top of our front ditch (the nearest thing I had to a well-raised, well-drained area). It grew sideways more than upward, smothering my prize nodding clematis vines (dug up from the edge of woods near our home). The cassia had to move. I tried to dig it up. The roots were too deep. I soaked the area and tried again. No luck.

This was in mid-August. Blasting heat, drought conditions. Not the best time to transplant anything. But no way was I going to let it kill my clematis. I tied a rope around the base, tied the other end to my car bumper and pulled that sucker out. I planted it farther down, still atop the ditch. All the leaves fell off. It looked dead. By mid-September, that stubborn shrub was covered with bright yellow buds! The next year the leaves came back out, and it bloomed beautifully from that point on. That cassia definitely is in my Awesome Plant Hall of Fame.

But the story isn't over yet. I tried to find out what it was. Everyone said: "It's a *Cassia corymbosa*." But these are trees, not shrubs five foot high and wide like mine (see page 60). I collected seed and gave it away every time I spoke to a gardening group. "If it grows tall," I told them, "it's a *Cassia corymbosa*. But if it grows short and fat, it's a *Cassia Brenda*!"

## *Never Underestimate the power of your front yard:*

When we moved to Aldine, I looked for every excuse to drive past 710 Aldine-Mail Route. Obviously someone who loved to garden lived there. Beautiful flowerbeds lined the fences and sidewalk. When I started the Lazy Gardener column, I included a "Tip o' the Trowel" to that gardener (whom I had never met) for making my life a little brighter. A month or so later, a woman phoned me. Her mother lived in that house. She had been very ill and depressed over not being able to keep up her gardens. My column item, the daughter said, delighted her mother. And she had died shortly afterwards. The daughter just wanted to say thanks.

Never underestimate the effect your front yard is having on passersby. For decades, I have kept a close eye on two plantings on my regular driving routes. In the 8800 block of W. Hardy are the most beautiful caesalpinia I have seen. Every spring I eagerly await the first sprouts of green stalks, knowing this means those gorgeous flowers aren't far behind. For the same reason, I watch closely the corner of Luthe and Lauder looking for the first winecup blooms.

Seeing my winecups and my caesalpinia (for they feel like mine) appear each spring is as comforting as seeing dolphins from the ferry or hearing owls in the woods. They mean all's right with the world, no matter what bad things might be happening in my life at the moment. I also treasure the incredible morning glory tree (the size of a large oleander) in the 1600 block of Houston Avenue. These normally grow so straight upward and lanky, my niece and nephews (Stuart, Mimi and Jimmy McMurray) call theirs the Dr. Seuss Tree. But this one was regularly pruned so it sprouted multiple stalks. The best time to view it is in the morning. Then there's the plumeria at 2711 Harrisburg that defies all the rules. This enormous shrub is growing in the ground, obviously easily surviving winters that force most plumerias indoors. All these plants are in my Awesome Plant Hall of Fame.



*Morning glory tree*

## *My Awesome Plant Hall of Fame ...*

My yard has certainly provided its own set of challenges (besides me), including a four foot flood that kept everything submerged for 36 hours. But my Awesome

Plant Hall of Fame started long before Tropical Storm Allison, before I even knew much about plants at all. My grandmother Mimi gave me an althaea from her yard. It grew huge and was beautiful. I wanted more. I went to the nursery and nearly went into cardiac shock at the cost of a shrub that large. I went home, dug up the althaea, got Husband's saber saw and cut the rootstock into quarters. I planted the quarters. Every single one grew. Later someone told me that was a really stupid thing to do. To this day, every time I look at those althaeas, I think: "*You're truly awesome plants.*" And that's how it started.

The second plant inducted was a peach-colored El Capitolio hibiscus. A huge branch fell out of a nearby oak tree, smushing the whole thing to the ground. To my amazement, it came back out. And when it bloomed, it had both red and peach flowers! Neighbors would stop and marvel. What happened was that a peach-blooming hibiscus was grafted onto a red-blooming rootstock. After it was smushed, shoots emerged from both above and below the graft. Eventually the reds disappeared but — surprise! — the peach flowers developed a red throat.



*El Capitolio  
hibiscus*

The third plant inducted was my pink magnolia (*Magnolia soulangiana*). I wanted it to grow one way. It wanted to grow another way. I tied wire to the main stalk and pulled it into place, securing it to a stake. But I pulled too hard. The bark split all the way down to the ground. I grabbed some electrical tape, taped the bark back together and pulled it into place. It went right on growing and blooming as though nothing had ever happened. Several years later, during Hurricane Alicia, a huge limb fell out of another oak and smushed my magnolia flat to the ground. It came right back out and bloomed the next spring.

Two live oaks are in my Awesome Plant Hall of Fame. One is a huge live oak in the 3300 block of Aldine Bender. I fell in love with it the minute I saw it, and prayed it would survive that road's widening. It did. It was the biggest live oak I'd ever seen outside the one that reigns over Husband's childhood home in Rose City, where his sister Bess Allen lives now. But let's face it. All huge live oaks are awesome. Just looking at them fills me with wonder. Perhaps they take me back to the live oak-filled campus of the old St. Agnes Academy on Fannin where I spent wonderful high school days with women who have remained good friends all these years. Perhaps the best plants of all are those that have these kinds of special associations.

• • •

After 9/11, someone (I wish I knew who) said:

*"That day I needed  
my garden more  
than it needed me."*



*Pink magnolia from the Awesome  
Plant Hall of Fame.*

I know how she felt. My Awesome Plants are a constant source of strength and inspiration. I certainly do need them more than they need me — all the time.

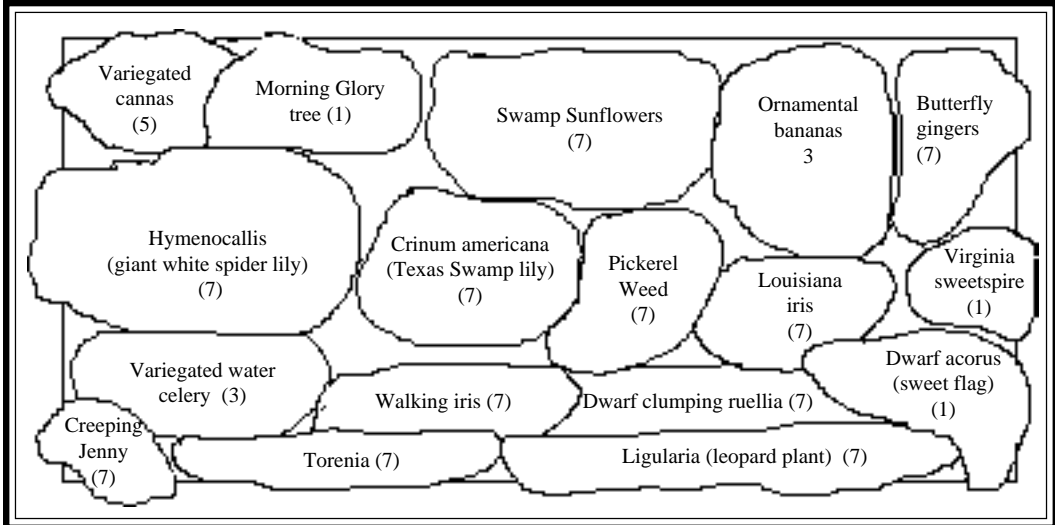


Sunny side

# A Bog Garden



Shady side



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

## Bog Gardens . . .

... are one of the best ideas to come along in a LONG time for Greater Houston area gardens. Wouldn't it be wonderful to store, deep underground, all that rainfall that runs off your yard for use by your trees during summer droughts? Keeping soil moist helps prevent expensive subsidence damage and protect bayous and Galveston Bay from dangerous landscape chemicals in the runoff. It's a win-win situation. A naturally low spot, where water stands or collects during a heavy rain is ideal. It is NOT a mosquito breeding ground because there is no standing water (except during rains). Rain water drains into the area from the rest of the yard (making adjacent beds healthier) and is absorbed by lower soil levels. You can go one of 2 routes:



1. Dig the area (if necessary) to make it 8-15" below ground level. Fill half full with pea gravel and/or rocks plus very coarse mulch. Plant into the mulch/rock level. The soil normally attached to nursery-grown plants will mix with this mulch layer, providing sufficient growing medium. Fill to top with leaves, pine needles and/or a very coarse mulch.

2. (Lazy way) Plant right into the low spot. Fill with leaves, pine needles or a coarse mulch. These beds may have to be watered to get the plants started and during extreme drought periods. But the more mulch you use on top, the more moist the bottom will stay during the summer.

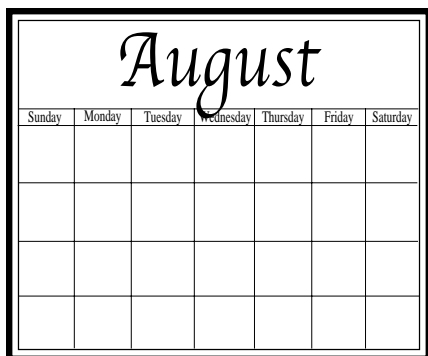
If you're already in an extremely high or well drained area and simply want to grow boggy plants, use a liner. Dig as above. Line the bed with plastic. Fill and plant as described above. A lined bed holds water better during the dry periods but won't help with subsidence or provide water to trees.

Bog Gardens can be as sophisticated as you want — or as simple as throwing bananas, cannas, crinums, elephant ears, LA iris or ruellia into a low area that takes forever to dry out after a rain. These root without planting and love this "difficult" situation.

In a bog garden, the center will be the most moist. Edges are less moist and a better area for experimenting with regular garden plants. Lobelia (cardinal flower) and creeping jenny often do better on a bog edge than they do in regular gardens. If you have a natural edge pond, consider expanding the sides to create a Bog Garden border!

This garden was designed with the help of Anita Nelson of Nelson Water Gardens with more plants than you will probably want. But this gives you a selection of very common ones that should be easier to find. Once established, this garden should be carefree. Unless, that is, some decide they like you TOO much and take over! There is a whole world out there of Gulf Coast-hardy "bog or swamp plants" that would also work in this yard.

A  
B  
O  
G  
G  
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R  
D  
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N



## *Gaura . . .*

*blooms in deserted fields all over Houston. It loves hot, dry sites and looks like butterflies in flight. It is now readily available in nurseries.*

# August

## *This month, you really should . . .*

- Watch for hummingbirds! Soon migrating species come through. Keep feeders clean, full.
- Give perennials, annuals, roses and fall-blooming shrubs a light feeding and slight haircut.
- Order a free best fall vegetable varieties list from your county Extension Service.
- Prune deadwood from trees. Hurricane season's here.
- Let cactus roots dry out (callous over) before replanting. Plant in well drained spot.
- Keep the lawn well watered. Mow more often to force sideways growth to fill in bare areas. Sick of mowing? See tips on eliminating lawn on Page 12.
- Water less often, but leave the sprinkler on for an extended period (watch for runoff). Shallow waterings encourage problems.

## *If the spirit moves . . .*

- Check lawn areas adjacent to concrete for chinch bugs. (See Chinch Bugs, Page 45).
- Set out fall tomatoes (plants), green onions, cucumbers, corn and green beans.
- Later in month, start seeds of broccoli, cabbage, chard, garlic, kohlrabi, squash. When temperatures drop in September, plant in garden.
- Protect new seedlings from hot afternoon sun with newspaper or cloth shade.
- Feed plumerias toward the end of this month with a high phosphorus (high middle number) fertilizer. Hibiscus like a low phosphorus fertilizer.
- In the water garden, feed all water plants.

## *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Work organic matter into beds. This holds water in a form plants can use.
- Visit nurseries for great clearance sales on plants as they make room for fall stocks.
- Prune newly-purchased plants slightly and soak in a rooting stimulant before planting.
- Work 1/2 cup of Epsom salts around roses, hibiscus and other bloomers for more flowers.

- Collect the air conditioning drip water for potted plants. They'll love it.
- Divide crowded iris. Remove old foliage. Use bone meal or superphosphate.
- Remove moisture-grabbing weeds or smother them under a thick mulch.
- Serve some alfalfa tea to all plants: steep 10-12 cups alfalfa pellets 2-3 days in a 30-gallon garbage can full of water. Pour on all plants.
- Potted hybrid (modern) roses may need watering twice a day.

## *Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Don't cry over plants that die in the heat of August. They don't belong in Lazy Gardens!
- Don't assume dead plants are really dead. Some, like maidenhair and other ferns, oxalis, some roses, phlox and German primroses, may just be dormant and will return in fall.
- Pinching faded flowers prolongs bloom periods and is a good way to relieve stress (yours).
- Stop feeding and watering potted amaryllis. Lay pots on sides out of the way (to remind you not to water). When foliage dies, cut it off.
- Don't fertilize a heat-stressed lawn. (Okay to apply seaweed extract or fish emulsion.)

*Chinch bugs:* Dead lawn areas near concrete may harbor chinch bugs. Cut a plug of St. Augustine grass that is half-dead, half-alive grass. Submerge in water. Chinch bugs (black bodies, white wings) float. Keep area well watered. Don't fertilize. A few chinch bugs are normal. Even when bugs are present, keeping the area well watered keeps grass from turning brown. If chinch bugs are destroying the area, consider replacing the grass with Favorite Lazy Gardener Plants for Sunny Areas (Page 18). Border with bricks, timbers, etc., and raise area 6-8" with enriched topsoil before planting.

*Crinum:* These have to be the easiest, most satisfying of plants to grow. When not in bloom, the long strapping green leaves create a tropical shrub-like effect. The flowers appear on tall elegant stalks in varying shades of white, pink and red. The bulbs multiply like crazy, and they can be planted or transplanted anytime



*Crinum*

of the year. I bought my first crinum at the Bulb and Plant Mart decades ago. I paid \$5 for this enormous bulb, which horrified me. Such an extravagance! But the flower pictured was so beautiful. Crinums can go in right at ground level. They will appreciate a rich, friable soil. But they are so hardy, if you leave one lying on top the ground, it will probably root and bloom if left alone long enough.

*Husband and the Crinum:* One day Husband and I were walking down the railroad tracks behind his Rose City childhood home. He likes wildlife; I love wildflowers. Suddenly, from the top of a trestle, I spied beautiful white flowers down in the swamp. "I want one of those!" I cried. He protested: "It's growing in water. It won't grow in your garden."

I persisted. Gentleman that he is, he scrambled down the bank, threw a board into what turned out to be much deeper water than he expected and, by then all covered with wet muck, waded out to dig up one of the flowers. He brought it back, mumbling that he would probably die from contaminated swamp water. I planted the treasured bulb where our grease trap

overflows. I figured that would keep it alternately wet and dry as it was in its native environ.

Finally it bloomed. I was so thrilled, I carried it into the office to show to Sally (McQueen Squire, Houston's Bulb Lady). She nodded and said it was a *Crinum americanum*. And, if I wanted one, why didn't I tell her? She has lots of them! (Mine is pictured on page 54.)

*Lycoris*: Those beautiful spidery flowers blooming now atop leafless stalks are lycoris. They are related to Greta Garbo, says Sally, "*They 'vant' to be alone.*" They grow best where they are totally ignored when not in bloom. The narrow leaves sprout in spring, then disappear when temperatures rise. The flowers, which come in a multitude of colors, suddenly appear about this time. If overwatered, they will rot. Some years they are prettier than other years.

*Palms* are invaluable in the landscape because of their unusual forms, textures and colors. Typically they are so slow growing, it's best to buy the largest plant you can afford. Before you select a palm, find out its eventual size. Some need protection but make beautiful patio or poolside plants. Others do well in the ground here. (*The Houston Palm Society* — [www.palms.org/houston](http://www.palms.org/houston) — *are wonderful resources for learning more about growing these.* )

*Water Gardens*: The point where two different environments join together is usually ecologically healthier than either single environment alone. Wildlife diversity is greater with more natural enemies to control harmful insect populations. Water gardens introduce a second environment into our yards. If space is limited, consider a water garden in a whiskey barrel or other above-ground containers. Inexpensive fish will take care of mosquito larvae.

Pick a site with some full sun, away from trees. Toxins from decaying leaf may harm fish. Since water immediately draws the eye, preview the site from inside the house. You don't want an ugly, unchangeable background. Use a hose to experiment with outlines. Liners, preformed basins or concrete bases, pumps and instructions are available at many nurseries.

Dig the hole 15 to 18 inches deep. If you use a preformed basin, conform the hole to its shape. Or, you can set the basin above ground and camouflage the sides with boulders and plantings. If you use a liner, lay it in the hole with excess overlapping sides. Fill with water. Cover excess liner with rocks, etc. Liner exposed to the sun will dry out and crack. Before you add fish, use a chlorine remover in treated water.

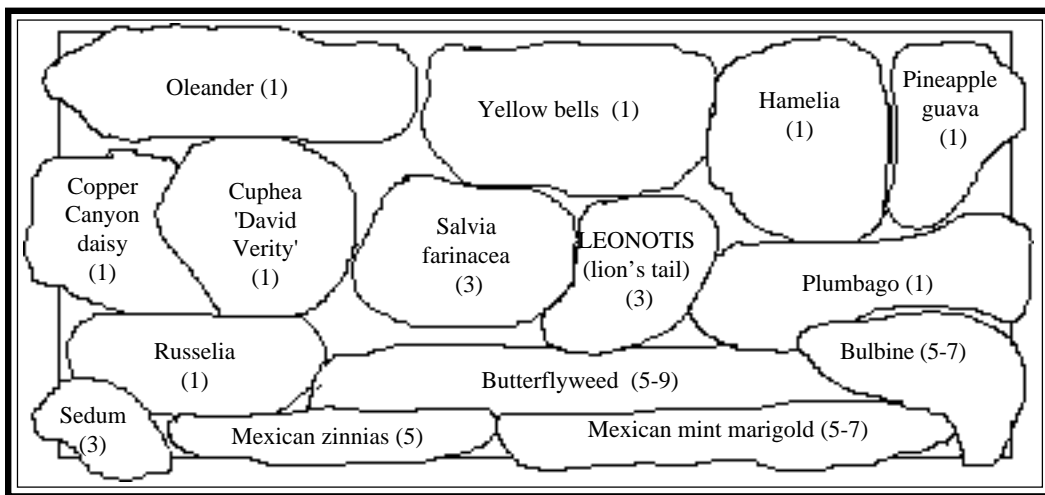
Some fish find water lilies very tasty. Discuss plans with a local expert before making large investments. Pumps recycle water to create wonderful waterfall sounds. Water lilies do best in still waters. If you want both, locate the waterfall at one end and the water lilies at the other end. If the electricity goes out because of a power failure, unplug the pump. The surge of power that might result when electricity is restored could cause damage. Invisible child-proof nettings are available and are a good safety measure.



*The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives.*

-- American Indian Saying

# A Garden in All Day Sun or Strong Afternoon Sun



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

**Gulf Coast afternoon sun** is so hot, those blistering few hours can equal “all day sun” in other regions. The whole bed needs to be raised a minimum 12 inches above ground level.

- BULBINE.** Succulent-like foliage; tall spikes of orange or yellow blooms. Evergreen.
- BUTTERFLYWEED** (*Asclepias*). 2-3', bright orange/red blooms all summer.
- COPPER CANYON DAISY.** 2-3', bright yellow flowers, lacy foliage, scented when leaves crushed.
- CUPHEA 'DAVID VERITY'.** 2-3', red/orange cigar like flowers; great for hummingbirds.
- HAMELIA** (Firebush, hummingbird bush). 4-5' foot shrub, red/orange flowers. Red fall color.
- LEONOTIS** (Lion's tail). 5', orange plumes atop upright stalks.
- MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD.** 2-3', bright yellow flowers, lacy foliage, scented leaves.
- MEXICAN ZINNIAS.** 1', bright orange or yellow flowers with mounding foliage.
- OLEANDER** (Standard size). Very hardy shrub, up to 15' depending on variety. Dwarfs great too!
- PINEAPPLE GUAVA** (*Feijoa*). Hardy subtropical fruiting shrub with beautiful red/white flowers.
- PLUMBAGO.** 3', spreading, cascading branches with blue or white flowers. Very tough.
- RUSSELIA** (Coral fountain plant). Native, 3-4', orange/red cigar-shaped flowers on ferny foliage.
- SALVIA FARINACEA.** Blue spikes 3-5 feet, blooms spring through first heavy frost.
- SEDUM.** Groundcovers, easy, with small succulent foliage and various colored flowers.
- YELLOW BELLS.** (*Tecoma stans*, Esperanza). 6-8', Yellow bell-shaped flowers.

See page 18 for more Favorite Lazy Gardener Sun Plants.

**A Cactus & Succulent Garden** makes an ideal planting for an extremely well-drained area that receives all day blistering hot sun, especially if the area is difficult to water. The flowers are often long lasting and the plants generally have beautifully sculptural shapes even when not in bloom. (*The Houston Cactus & Succulent Society* — [www.hcsstex.org](http://www.hcsstex.org) — is a wonderful resources for learning more about growing these.)



(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)

September						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



## American Beautyberry

is in full-berry this month. This native shrub attracts many birds to a landscape.

# September

*This month, you really should . . .*

- Reduce watering on caladiums toward the end of the month. Bulbs will start to go dormant.
- Plant wildflower seed in raised beds as soon as it starts getting a little cooler.
- Dance on those beds after planting wildflower (or any) seed. Seed/soil contact is vital.
- Plant bulbs in clumps among perennials and shrubs. Their sculptured greenery will intensify the colors of other bloomers even when they aren't flowering.
- Use superphosphate or bulb food instead of bone meal to feed bulbs if squirrels are a problem. They'll dig up bulbs looking for bone meal.
- Refrigerate tulips, hyacinths, muscari and crocus at least 4-6 weeks before planting.
- Consult "*A Gardener's Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast*" by Sally McQueen Squire (River Bend Company, Houston) to learn which bulbs do best here.

*If the spirit moves . . .*

- Remove spent flowers from crape myrtles and vitex so they'll bloom again. Cut back okra and tomatoes so they'll bear again.
- Plant perennials, especially natives, and hardy shrubs to give them time to establish strong root systems before they have to face a Gulf Coast summer.
- Apply a winterizer fertilizer to the lawn toward the end of this month or early in October.
- Plant artichokes, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, chives, collards, dill, green onions, leeks, kale, parsley, pintos and spinach for fall and winter harvesting.
- Try these fall vegetables in hanging baskets if space is a problem: lettuce, kale, oregano, parsley, radishes, rosemary, spinach, strawberries, thyme and turnips.
- Thin vegetable seedlings for more productive plants.
- Feed mums and returning gerbera daisies with a high phosphorus fertilizer. Water well.
- Move gerbera daisies into containers to promote blooming. They like to be rootbound.
- Divide cannas, daylilies, Louisiana iris and violets if they didn't bloom up to par this year.
- Oxalis may reappear and bloom. Divide if necessary after it blooms.



- Check nursery for fall-blooming perennials. Many are more beautiful now than in spring.
- In the water garden, this will be the last month to fertilize lilies every two weeks.

## *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Leach potted plants to remove accumulated salts. Set on a raised platform, with the drain hole free. Repeatedly pour water through the soil.
- Prune off those little branches that hide spectacularly-colored pyracantha berries.
- Root-prune wisteria if it didn't bloom. Use a sharp shovel to cut a circle trench around the outer leaf canopy. Fill trench with water and a high phosphorus fertilizer. Reseal trench.
- Pick flowers to enjoy indoors if strong rains are forecast. This may trigger more blooms!
- Give groundcovers a slight haircut to encourage spreading.
- Start cuttings of favorite impatiens, begonias and similar softwood plants. New plants started from cuttings will often be stronger than plants that winter over. (See page 57.)

## *Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Don't overwater gardens. Overwatering is one reason plants don't bloom well.
- Don't remove dead roses. Leave them on so the plant will know dormant time is coming.
- Don't panic over fuzzy brown balls on the backsides of oak (and other tree) leaves. These are insect galls, good guys. Just leave them alone. They may also appear as woody balls on trunks. When the insect inside hatches (by spring), they'll disappear.
- Don't plant pansies yet. It's still too hot.
- Don't water aloe veras as much as before. They're going dormant.



*Brazilian red cloak  
(Megaskepasma  
erythrochlamys)*

## *Why Didn't My Plant Bloom?* Could it be:

1. The wrong spot? Too much/not enough sun? Not enough/too much water? All affect blooming. Make sure drought tolerant plants are in beds raised 1-2' to protect roots from excessive moisture during heavy rains.

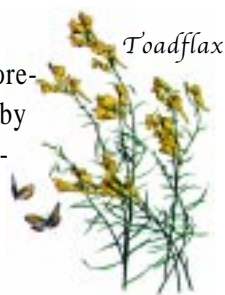
2. Too young? Some plants, especially trees and shrubs, need to set strong root systems before they turn energies toward blooming. This may take 2-3 years in some cases. (Up to 7 years in the case of new-branch plumerias. No one else will tell you these things, will they?) I waited five years for my Brazilian red cloak to bloom. But when it did — wow!

3. Wrong fertilizer? High nitrogen fertilizers (high first number) promote green growth with no flowers. For flowers, use a balanced fertilizer or one with higher middle number (high phosphorus). Exception: hibiscus need a balanced fertilizer only.

If all else fails, sprinkle Epsom salts around base, bury coffee grounds and/or banana peels in soil or, at night beat plants with a broom's straw end. (See page 50.)

*Dead Lawn Areas Under Trees:* Too much shade? Give up. St. Augustine is our most shade-tolerant grass. Border dead areas. Add organic-enriched topsoil over area (not over 2" under trees). Plant shade lovers in small clusters: ajuga, ardesia, Australian violet, begonias, chocolate plants, ground orchids, holly fern, hostas, hydrangeas, indigo, impatiens, jacobina, lysimachia, white- or purple-flowering oxalis, peacock gingers,

pentas, pigeonberry, phlox, plumbago, ruellia, spring snowflakes, toadflax, torenia, wedelia or wood fern. Use mulch between plant clusters. If shade is cast by a deciduous tree (loses leaves in winter), this is an ideal site for early spring-blooming bulbs among other plantings. Late this month, plant daffodils and purchase tulip, hyacinth, muscari and crocus bulbs. Refrigerate these latter four for 4-6 weeks and plant in early January.



**Fall Gardening:** Northerners are now getting ready for winter. Not us! We still have a good 4± months of flowering time left and fall is a spectacular bloom period. Many plants are still blooming at Christmas. Days get cooler, gardening's easier. Insects are diminishing. Rainfall is plentiful. Rose displays are often more beautiful than in spring.

Other fall bloomers: ageratum, althaea, alyssum, amaranthus, asters, repeat-blooming azaleas, balsam, begonias, blue daze, brunfelsia, buddleia (butterfly bush), bulbine, butterfly-weed, calendula, cardinal flowers, cestrum, chocolate plants, cleome, clerodendrums, cockscomb, coneflowers, cosmos, crape myrtle, cuphea, numerous daisies (gerbera, Michaelmas, etc.), datura (angel's trumpet), dianthus, forget-me-nots, four o'clocks, firespike, fountain plant, gaura, geraniums, globe amaranth (gomphrena), hibiscus, impatiens, jacobina, jasmynes and jessamines, lantana, liatris, lobelia, lythrum, Mexican mint marigold, nicotiana, pavonia (rock rose), physostegia (obedient plant), pentas, periwinkles, petunias, summer phlox, pigeonberry, plumbago, portulaca, purslane, purple coneflowers, mallows, sages, salvias, sedums, shrimp plants, torenia, Turk's cap, verbena, veronica and zinnias. And you thought nurseries only carry mums and pansies now — HA! Watch the papers for dates of the many fall Master Gardener sales. These are where you first find exciting new introductions.

**October is Rose Month!:** Along with marveling at the incredible rose displays now, are you grinding teeth over a rose (probably an antique or "carpet") that has grown so large, it's taking over the garden? Blame our long growing season. If you're tired of pruning it, take it out. There are too many other "controlled" choices available now (see page 21).

If older antique roses stop blooming, check overhead trees. Growing branches may be cutting off too much sun. Or it could be sap flow. My Seven Sisters rose, which never bloomed, grew so large and lethal, its thorns mangled everyone who passed by. I was ready to trash it when my sister Audrey asked for a "plant" to stop burglars from jumping over her back fence (a neighborhood problem). No burglar would cross a Seven Sisters rose. She took it.

I mentioned that nonblooming rose to the late Margaret Sharpe, *Rosarian Extraordinaire*. She said late at night to whack it hard with a broom. "Why night?" I asked. "So neighbors won't think you're crazy," she said. Dubiously I passed on this tidbit. Audrey tried it. It worked. The whacks get the sap moving. (*Be forewarned: antique roses are addictive. Audrey became so obsessed, she became Director of the Texas Rose Rustlers — www.texas-rose-rustlers.org — a group dedicated to preserving and promoting antique roses*)

**Poinsettias:** Short-light days trigger color brackets. Keep in pots or set in gardens in a sunny, well drained spot protected from north winds. Starting this month, cover the plant, or put it in a closet, at 6 p.m. In the morning, remove the cover or set it back out in light. As soon as you see color, stop. The bloom mechanism has been triggered.



*Tulips:* These may be one-shot bloomers for us, but when they bloom — wow! They have to be refrigerated at least 4-6 weeks before planting. At the Keukenhoff in Holland, they plant 20+ million tulips 3 deep to prolong blooming periods. The highest bloom first, deepest last.

We can plant 3 deep in a pot, or 2 deep in the garden, says Sally McQueen Squire, Houston's Bulb lady. Dig the bed 7 inches deep. Place one layer of bulbs in, leaving space between bulbs. In that space, poke a stick at least 4-5 inches long. Add back two inches of soil, covering the bottom layer of bulbs. Remove the sticks one at a time, placing a bulb in its place. This way, you know you're not planting bulbs on top of one another. Fill with soil and wait for the explosion of beauty in the spring. Use the same depths and sticks when planting in containers.

Want to have fun with a tulip? Cut it vertically in half. Inside you will see a teeny-tiny, perfectly formed tulip. Of course, that bulb isn't going to bloom for you, warns Sally.

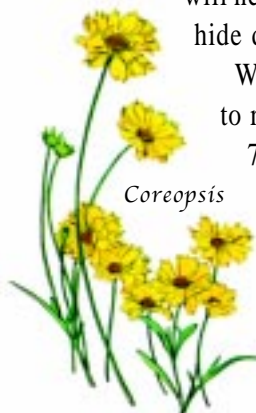
*Trees:* If large trees look peaked, call a professional and/or treat the area beneath the canopy with compost (available at nurseries if you don't have a compost pile). If an expert recommends expensive treatment, get a second opinion. Large trees often die from the inside out. Branches may stay green a year after the inside is dead. By keeping an ailing tree's roots well-fed with compost, you may help it survive. It is best, however, not to take chances with a tree that will take decades to replace. Protect trunks and roots during construction. Use fencing around trunks and rope to keep heavy equipment and vehicles away from areas full of tree roots. These compact soil, forcing vital oxygen out.

*Wildflower Gardening:* Now through January is the best time to sow wildflower seed in extremely well drained areas. Along the Gulf Coast, subsoil layers in average suburban lawns stay too wet during fall and spring. Seed rots. In spring, the soil heats up so quickly it affects germination. Bluebonnets and most other wildflowers do best in very sunny areas in extremely well drained, raised beds, containers or hanging baskets. Those in containers can stay out all winter. Seed needs cold to germinate properly. Other wildflower that do well (in raised beds!): asters, beebalm, black-eyed Susans, coneflowers, coreopsis, gaillardia (Indian blankets), gaura, lazy daisies, penstemons and verbena.



*Black-eyed Susans*

The most important factor in success with wildflowers is soil/seed contact. Dance on beds after you sow seed. Mother Nature sows billions of seed for perhaps one million plants. The rest is eaten by birds or other wildlife. Sow at least twice as much seed as you estimate you will need. Plant according to bloom periods and height so various flowers will hide dying foliage of previous bloomers.



*Coreopsis*

Wildflowers tend to look scraggly when not in bloom. If you want them to reseed, don't cut off dead plants until seed has dried and fallen. When 70 percent are scraggly, plenty of seed has fallen. To keep neighbors from pursing their lips at sad-looking wildflower patches, make a cute sign that says: "Wildflowers at rest!"

A lazier route is to plant wildflowers among deciduous shrubs and perennials which come into full leaf and flower in early summer, just as most spring wildflowers are going to seed. Buddleia (butterfly

Call it *Poinciana*, *Caesalpinia*, pride of Barbados or bird of paradise tree, this plant of many names is one of our most beautiful wildflowers (imported varieties are equally as beautiful). I first saw *caesalpinias* growing wild in cemeteries in El Paso! They need excellent drainage and full sun; overwatering is a sure way to kill these. I photographed this one blooming in front of what was once the home of my grandparents, George and Estelle Beust, on the corner of 35th & R streets in Galveston.



bush), butterflyweed, dwarf crape myrtles, firespike, four o'clocks, hamelia (hummingbird bush), hibiscus, lantana, leonotis (lion's tail), pavonia, Turk's cap and hardy salvias bush out later and hide fading wildflower foliage. The fine line between wildflowers and regular garden plants has almost disappeared. Many popular plants have an informal "wildflower" look. Many natives have been hybridized into tighter growers with more blooms. These often do better in our gardens, usually don't reseed as easily as natives. Wildflower mixes include seed for

a wide range. Chances are not all the flowers are going to bloom for you. These are fine for restricted plantings. But to seed an entire field, or very large area, consult an expert and get the proper seed for your specific climate. (See Wildflower Garden, Page 27.)

*The Fairy Garden:* One ancient legend goes this way: when Lucifer called for the angels in Heaven to follow him, some did. Others sided with Archangel Michael, electing to stay in Heaven and do good deeds. A third group of angels announced they weren't interested in doing good or evil deeds. They just wanted to play all day. These angels fell to earth, and became the fairies. Some ancient folk believed each plant had its own fairy, who gave it life and vitality, color and beauty. If the fairy was happy, the plant thrived. It was a common practice to plant a special nook just for the fairies — to help keep them happy!

Fairy gardens are still a fun tradition today in many areas. A fairy garden is a quiet, shady nook, perhaps right on the edge of a sunny, flower-filled bed — spot where fairies can "take a break" during a hot summer afternoon's play. They like the cooling ambiance of ferns, especially the dainty-leafed maidenhair variety and the tiny Korean rockfern. Fairies are also particularly fond (or so I am told) of clover and oxalis or wood sorrel. Fill the bed with small-flowered varieties that bloom in bright shade, like peacock gingers, snowbells, Katie's compact ruellia, pansies, torenia, toadflax and violets. The delicate bell-shaped native *Clematis pitcheri*, Johnny jump-ups and 'Moonbeam' coreopsis would do perfectly. On the sunny edges, it would be fun to have the whimsical bat-face cuphea, tiny daffodils, small-flowered daisies, rainlilies . . . well, you get the idea.

When I think about fairies, or fairy gardens, I feel happy — childhood happy. Maybe it calls to mind playing among the fairy rings in what we called Hilly Park in my old Riverside neighborhood. Or, maybe fairies like to have folks thinking about them and good feelings (and healthy, blooming flowers) are their way of saying thanks.



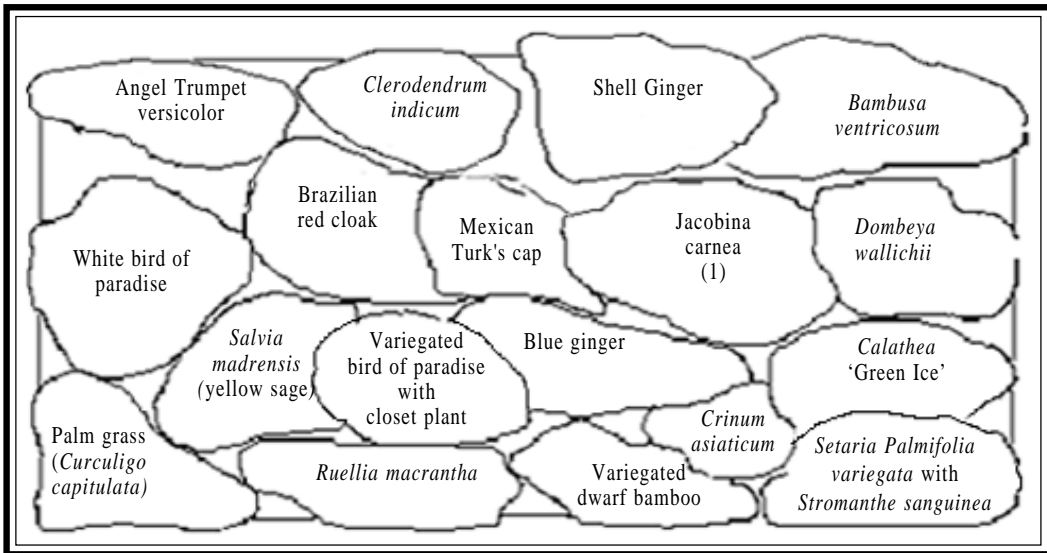
*Oxalis* (Wood Sorrel)

What do you suppose?  
A bee sat on my nose.  
Then what do you think?  
He gave me a wink  
And said, "I beg your pardon,  
I thought you were the garden."

- A rhyme from England



# A Tropical Garden for Winter Beauty!



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

*We live in a semitropical area.* The plants listed here strut their stuff during winter as well as the rest of the year! All other gardens in this book are designed for casual or “lazy” gardeners. This one might take a little more dedication! True, they may not survive extended drops in the 20s, but we seldom have that. The older they get, the hardier they become. These plants are recommended by Houstonians Jerry and Fern Seymore who created a jungle paradise in my beloved Aldine with their internationally recognized tropical plant collection. Close planting protects plants in winter (just as in a real jungle). If you can’t find some of these, contact Jerry at the address below. Plant these now so they have plenty of time to set strong roots before cold sets in.

A TROPICAL GARDEN

**ANGEL TRUMPET** (*Brugmansia versicolor*). 15', yellow, full or partial sun.

**BAMBOO, DWARF, VARIEGATED.** Clumping so not invasive, white and green variegation.

**BAMBUSA VENTRACOSUM.** 15-25', tall clumping (so not invasive) bamboo, forms narrow upright sculpture

**BIRD OF PARADISE, WHITE.** 10', slow grower. Striking white flowers. Needs heavy fertilization.

**BIRD OF PARADISE, VARIEGATED.** 3-4', lush upright foliage, orange blooms. Needs heavy fertilization.

**BLUE GINGER** (*Dichorisandra*). Not a ginger at all, upright 7' shrub with almost impossible-to-find rich blue plume like flowers. Can take full sun but prefers some shade.

**BRAZILIAN RED COAT.** 7-8', large lush leaves, huge deep pink flower clusters fall and winter. (See page 49)

**CALATHEA 'GREEN ICE'.** Pine cone-shaped bracts with brilliant yellow flowers. Full or partial sun.

**CLERODENDRUM INDICUM.** 15', branches “weep” putting the white blooms down where you can see them.

**CRINUM ASIATICUM.** Striking white flowers with long strapping green foliage.

**DOMBEYA WALLICHII.** 15-20', pink double 6" rose-shaped blooms.

**CLOSET PLANT, VARIEGATED.** Startling white and green variegation.

**GINGER, SHELL.** 8', white tubular flowers in droopy clusters. Beautiful upright foliage.

**JACOBINA CARNEA.** 12', large yellow cluster flowers.

**MEXICAN TURK'S CAP.** 12', red, white, pink flowers, variegated foliage. Full/part sun.

**PALM GRASS.** 4' tall and wide, pretty foliage plant.

**SALVIA MADRENSIS.** (Big yellow sage). 6', fall-winter yellow flowers.

**SETARIA PALMIFOLIA VARIEGATA.** 2-3', crinkled burgundy/green/white leaves.

**STROMANTHE SANGUINEA.** Low spreading plant, red, white and green leaf pattern.

**RUELLIA MACRANTHA.** 2' stalks, fire engine red flowers. Not invasive like tall varieties.



Blue ginger (*Dichorisandra*)

Jerry's Jungle Garden, at 712 Hill Road (281-272-8612) is opened periodically to the public.

(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)

October						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



### *Texas Swamp Lily* (*Crinum*

*Americana*) is a hardy, fragrant crinum best planted this month. It likes low swampy places (see page 45).

## October

### *This month, you really should . . .*

- Plant spring-blooming bulbs around perennials and shrubs that green up in late spring. Try anemones, fancy daffodils, hyacinths, ranunculus and tulips. (Tulips, hyacinths, muscari and crocus must be refrigerated at least 4-6 weeks before planting.) Celebrate Halloween by planting anemone, crocus, Dutch iris, freesia and ranunculus.
- Plant shrubs and perennials! They need winter cold to set strong root systems.
- Seed the same areas with delphiniums, hollyhocks, larkspur, snapdragons, stocks for early spring color. These bloom before the perennials get started, and fade when it gets hot.
- Move potted azaleas into brighter light to trigger blooming.
- Move other potted plants into shadier areas, to prepare them for eventual move inside.

### *If the spirit moves . . .*

- Use a winterizer fertilizer on the lawn.
- Plant sweet peas in a 6-8" deep trench. Cover with 1" of soil. As they grow, continue to fill in the trench with soil. Mulch well.
- Plant bok choy, Chinese cabbage, Swiss chard, garlic, green onions, kohlrabi, mustard greens, oregano, radishes and turnips. Plant 1015Y onion seeds on October 15. (Get it?)
- Plant pansies, broccoli and beets as soon as it starts getting cooler. Also plant cyclamens, ornamental kale and cabbage, primroses.
- Watch roses that aren't blooming as they should. Are they getting enough sun?
- Plant bee balm, coriander, feverfew, dill, garlic, chives, oregano, tansy and rue.

### *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Repot hanging baskets if the roots have become too matted.
- Pile falling leaves around shrubs; use excess to start a compost pile.
- Plant artichokes, parsley in pots so you can protect them from the cold.
- Move more delicate patio plants closer to the house or garage, so they can be easily moved into the house or garage. Our first "norther" usually blows in this month.
- Give plumerias, hibiscus sufficient light and cold protection and they'll bloom all winter.

- Trim hibiscus, other tropicals a little at a time, so they can be more easily moved inside. Root cuttings! Use rooting hormone, plant in container. Protect.

## Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners

- Don't get in a rush about moving plants inside for good. On average, the first actual freeze doesn't occur until the first week in December.
- Don't worry about "lifting" bulbs. Transplanted gardeners from northern regions often ask about this. No one here does that (see caladiums below). The best bulbs for us, including amaryllis, can stay in the ground year-round.
- Stop watering plumerias after leaves fall off. Move into the house or garage on Halloween.
- Leave old blooms on roses and other flowering shrubs so they will go dormant. Don't fertilize again until early spring.
- Be patient if watching for wildflowers to sprout. They march to their own drummers.
- Don't mow down the bluebonnets once they start sprouting. They look just like clover.
- Don't fertilize potted plants you are moving inside for winter. They are going dormant.
- Don't panic if azaleas and pink magnolias pop into bloom on warm, wet days. This is normal after hot, dry summers. Enjoy. (There's nothing you can do about it anyway!)

**Caladiums:** Personally I've never met anyone who actually digs caladiums to save them for next year. But if you're so inclined, do it now before the foliage fades. Otherwise, they'll be the devil to find. Dry tubers for a couple of days, drop in a bag with agricultural sulphur, shake, then store in vermiculite, sawdust or wood shavings until next spring. They need about four months of dormancy before replanting, says Houston's Bulb Lady, Sally McQueen Squire's "**A Gardener's Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast**" — a Bible for the Gulf Coast. (*Most folks — myself included — just replant every spring. Husband loves them. Calls them "those white things." I plant them for him.*)



Caladiums

**Flooding** is a fact of life on the Upper Texas Gulf Coast. Few areas are safe. We had four feet of water thanks to Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 (for 36 hours) and 10 inches for about 12 hours the next year. A silver lining: well-adapted inground plants appreciate the deep waterings; one reason why it is better to plant truly Gulf Coast hardy varieties.

If you think your yard might flood, pick up landscape timbers and other loose materials. (Timbers come in handy to raise furniture indoors.) Move container plants to higher spots. Pick up lawn furniture and garden equipment. After waters recede, replant immediately any plants washed out of beds. Hose leaves well to remove debris and water deposits. If the sun is very hot, protect delicate or young plants with a shade cloth. Replace lost mulches. Mats of plant debris collected against fences or on lawns after flood water recede make excellent mulches. Rake them into gardens. Watch for ant mounds that sometimes float on them.

The waters will probably leach out recently applied fertilizers. Wait a while or so to refeed to allow plants to recover from the shock. You might want to treat the soil with FosterSOS, fish emulsion, seaweed extract or other soil additives.

Perennials and newly set out plants may suffer dieback. Pinch the tips back and pray. Other plants may look fine at first, but die several weeks later. In low spots in yards, plant banana

trees, cannas, elephant ears, hymenocallis (large white native spider lily), bog lily (Texas swamp lily or *Crinum americana*) and Louisiana iris. These actually thrive on flooding. See Bog Garden Design on page 43 for a way of storing flood waters in your own underground reservoir for use during summer droughts and to counter ground subsidence.

If you lose a plant you really want, next time put it in a bed raised 1-2' above ground level. Plants in well-raised beds usually recuperate faster after floods. Just be sure your border material will keep the raised soil from washing away.

**Forcing Bulbs:** Force amaryllis, hyacinths, paperwhite narcissus and tulips into bloom for winter color. Plant tulips 3-4" deep in potting soil mixed with peat moss, sharp sand and 1 tbl. of bone meal, superphosphate or bulb food. Plant in circles with bulb's flat side toward outside of pot. This positions leaves on outside and flowers on inside. Store pot in a cool spot (dark garage corner). Protect from freezing. Place an upturned cardboard box over pot to block out light. Keep soil slightly moist. In a few weeks, when shoots emerge, gradually move container to a brighter location. Tulips will not bloom again.

Hyacinths can be forced like tulips (above), or in water, using a hyacinth vase (available at nurseries) or small rimmed jar. Remove the bulb's loose outer skin. Put a piece of charcoal (not briquette) in the jar/vase bottom. Fill with water. Set bulb on top, with the base just barely touching water. Cover the vase with a paper sack; set in refrigerator (not touching a wall). Keep the water level just below the base of the bulb. When roots fill the vase, and the flower begins to show color, remove it from the refrigerator and gradually bring it into stronger light.

Amaryllis can be forced in either water or soil. In soil, use a very small but heavy pot, just barely big enough to hold the bulb. It needs to be slightly rootbound to bloom. The pot must be sturdy enough to support a 1'-2' high stalk with four large flowers. Nurseries carry amaryllis forcing vases. As with hyacinths, water should barely touch the bulb base. Set in a dark cool spot until strong roots fill the vase. Then move it out into brighter light.

Start paperwhites on pebbles in shallow bowl. Set bulbs on pebbles, fill with water up to, but not touching, bulbs. Set in cool dark spot until bulbs sprout.

Nurseries carry kits with bulbs, pot, etc., all packaged —great Christmas gifts!



**Poison Ivy:** There is no such thing as permanent eradication. The beautiful red winter berries attract birds who then drop seed. It turns bright red in fall. Poison ivy has reddish stems and clusters of three leaves — always. A similar vine has three, four, or five leaves. Remember: “Three leaves = Foe!” Poison ivy sap is so resilient, it stays on clothing and tools, continuing to affect skin it touches for days afterwards, even after a single washing with soap. Wash tools and clothing repeatedly in hot, soapy water.

Even so, scratching at the blisters leaves raw exposed flesh. How quickly, and how badly, skin reacts depends solely on the concentration received. Skin areas with the strongest concentrations break out first, those with lesser concentrations break out later, whether you scratch or not. Scratching blisters does not spread the infection. Blisters contain only normal body serum. Damaged skin tissues take longer to heal and may become infected. Over-the-counter treatments help mild cases. For severe cases, see a physician. Allergic reactions can change as we age.



Poison ivy is a very pretty vine and an important food source for birds. Still, it's a good idea not to let it take hold. The longer you wait to remove it, the harder it will be to kill. First try to twine it around a stick or sharpshooter (without touching it!), pulling it out and throwing stick and all away. Or, wrap the stalks with multiple layers of newspaper. Pull out and throw away. Pulling it out is usually easier after a heavy rain. If the roots are too deep, try digging it out, but wash the shovel well afterwards. Or, try vinegar, a natural (albeit slow-working) herbicide. Fill a spray bottle with vinegar with a teaspoon of dish soap added (to make it stick to the leaves.) Spray on the leaves, being careful not to spray anything else. If all else fails, I've been told goats consider it a delicacy.

*Plumerias:* Halloween is traditional day for moving these fragrant flowering trees indoors for winter, unless temperatures drop into the 50s at night before then. Pull out of ground or pot, shake off dirt and stick in a protected garage. Or, move pot and all into garage. If plants are too large to move, prune off too-large branches. Set these inside with main plant and plant next spring. Cuttings must "harden" (dry completely) before replanting. (*Plumeria Societies* — [www.theplumeriasociety.org](http://www.theplumeriasociety.org) — are wonderful resources for learning more about growing these plants.



*Leaves & Pine Needles:* The time is rapidly approaching when we will not be able to send leaves and pine needles to landfills. They don't decompose. Plastic bags full of leaves have been found still in tact after 50 years! Fallen leaves and pine needles represent an incredibly rich source of nutrients for gardens. Use them as mulch or mow over them repeatedly so they will break down rapidly and enrich the soil beneath your lawn. If you have too many leaves or pine needles, call your County Extension Agent for a community garden organization, such as Houston's Urban Harvest. But don't expect anyone to come out and rake your yard. You take the bagged leaves to them.

### *Propagation: Creating new plants from existing ones:*

**GROUND LAYERING:** Use with larger shrubby plants, such as althaea, azalea, buddleia, shrub crape myrtle, hamelia, hibiscus, hydrangea, lantana, oleander, spirea and vitex. Select a strong branch that easily reaches to the ground. Dig a shallow trench near a low branch. Make a slight cut on branch underside. Lay it in trench. Use root stimulator. Cover with soil, leaving tip end exposed. Lay a brick over buried branch, as it may pop back up. New growth is not an indication roots have formed, as the branch is still attached to the main plant. In 2-3 weeks, check for new roots. When roots form, cut the branch off the main plant.

**AIR LAYERING** is done with stiffer trunked plants that won't bend, such as dracaenas, scheffleras and similar plants that grow too tall to handle. Make a diagonal slice partway through the stalk, cutting upward so any sap can run down and out. Insert a toothpick in the cut, so the stalk won't grow back together. Wrap sliced area with well-soaked sphagnum moss. Wrap moss with plastic, secure with ties above and below the moss. Keep moss moist. Eventually roots will grow out of diagonal slice. Cut plant off below the roots. Plant and keep well watered at first. New branches should spout from the main plant.

**CUTTINGS:** Use with impatiens, geraniums, begonias, mums, four o'clocks, verbena, ivies and other plants or vines with leaves and/or flowers up and down stems. Cut a healthy section, 6-8" long, from a strong stem. Remove leaves/flowers. Plant in loose, friable soil in pot with open drain hole. Use root stimulator. Keep watered, but not soaking wet. Set in a shady spot. When 3-5 true new leaves appear, transplant into ground. To speed rooting, turn a glass jar upside down over the cutting, creating a mini-greenhouse.

These same type plants can also be rooted in water. Change water if it become cloudy. After strong roots appear, gradually add soil to the soil, a little each week, until the container is full of soil. The type of roots a plant develops in water are not the same as the type of roots formed in soil. This will help the plant make the proper adjustments.

Plants that multiply on their own are Lazy Gardener favorites. But it pays to know what they look like in and out of flower. Tickseed sunflower, one of my most favorite wildflowers comes into full beauty this month. These bright yellow "daisies" on tall slender stalks bloom in ditches and on the edges of woods. I tried for years to transplant these into my yard.

Unfortunately, at the same time, I was trying to rid my gardens of my worst gardening mistake of all. I shudder to admit it. I transplanted goldenrod into my yard. In defense of this beautiful wildflower, let me first point out it does NOT cause hay fever. Goldenrod has a heavy pollen transported by bees and butterflies. Sadly, almost always growing with it is the true culprit, ragweed, with its wind-borne, allergy-triggering pollen. But native goldenrod does have the disadvantage of multiplying like crazy. Although it is spectacular in a huge field, in the home garden the natives look spindly and uninteresting. On one hand I was cussing the multitude of what I thought were goldenrod stalks and, on the other, bemoaning the fact that my tickseed sunflowers never returned. Then one summer I missed pulling out some of the "goldenrod" stalks and, lo! They turned out to be tickseed sunflowers! All those years lost!

*Patience — It's the Gardener's Best Friend:* The old Silver Leaf Nursery on Lee Road in North Houston was legendary when I started gardening. But it was also well past its prime. Silver Jungle might have been a better description. One day, while wandering around there, I spied the most incredible flower blooming high above the tangled masses of pots and plants. It was a pure white *Henryii* clematis, at least eight inches across. It took forever to track the stem down from the bloom to the pot buried underneath.

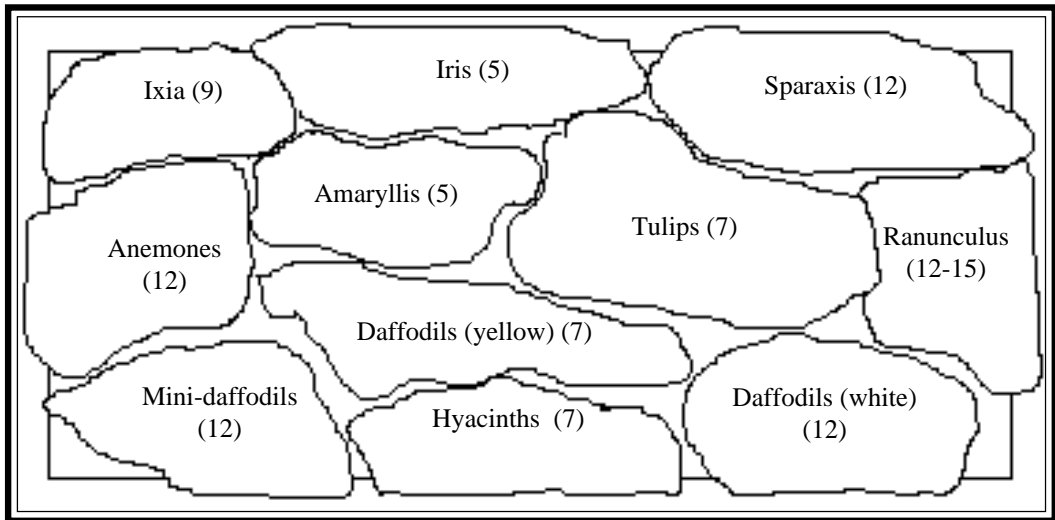
Clematis prefer a colder climate than ours and slightly acidic soil (ours is usually slightly alkaline). They don't like our heavy clay, heavy spring and fall rains, summer heat or drought or our mild winters. But I wanted that plant.

The general rule is: plant clematis so their heads are in some sun and their feet in the shade. At the base of an oak in our front yard was a hole probably created by rotting wood. Since I had so much vine on this plant, I threw the root ball down the hole. Then I threw in two or three bags of potting soil. The vine I wired to the tree trunk where it got strong morning sun.

For five years, that clematis grew, but never bloomed. Then suddenly one spring it was covered with huge white flowers. It became one of my awesome treasures. Its fabulous blooms stopped cars passing by for about five years. Perfect strangers came by to ask what it was.

Then the oak tree died and had to be taken down. The clematis disappeared, and never returned. But I was so glad it came into my life.

# A Bulb Garden



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

*Wouldn't this garden be a treat,* blooming in your yard come spring? To accomplish this, you have to plan now. This garden was designed for you by Sally McQueen Squire, Houston's Bulb Lady. Tulips aren't, strictly speaking, a good Lazy Gardener plant. We purchase them now, refrigerate them a minimum of 4-6 weeks and then plant them on or near New Year's Day. They only bloom once, and then should be lifted and discarded. They won't bloom again. But, wow, are they gorgeous! All these need to be in a raised bed. They will rot if they stay too long in wet soil during our heavy spring rains.

**ANEMONES.** 2-3" flowers, 12" stems. Vivid colors, excellent for cutting.

Parsley-like foliage. Plant with ranunculus.

**AMARYLLIS.** 2-3'. Large red, white or pink trumpet flowers atop lush leaves.

**DAFFODILS.** 1/2-3" yellow/white flowers. Fancier varieties may not naturalize; however, 'Fortune' should return and multiply in Gulf Coast gardens with heavy gumbo soil. 'King Alfred' will naturalize in sandy, more porous soils.

Try mini-daffodils as border plants.

**HYACINTHS.** Large, extremely fragrant tubular flowers, 10-12", may naturalize for a few years.

**IRIS, DUTCH.** Large, orchid-like flowers in multi-colors. Spear-shaped foliage is beautiful foil for other flowers.

**IXIA.** 1-2" spikelike clusters of dainty flowers in pastel shades on 18-20" stems. The swordlike foliage dies down in midsummer. Longlasting and excellent in flower arrangements. Naturalize easily. Sun.

**RANUNCULUS.** Tissue-thin -petaled flowers up to 4" across on 18" stems. Although these do not naturalize, they are the essence of spring and worth a spot in every garden.

**SPARAXIS.** Excellent for cutting, 2-3" wide, slightly flat petals in multicolors on 12-15" stems. Often planted with ixia.

**TULIPS.** Pick Darwin Hybrids and a lily-flowering variety for a spectacular display. The Darwin Hybrids will bloom first, followed by the lily-flowering ones.



*Daffodils*

*For more tips on great bulbs, consult Sally McQueen Squire's*

*"A Gardener's Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast" (River Bend Company)*

*(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)*

November						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



## *Cassia . . .*

*is one of the great hardy shrubs that should be planted now through February.  
(See page 41)*

# November

## *This month, you really should . . .*

- Water inground plants if a freeze is forecast. Dry roots are more easily damaged by cold.
- Plant daffodils and hyacinths on Thanksgiving Day.
- Plant artichoke plants, bok choy, cilantro, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, green onions, turnips.
- Order seed catalogs; addresses are in gardening magazines.
- Plant or move shrubs and trees so the roots can become established before cold sets in.

## *If the spirit moves . . .*

- Start an herb garden — best month! (See Pages 61 & 63.)
- As mums fade, pinch tips to force more root growth.
- Work blood meal into the soil before planting pansies. Pansies do best if fed regularly.
- Try pansies and tulips in the same bed. But don't plant the tulips until New Year's Day!
- Harvest all sweet potatoes before December.

## *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Try human hair sprinkled on the soil to discourage rabbits from eating bulbs.
- Remove plant debris under plants to prevent problems.
- Pick up some hay at the feed store. It makes an inexpensive mulch.
- Plant strawberries. They do well in containers and hanging baskets too.
- Take advantage of any Pecan Shows in your area to learn more about growing these trees.
- Cut the dead growth off all fading perennials; it might attract insects. Put in compost pile.
- Leave fading rose blooms on bush. They need this signal to start going dormant for winter.

## *Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Don't panic if leaves of plants moved indoors suddenly drop off. They're adjusting to a new environment. Cut back watering. Mist frequently to compensate for loss of humidity.

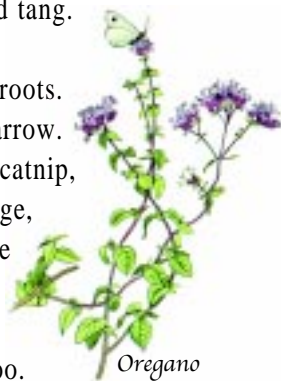
- Ignore althaeas and hardy hibiscus. They'll come back in the spring. For bushier plants in spring, cut dead stalks to the ground.
- Notice the hibiscus blooms. They get smaller as the nights get colder.
- Cut back on watering clivia, agapanthus.

**Bananas and Papayas:** Plant papayas in a site protected from freezing winter winds. Bananas die back but return easily in spring. Both need sun and lots of water, so are ideal for low spots where water stands after a rain. Both are more likely to fruit if the trunk does not freeze back entirely. Cut the trunk off at about 6 feet toward the end of this month (or earlier if a freeze is forecast). Wrap it tightly with alternating layers of newspaper, burlap and plastic. Leave the wrapping on until next March. Remove all baby plants, saving only one or two main trunks. The babies can be transplanted to other areas. Banana leaves can be used in the same way corn husks are used here for tamales. The leaves also attract fleas, so can be laid around areas where dogs sleep. Regularly throw the leaves away in sealed plastic bags.

**Fall Color:** Some folks sniff at our fall color, but we probably appreciate ours more than folks who have so much they take it for granted. For spectacular oranges, reds and yellows, plant bald cypress, black gum, Carolina buckthorn, crape myrtle, Drummond red maple, flame-leaf sumac, flowering dogwoods, golden raintree (tender tree), ironwood, Japanese maple, oakleaf hydrangea, parsley hawthorn, red oak, sassafras, strawberry bush, swamp chestnut oak, sweet gum, many viburnums, Virginia sweetspire, white oak, to name just a few.

**Green Tomatoes:** A freeze is forecast and tomatoes are still green! Pick 'em! Ripen in a dry, cool area away from bright light (couple of weeks). Or, fry 'em green. Slice thickly and try these coatings: (1.) Dust with flour. Fry. (2.) Coat with a mixture of 1 egg, 1 tbs. of water and enough flour to make a paste. Fry. (3.) Beat together one egg and 1/2 cup of milk. Coat slices, then dip in cornmeal. (4.) Coat slices with egg/milk mixture. Dip in crushed crackers or a non-sugared cereal, crushed. Add Cajun spices for an added tang.

**Herbs:** Plant herbs now. (See Page 63.) Most need cold to set strong roots. Plant now: artemisia, bee balm, chicory, cumin (seed), curry (plants) and yarrow. This month and next month you can plant: bay, borage (seed), chamomile, catnip, chervil, clary sage, comfrey, coriander, dill, fennel, feverfew, garden sage, garlic chives, horehound, lambs ear, lavender, lemon balm, lovage, all the mints, nigella (seeds), pot marigold, oregano, onion chives, parsley, rosemary, rue, salad brunet, santolina, sorrel, tansy, thyme and winter savory. Most herbs need full sun and excellent drainage. Plant with perennials, too.



*Oregano*

(The South Texas Unit of the American Herb Society — [www.herbsocietystu.org](http://www.herbsocietystu.org) — is a wonderful resource. Or ask your nurseryman to help you find this or other local chapters.)

**Living Christmas trees:** Nurseries now carry beautifully shaped, berry-covered yaupons, cherry laurel, hollies, loblolly pines and Japanese black pines that make wonderful living Christmas trees. 'East Palatka' and 'Savannah' American hollies have vivid red berries. After the holidays, these can be planted in the yard, or donated to a school or

community center as a very special commemorative gift. These trees can be kept potted for up to two weeks, and moved inside for short periods. Do not keep them indoors for extended periods of time. Don't let the soil dry out completely, but don't overwater either. Use only small ornaments and lights. Nurseries often also carry fragrant rosemary shaped into small Christmas trees ideal for tabletops.

*Oleander Trees* are making a comeback. But don't attempt to transform an older plant. It will be too hardy to put up with this nonsense! Instead, cut a mature inner 4-6' branch (1-2.5" in diameter at base) from an established plant. Remove leaves. Place in a nonmetal container filled with 8-10" of water. Maintain level until roots form (3-4 weeks). Plant in a container with peat moss and garden soil. Leave in container for six months, and keep well watered as the roots develop. Strip new shoots from trunk or root base. Allow only top growth. Prune after blooming to shape. Trees can be left in container, or transplanted into ground. Stake for support as top growth develops. (*The International Oleander Society — www.oleander.org — is based in Galveston and is a wonderful resource. Or ask your nurseryman to help you contact this group.*)

*Ornamental Grasses* beautifully accentuate other plants. They have almost no insect/disease problems and, once established, need no fertilizing and little watering. They come in spectacular colors with wavy plumes that add a unique dimension, carry otherwise "blah" landscapes through the worst winter months and provide food for wildlife. Muhly grasses grow in clumps with thin, airy leaves and lovely fall color or beautiful seed heads. Fountain grasses are instant eye-catchers. Many common grasslike plants (miscanthus, monkey grass, liriope) now come with variegated leaves in dwarf and/or giant sizes. Many are particularly impressive when grown with flowering perennials. Try Gulf muhly, inland sea oats (shade), lemon grass and, in shady areas, switch grass. Plant now through February.

*Pecans:* November is our Pecan Month. The best nuts are ripe for showing, prize-winning and eating. Plant pecans now through spring. County Extension agents have free materials. Pecan trees are notoriously slow growers for the first few years. Panic not. The root system is spreading. Suddenly it will shoot up and you have a full grown tree. Squirrels are the biggest headache with pecans. The late Bob Flagg, known for his folkloric approach to gardening, said the only printable cure for squirrels is to move to Israel. They have no squirrels in Israel..

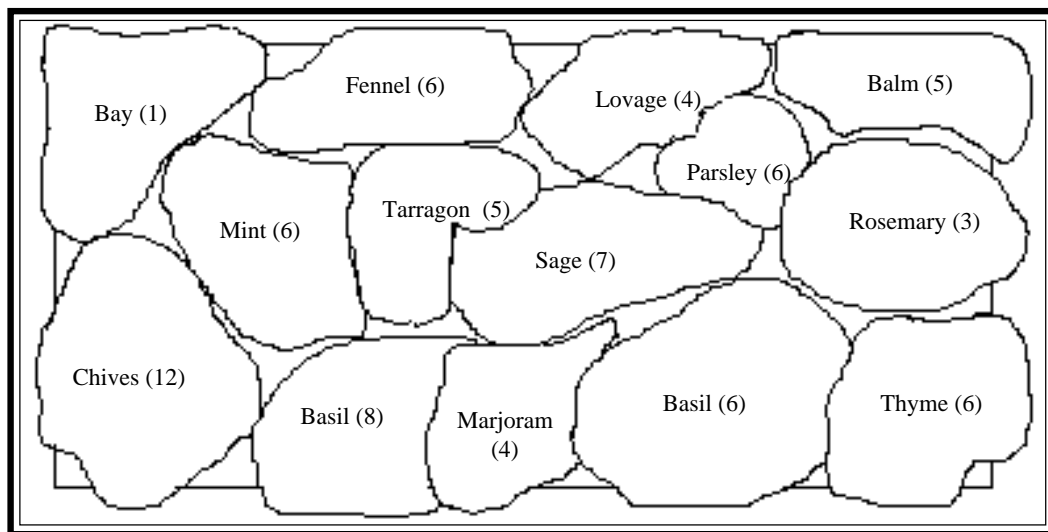
*Pets in the Garden?* Whether it's your pet or someone else's, domestic animals can be a challenge. Cats digging? Try a pine cone mulch. Here are some tips from "Gardening with Dogs" (River Bend Company):

1. Don't let Dog see you planting. What could you possibly be burying except a bone? Put him in the house or garage when you plant.
2. If he digs repeatedly in the same spot, cover over it with bricks.
3. If you catch him digging, toss a cola can filled with pennies near (not at!) him. The noise is painful.
4. Give him his own place in the landscape. Incorporate his regular running path into your landscape design using a soft paving material.



*For more tips, order "Gardening With Dogs" from River Bend Company, 713-621-3468 (RiverBendBook@aol.com).*

# An Herb Garden



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

AN HERB GARDEN

*Good direct sun* early in the day really brings out the flavor in herbs. Some will burn in afternoon sun. Few will grow in deep shade, but chives, coriander, mints and oregano can take more shade than most. Almost all herbs require good drainage. Raise this bed at least 12" above ground level for best results. Since most herbs do best over winter here, now is the time when most of the Herb Societies have their big sales. Watch the newspapers for dates.

**BALM** (*Melissa officinalis*, lemon balm). A hardy perennial, 16-18". Thrives best with some shade.

But, although its leaves will turn yellowish, can tolerate sun.

**BASIL** (*Ocimum basilicum*). Annual, needs sun, well-drained soil, sow seed after danger of frost has passed. Prune back for compact growth.

**BAY** (*Laurus nobilis*). Shrubby plant, moderate size. Glossy, tough and bright green leaves used.

**CHIVES** (*Allium schoenoprasum*). Clumping perennial. Lavender-pink flowers. For best foliage, keep flowers from blooming. Cut back for thick growth.

**FENNEL** (*Foeniculum vulgare*). Perennial. Prune after harvesting seed.

**LOVAGE** (*Levisticum officinale*). Perennial, with stems and parsley-like leaves that taste like celery. Can grow to 2 feet, in rich, moist beds with a little shade.

**MARJORAM** (*Origanum*). Prefers a drier soil than most herbs. Plant in a well-drained soil and in full to partial shade. Harvest the plants before they bloom.

**MINT** (*Mentha*). Loose, well-drained soil, full sun, tolerates some shade. Trim, water frequently. Feed lightly with cottonseed meal or all-purpose fertilizer.

**PARSLEY** (*Petroselinum crispum*). Attractive border. Sunny, well-drained bed (if you plant the seeds, soak them first), protect from the late afternoon sun.

**ROSEMARY** (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). Grow from seed, cuttings or bedding plants. Likes sun, can tolerate some shade. It likes a well-drained bed.

**SAGE** (*Salvia officinalis*). Sunny, well-drained location. Ornamental salvia varieties include *S. coccinea*, a scarlet red bloomer; *S. greggii*, with fuchsia, pink and purple blooms; *S. leucantha*, Mexican bush sage that grows to 4-5'.

**TARRAGON** (*Artemisia dracuncululus*). Perennial, slight anise flavor, excellent in containers and baskets. Light, well-drained soil.

**THYME** (*Thymus vulgaris*). Perennial, upright or creeping, sun, good drainage.

*(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)*

December						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday



*Weeping yaupon . . . provides fall and winter beauty and is an excellent source of food for birds. This was photographed at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens — a great place to see great winter flowers for our gardens.*

## December

*This month, you really should . . .*

- Keep poinsettias and other holiday plants out of heating drafts; set on cool floor at night.
- Water plants if a freeze is forecast. Rinse frost off in the morning. The average first freeze occurs the first week of December. Remove protective covers off plants in the morning.
- Check the water level on Christmas trees every day so they won't become a fire hazard.
- Cut branches of magnolia, holly, ligustrum, juniper and yew for indoor holiday decorations. The plants will benefit from the slight pruning.
- Check out your neighborhood nursery for great Christmas gifts: plants, pH kits, trowels, decorative pots, etc., and these great local gardening books:
  - *“A Gardener’s Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast”* by Sally McQueen Squire
  - *“The Lazy Gardener’s Guide”* (revised 2003) by Brenda Beust Smith — and its annual supplement . . .
  - *“The Lazy Gardener’s Companion”* Brenda Beust Smith’s yearly calendar series (a supplement to “The Lazy Gardener’s Guide”)
  - *“Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast”* by Mark Bowen
  - *“Habitat Gardening for Houston & Southeast Texas”* by Mark Bowen with Mary Bowen
  - *“Gardening with Dogs”* by Brenda Beust Smith and Frances Burke Goodman
  - *“The Bayou Planting Guide”* by Mark Bowen for Bayou Preservation Society, Houston.

*All are available in better nurseries and plant supply retailers. Contact River Bend Company, 713-621-3468; email: RiverBendBook@aol.com for a list of area retailers or a direct order form.*

*If the spirit moves . . .*

- Plant cyclamens, primroses, ornamental kale and pansies for instant color.
- Plant green onions, leeks, mustard greens, turnips.
- Last chance to plant pansies for longest possible bloom time.
- Feed pansies every six weeks with blood meal. The more you feed, the more they bloom.
- Feed shrubs which bloom in spring. (Except azaleas, camellias. Feed after they bloom.)
- Water bulbs during dry periods. Plant agapanthus, allium, crinums, iris and montbretia.



*Rabbits love the taste of pansies!*



## *If you're really feeling energetic . . .*

- Cover dormant beds with compost or other organic matter (dried manure, seaweed, etc.)
- Check the pH of beds where plants have problems. Kits are available at nurseries.
- It's okay to move azaleas if necessary. Moving them now won't affect blooming.
- Feed established trees. Louisiana irises will appreciate a serving of cottonseed meal.
- Plant hollies, yaupons and other berry-bearing shrubs to attract birds in winter.
- Prepare now for a spring vegetable garden. Dig bed, bury nonprotein kitchen wastes in it.

## *Great Don't-Do tips for really Lazy Gardeners*

- Don't do any heavy pruning. New growth may freeze.
- Don't overwater potted plants; they're dormant.
- Don't feed or water clivia anymore; they're dormant.



**Amaryllis:** Amaryllis come in a variety of sizes from delightful miniature eye-poppers on 3' tall stalks. Potted amaryllis make longlasting holiday gifts. years I gave my grandmother, Mimi Gracida, one of the huge amaryllis kits found in nurseries. She enjoyed the blooms then gave me the bulbs to plant in my yard. I think of her everytime they bloom. The “neck” should be above ground, and the bed well-drained. They can take full sun, but appreciate afternoon shade. If snails are a problem, work very coarse sand, diatomaceous earth and/or crushed egg shells into and on top of the soil. Or, transplant them to a slightly larger pot. They'll bloom again next year. They like to be rootbound before blooming. Watch the paper for the big Houston Amaryllis Society sale this month.

I remember vividly the first giant amaryllis I ever saw. I was a young reporter with a new gardening column. A woman wanted the Chronicle to photograph her beautiful plant. She was so excited, I agreed to go see it. Her house turned out to be an old frame “shack” with a junk-filled yard in a dilapidated neighborhood. I was scared, but afraid to insult her. I followed her to a back porch filled with mostly dead plants. But there in the middle was the most incredible amaryllis I had ever seen. She said she rescued the bulb from a garbage can. I became as excited as she was. That woman taught me the beauty of flowers has nothing to do with their surroundings. To this day, when I see a single flower, the rest of the setting totally disappears. (For more information, contact the Houston Amaryllis Society, 15319 Vandalia Way, Houston, TX 77053.)

**Bonsai** is an ancient art technique of pruning roots to dwarf growth. Use plants with small leaves (azaleas and bougainvillea). Prune top growth to resemble a small tree, and prune roots to fit in a small container. Use wire to bend trunk and branches to give the tree a more natural shape. Prune as needed. Generally, once a year, 1/3± of the root system is pruned, and fresh soil added to encourage new root development. Bonsai does best outdoors, especially if outdoor plants are used, and usually will not survive indoors. Reduce watering now so it will go dormant. Protect from extreme cold. For temporary stays indoors, set it on a shallow saucer filled with pebbles and water, to compensate for low humidity. Don't let water touch the pot bottom. (For more information, contact the Houston Bonsai Society — [www.houstonbonsai.com](http://www.houstonbonsai.com).)

**Camellias:** These are the true elegant ladies of the garden. They provide greenery and color during winter when other plants are dormant. Camellias do well in containers or in

ground. They demand good drainage and loose, friable, slightly acidic soil. Plant now through March in a spot protected from harsh sun and winter winds. Work leaf mold, sand and pine bark into the soil. Plant so 1/2 the rootball is above ground level. Pile the remaining soil up around the rootball (just as you do with azaleas). Do not feed the first year. Feed established plants with an azalea/camellia food. Never overfertilize. "Yuletide" is a brilliant red often used in containers by the front door during the holiday season because it is almost always in bloom at Christmastime. (For more information, contact the Houston Camellia Society, [www.camellias-ac.com](http://www.camellias-ac.com).)

*Espalier:* Espalier is the training of fruit and/or ornamental trees in patterns on a flat surface. This is great for shrinking yards or empty walls and fences. Start plants now so they will establish a strong root system before spring. Select a site and pattern. If the plant will bear fruit, consider a design like the tree of life that highlights horizontal branches. Ivies are ideal for lattice type patterns. A wood fence must be of excellent, treated lumber, or the moisture that collects will trigger rotting. On chainlink fences, weave (or tie) branches through the open holes. On bricks, use mortar screws to secure wire pattern with 2+ inches clearance between wires and wall. Secure horizontal branches to wire. Remove twiggy vertical branches or those that don't conform to the desired pattern. Keep plant well fed/watered during the training process. Good plants to use: Chinese witchhazel, evergreen pears, pyracantha and fruit trees.

*Holiday Gift Plants:* Heat, and overwatering are the main reasons these drop flowers/colorful leaves too soon. Remove foil so excess water won't collect in the bottom. Position away from drafts. Water sparingly. At night, set pots on a plastic mat on the floor where it is cooler. (Condensation damages carpets and floors.) When flowers/foliage fade:

**AZALEAS:** Repot using a slightly acidic soil. Place in cool location until spring. Plant in ground in a well drained spot with filtered sunlight. Or, leave in the container, and place outside in filtered sun until fall. Then move it into stronger light to encourage blooming.

**BROMELIADS:** Water in plant cup. Use rainwater or distilled water at room temperature. During summer, move to a shady outside location with good air circulation.

**CHRISTMAS CACTUS:** Transplant into a mixture of 4 parts leaf mold, 1 part Perlite and 1 part sand. These need good bright natural light (no direct sunlight), good air circulation and excellent drainage. Don't overwater. To trigger blooms, in fall move plant into area of relative cool darkness from 6 p.m. to 10 a.m. As soon as color shows, bring it back out into light.

**CHRYSANTHEMUMS, KALANCHOES, POINSETTIAS:** Cut stems to 2". Set in protected area. Keep soil barely moist until spring. Mist to compensate for lack of humidity if inside. In spring, move to garden, or plant in container with sand, predampened peat, Perlite and potting soil. To trigger color, treat as Christmas cactus above. Poinsettias hold color for months if humidity and other factors are to their liking. My grandmother, Mimi Gracida, kept brilliant red leaves on hers well into June. But she hated air conditioning and kept the windows open in her Montrose-area apartment. It was like a greenhouse in there!

**CYCLAMENS AND FLORIST GLOXINIAS:** Cut back on water. When plant is gone, set pot in a cool spot in garage. In spring, transplant into a mixture of 1 part soil, 1 part predampened peat and 1 part sand. Set in filtered light and pray. Neither likes our heat.

**FUCHSIAS:** I used to say these iridescent hanging flowers need more cold than we can give



them except in the middle winter. That's what ALL the experts say. But then I saw with my own eyes a fuchsia in full bloom in the middle of July, hanging from an eave at the home of Clint Horne and Mary Alice Justice, just off I-610 and Ella Blvd. Clint didn't understand my surprise. He said it bloomed all the time —wasn't it supposed to? There truly is such a thing as a "green thumb." Some folks truly can get plants to do things the rest of us just can't.

*Landscaping Time!:* This is what Houston's Bulb Lady, Sally McQueen Squire, calls "Bare bones gardening" season. Dormant plants can be more easily moved, or worked around, without damaging roots. Consider redesigning or reshaping gardens. For a more informal, naturalistic look, gently curve borders, use a wide variety of plants and allow a few spreading plants to cascade over the sides at intervals. For a formal look, use straight-line borders, thicker plantings and single varieties.

Informality is not for everyone. In her youth, my sister Audrey disliked the "natural" look I wrote about so often. There was so much chaos in her life, she said, she wanted organization in her garden! (Three children, a full time job and top reins of the Texas Rose Rustlers gradually nudged her into the naturalistic group. See Audrey's rose garden design, page 21.)

Make low-care top priority. Use a garden hose to outline prospective new beds. Push the lawnmower along it to make sure you aren't creating a mowing nightmare. If beds are to be wider than you can reach across, include an internal pathway of pine needles or stepping stones for easier maintenance. Position high care plants like hanging baskets and containers close to water sources. At outer yard edges, use hardy plants that need little care.

Never pile soil over the weep holes in your house foundation. These must be left open to keep the concrete foundation dry. Don't position plants under splash from house eaves unless you have gutters (a pain to keep cleared). Move plants outside the eave spillover.

Bulbs used liberally among perennials give beautiful spring color splashes (when perennials are still coming out) and, when not in bloom, the bulb foliage enhances the shapes and colors of other flowers. Try spear-shaped iris leaves next to a fluffier shrub, and flattened greenery in front. Juxtapositioning these different elements makes each one look more defined and the whole becomes an interwoven tapestry — rather than a yard that, like Topsy, "just grewed."

Small trees with flowers or distinctive foliage pull the eye upward, creating a greater sense of depth. A climbing rose on a brick wall or chain link fence softens what might otherwise be a harsh line. Landscapers allow vines to cover only a portion of a wall/fence. The plant looks closer, the wall/fence further away, making the whole area look larger than it really is.

Professional landscapers also like to repeat colors at various intervals in the yard, using different plants. The red/orange of a hummingbird bush, for example, may repeat in a cuphea of the same hue in another area; or the yellow-gold of black-eyed Susans may repeat in a blooming cestrum across the yard. This trick pulls the eye across the yard, a pleasant sensation.

*Underpruning:* As yards grow smaller, we seem to be borrowing more from Asian-style landscaping, which creates whole universes within small confines. Underpruning transforms large shrubs into mini-trees to flower on an overhead canopy, while allowing sun to penetrate below for lower-growing plants. Try this with azalea, althaea, bay, bottlebrush, buckeye, cape jasmine, crape myrtle, hardy hibiscus, holly, ligustrum, photinia, viburnum, vitex, wax myrtle, yaupon and large antique roses.

Underpruning is best done when the plant is dormant, now through February. Select 3-5 large strong main stalks. Remove all stalks coming from the root and all side branches up to about five feet. As the plant grows, continue removing lower side branches and leaves. Gradually the multi-trunks will harden off. Underpruning generally will not work with shrubs with multiple stalks from the root base, such as oleanders. Underpruning gives the illusion of depth and distance, and adds to safety by removing hiding places for intruders.

*Winterizing a Water Garden:* Remove fallen leaves. Stop feeding fish when temperatures drop to 50°. If necessary, add submerged grasses to give fish grazing material during winter. As lilies produce fewer leaves, cut back frost killed foliage. After 2-3 freezes, check tropical lilies for tuber production. Store tubers in plastic bags filled with water in a cool spot. As winter approaches, move lilies to the deepest portion of the pond.

*New Year's Resolutions:* Those of us who own homes have to garden whether we like it or not. At the very least, we have to keep the front yard presentable so the neighbors and property associations won't hate us. But it's much more than that. We spend an enormous amount of time, energy and money on plants and landscaping, and what we do affects not only our immediate neighborhoods but the entire ecosystem in which we live.

I hope, as a New Year's resolution, you will commit to learning more about gardening in our unique little subtropical pocket so you are an asset to our environment. Three ways to do this:

1. Become a Master Gardener. It will be the best time and money you ever invested — I promise! Every County Extension in the Greater Houston area has a Master Gardener program. Texas Cooperative Extension offices are listed in the telephone book under "County." Most Master Gardeners maintain demonstration gardens at their Extension offices where you can see new labeled plants that do best in your specific area.

2. Quit planting high care plants that don't like our environment! Learn about new plants for low-care, ecology-friendly, year-round beauty at Houston Arboretum & Nature Center, Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens in North Harris County, Chandler Arboretum in Baytown, Moody Gardens in Galveston, the Beaumont Botanical Gardens in Beaumont and other public gardens and nature centers.

3. Join Urban Harvest. This is the mecca group for organic gardeners as well as the umbrella group for our community gardens, almost all of which are organic and all of which support our food banks. The newsletter alone is worth the fee and will introduce you to vegetables that excel in gardens here (but which often aren't found in grocery stores). UH's many classes are the best place to learn more about organic gardening. Contact Urban Harvest at 713-880-5540 ([www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org)).

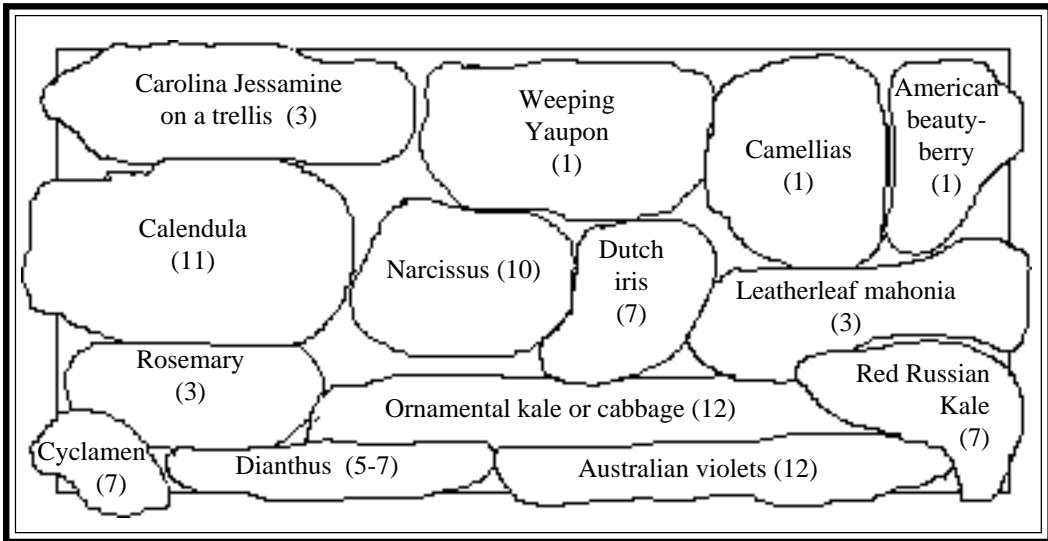
*Keep a green tree in your  
heart and perhaps a  
singing bird will come.*

-- Chinese Proverb





# A Winter Color Garden



Numbers indicate recommended number of plants for 20' x 8' garden.

*Winters are a gamble.* Some years impatiens will be in full color at Christmastime. Other years, an early freeze wipes everything out. Whenever a freeze is forecast, water all inground plants well. The drier roots are, the more susceptible they are to cold damage. Mulch heavily. The plants listed need cold weather to “do their thing.” Some of these plants may do beautifully one year, and succumb the next. But they are all worth a try. Unless we have an exceptionally cold winter, they should give color through next spring with just occasional protections. Winter is also a time when we can plant cold weather annuals in spots too shaded in summer. Under deciduous trees (lose leaves in winter), plant delphiniums, English and Shasta daisies, foxglove, hollyhocks, larkspur, pansies, poppies, snapdragons, stocks and sweet peas.

**AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY.** Wonderful purple or white berries up and down long arching branches. Perennial shrub.

**AUSTRALIAN VIOLETS.** Best violet for us. Perennials.

**CALENDULAS.** Yellow, daisy-like flowers with outstretched greenery. Annual.

**CAMELLIAS.** One of our most reliable evergreen winter blooming shrubs provided you give it slightly acidic soil, excellent drainage and protection from the hot summer sun.

**CAROLINA JESSAMINE.** This evergreen native East Texas vine will need to go on a strong trellis or fence; brilliant yellow flowers are usually first sign spring’s around the corner. Perennial.

**CYCLAMENS.** Orchid-like flowers, low spreading greenery. Really need cold weather. Annual

**DIANTHUS.** Fragrant, sprightly low-growing flowers in spring and fall; often dormant in summer.

**IRIS, DUTCH.** Low sword-like foliage, beautiful iris blooms even known to appear in snow!

**MAHONIA, LEATHERLEAF.** Evergreen shrub, great yellow flowers, bluish berries.

**NARCISSUS.** Paperwhites are often in bloom on the coldest January days. Fragrant, perennial.

**ORNAMENTAL KALE, CABBAGE/RED RUSSIAN KALE.** Grown for their very colorful leaves.

In spring will sprout yellow flowers on tall stalks if you let them. Red Russian is spectacular.

**PRIMROSES.** Spritely flower atop slender stalks with low foliage. Annual.

**ROSEMARY.** Small fragrant bushes that love the cold. Delicate little flowers.

**YAUPON, WEEPING.** This one has lovely fountaining red-berried branches. There are also yaupons now on the market shaped like Christmas trees!

Other choices: Swiss chard, Red Oakleaf lettuce, nasturtiums and flowering peas. (See page 53)

*(If you don't like, or can't find, any of these plants, show this sketch to your nurseryman and let him make other recommendations!)*

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