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Gardening with Cynthia Brian: SUMMER LOVING



Dendrobium orchid color combo creates elegant simplicity. Photos Cynthia Brian

"For colors, we request raspberry and cream with a hint of dirt. For the ceremony, forty corsages and boutonnieres, six bridal bouquets, two chocolate baskets festooned with satin ribbons filled with magenta rose petals, and forty-five table arrangements...all organic from your garden, please." That was the order for my floral services for a recent nuptial. Okay! Got it! Done!

June has arrived. The season of matrimony, graduations, and summer parties are in full swing. I am having a blooming good time creating original simple expressions of love, congratulations, and celebration for my clients. Perhaps you are experiencing your own summer of love and are interested to know what flowers would be appropriate for a variety of festivities.

Naturally what appeals to one person may not be the plant of choice for another, but there are tried and true examples of floral selections to make any heart sing. When I'm consulting with a client, I always assess their needs, ask what they want, offer suggestions, attempting to guess at what will be blossoming on their special day. Sometimes a client will say, "Oh Cynthia, you are the expert, whatever you think is best!" On the surface that sounds great, but it's

important to know colors, sophistication level, expectations, and of course, price point. Even with all that, Mother Nature is the final decision maker on what will be available. The key to creating memorable personal arrangements is flexibility and the knowledge that simplicity trumps

extravagance when it comes from your personal garden. Here are a few of my favorites that always please the patron, are fun to grow, while adding lots of color, form, fragrance, or texture to the landscape.

Calla lilies boast elegant, straightforward, and exquisitely beautiful trumpet formed flowers on long, fleshy green stems. Calla lilies are not a true lily nor a calla but zantedeschia, a genus of twenty eight different species native to tropical climates in Africa. Besides the abundant white and cream colors, callas are found in shades of magenta, greens, pink, and buttery yellows. Plant calla tubers two inches deep in full sun in mulched moist soil any time throughout the year. Expect blooms in 60-90 days. Callas are favorites for both weddings and funerals because they symbolize purity, womanhood, and rebirth.

Stargazer lilies are the most dramatic of flowers with a heavenly scent, spectacular white and pink petals, and are used for all occasions from expressing kudos to condolences. Lilies have been symbols of innocence and purity for centuries and are excellent choices for long-lasting displays or bouquets. Cut out the stamen to prevent the bright orange-yellow pollen from staining clothes and furnishings. Plant liliium bulbs with a spoonful of bone meal in fertile, well-drained soil where they will enjoy morning sun and afternoon shade. The sweet scented Oriental lilies maintain a summer through fall blooming cycle.

Roses are the quintessential emblems of beauty, love, style, and grace. With over a hundred species, and thousands of hybrids in a myriad of colors, roses intoxicate the senses. Some of my very favorites include David Austin cultivars. David, an Englishman of the 1960's, wanted to re-introduce old garden roses to the public. He hybridized old roses with modern teas and floribundas, thereby creating an old fashioned rose with fragrance and form in a rainbow of colors that also offers repeat blooming.

I am a particular fan of the Sarah Bernhardt tea rose (perhaps it's my acting background as well as my Francophile affinities) with its profuse violet infused perfumed florets of deep rose hued petals. This rose makes glorious bouquets and the buds are always perfectly shaped for elegant boutonnieres that beckon a whiff.

Propagate roses through cuttings dipped in a rooting solution or plant bare root in winter. (Contact me in January, and I'll give you cuttings from my prize winning specimens.) Roses require full sun with two to three feet of space between each bush for air circulation. Water, deadhead, and fertilize regularly for a continuous flower show that lasts from April through January when it is time for the hard pruning.

Peonies grow best in cooler climates in full sun, although if we plant ours in a northern exposure without mulching in the winter, we will be rewarded with a mass of flowers May through June in colors black, yellow, scarlet, white, red, purple, or pink depending on the cultivars. Nothing tops the chic of a corsage created from a double shaped peony adorned with a bit of asparagus fern or breath of heaven. Clip no more than one third to one half of the flowers from a plant and leave as much foliage as possible to ensure flowering in following years.

Alstroemeria, sometimes called Parrot Lily or Peruvian Lily, offer stunning blooms in salmon, white, pinks, purples, crimson, yellow, and other colors from fifty different species.

There is no perfume with alstroemeria, but I am fond of them for cutting because they will last for fourteen

days or more in water. Plant in well-drained soil, in full sun, with organic fertilizer and mulch. Add alstroemeria to a bouquet or an arrangement to bestow good fortune, happiness, friendship, wealth, and prosperity upon the receiver.

Hydrangeas have mesmerized me since childhood as they flourished in the gardens of my grandparents. They are native to Japan producing large inflorescences of white, pink, violet, blue, and fuchsia flowers growing in moist, well-drained soil in shaded areas. Big leaf and oak leaf hydrangeas bloom on last year's growth, therefore they must not be pruned in fall, winter, or spring, while panicle and smooth hydrangea flower bloom on this year's growth and cannot be pruned in summer. Gardeners may change the color of the blooms from pink to blue by adding aluminum sulfate to the soil. Hydrangeas are great for bouquets and arrangements adding a lacy yet dense texture suggesting friendship, devotion, and understanding.

Orchids denote love. They are an exotic, breathtaking tropical plant with thousands of species varying in shape and color. Except for the hardy cymbidium, native to the Himalayas, I grow orchids indoors in pots, watering only when a pencil inserted comes out dry. The rooting medium should remain moist, but never soggy. Be sure to not wet the leaves and use warm, never cold water.

Feed with orchid food that has the appropriate amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and trace elements such as iron. Read the label to get your orchids to re-bloom. Orchids provide continuous splendor for three to four months. For my nuptials, not only did I wear my mother's satin gown from 1948, but I mimicked her stunning bridal bouquet which boasted lavender and rose hued orchids, glorious gardenias, in addition to heavily-scented white stephanotis. Out of this world beautiful!

Wilt not, worry not! To keep my fresh cut flowers from wilting, I always carry a bucket of water to my garden. After each stem is cut, I put it in the water immediately. Back in my kitchen, I boil water, then place the stems in boiling water for 30 seconds, remove, and put in room temperature water with a splash of bleach. Most blooms will last several days with this treatment before wilting. It is best to also refrigerate corsages and bouquets after they have been designed to maintain optimum freshness. Of course, unless you have a walk in, this could be a challenge for a large occasion.

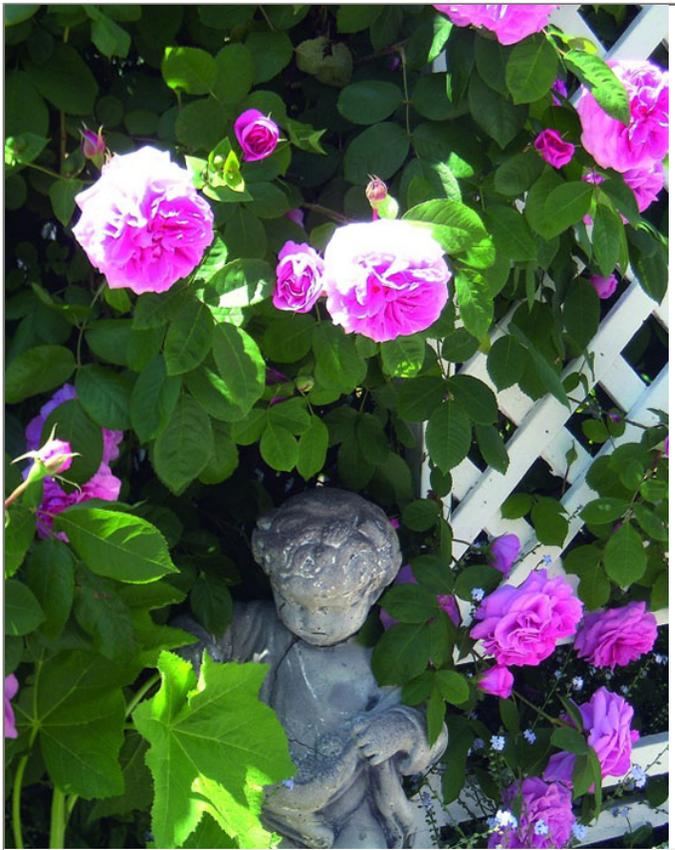
These are just a few of the myriad of choices for creative arrangements and bouquets. For greens and accents choose ferns, babies breath, heather, heavenly bamboo, Jupiter's beard, grape leaves, Dutch iris, and evergreens. Magnolia leaves are one of the best choices for cut stems for table settings because they'll remain glossy and striking for several days without watering. Tuck a few rose buds and toss fresh petals for a causal, yet elegant look. Be bold, be imaginative, and have fun in the summer sun.



A crown of roses.



Close up of bouquet of sterling silver, and copper colored roses, lavender hydrangea and Russian purple sage.



Art in progress-Ingredients for designing boutonnieres, bouquets, floral arrangements, and corsages on the work bench. Photos Cynthia Brian

Fragrant Angel Face Floribunda and Dutch iris in the garden are truly heaven scent. Photo Cynthia Brian

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Cynthia's wedding bouquet: Rose and lavender hued cattleya and cymbidium orchids, fragrant white stephanotis and cream gardenias.



Cynthia's Digging Deep Gardening Guide for June

All gardeners live in beautiful places because they make them so." Joseph Joubert, French essayist, 1754-1824

School will be out soon. Our children are growing up, graduating, or moving out. Some are getting engaged, married, or giving birth to the next generation of gardeners.

Dads look forward to being feted on Father's Day. Anticipation and excitement are in the air. The beach, barbecues, birthday parties and backyards beckon. The lazy hazy daze of summer calls to us. Get the work done now then take a break to relax, rejuvenate, and soak in the vitamin A.

- CLEAN patio furniture once again after the recent rains.
- DRESS up your entry or garden with dazzling pots filled with spillers and thrillers.
- WATER containers daily in the summer heat.
- PROLONG blooms by deadheading spent or faded flowers.
- ATTRACT winged visitors by supplying nectar rich plants, such as zinnias and butterfly bush.
- MULCH beds for added cool protection as the weather heats up.
- FERTILIZE azaleas, rhododendrons, and other acid-loving plants. Toss your coffee grounds for a jolt of java.
- CAGE your tomatoes, water, and fertilize regularly for the best produce.
- PICK your plums to share with friends and family.
- BRIGHTEN your veggie garden by planting edible, colorful nasturtiums on a trellis as companion plants for cucumbers, tomatoes, melons, and squash.
- SPRINKLE calendula seeds throughout your herb garden and harvest the petals as "poor man's saffron" to flavor salads and broths.
- DISCOURAGE dogs from digging by placing chicken wire covered with soil, then adding plants to grow through.
- PRESEVERVE extra fruits and vegetables by learning to can. Visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation (www.uga.edu/nchfp/) which offers the latest research-based safe canning techniques. Enjoy fresh flavor all year long.
- PINCH seedlings as well as established growth on annuals to encourage branching and fuller growth.
- MARK the foliage of any spring blooming bulb such as tulips, daffodils, or iris that didn't bloom this season with a ribbon. Wait until the foliage has died back, then transplant into a sunnier area with good drainage and richer soil.
- PLANT your basil, dill, and cilantro now for a season of seasonings.
- SQUEEZE the juice from Meyer lemons into a pitcher of water for a fresh, sweet, home-made, calorie free lemonade refresher.
- CALL me if you want a garden consultation or have floral needs for a celebration.
- LIVE fully by continuing to READ, PLANT, GROW.
- PROTECT your body from the inside out by loading up on anti-sunburn foods such as apricots, broccoli, and tomatoes.

Whether you are celebrating a prom, graduation, Father's Day, birthday, wedding, or other festivity, inspire your senses with copious amounts of summer loving.

Happy Gardening to You!

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