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Digging Deep

By Cynthia Brian



Purple clematis is royal and easy to grow.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Flowers and fruit are only the beginning. In the seed lies the life and the future." -- Marion Zimmer Bradley

Fruit, luscious, juicy, tantalizing ripe fruit—there's no better delicacy than that which you grow in your own backyard. Whether it's in a pot or a plot, growing your own is the way the rock it.

With our long, warm summer days at their height, fruit and vegetables are ripening quickly, awaiting plucking for our feasts. Apricots, plums, prunes, mulberries, loquats, tangelos and tangerines are just a few of the gems hanging from my trees right now. Soon there will be mouth watering peaches, pears, apples, guavas, nectarines and figs. Tomatoes have taken up the space left by harvested greens, while beans, eggplant, peppers, zucchini, cucumbers and tomatillos are racing to the finish line. It's a virtual farmers market in my garden and this is exactly the

way I like to eat. Every day I walk into my potager to fill baskets with crunchy deliciousness for our supper. I never know what I'll be creating in the kitchen until I see what's ready to harvest.

I continue to sprinkle lettuce and arugula seeds in the empty spaces to extend my summer, fall and winter crops. My recommendation is to sow rows of bush beans, carrots and radishes - or any other vegetable - every three weeks to satisfy your cravings for freshness. Remember to continue to replenish the soil with nutrient rich compost to keep productivity high.

Did you know that that average home gardener only spends \$359 per year on gardening supplies and plants, as reported in a study conducted by Money.com? That seems ridiculously low when you consider that growing your own

tomatoes will save you money. And that doesn't include the spectacular taste, increased vitamins, and the fact that you actually know what you put into your soil.

When it comes to homegrown fruits and vegetables, I am a garden-to-table snob. The finest, healthiest, most cost-efficient source of nutrients is waiting for you in the garden. Dig in!

With the barbeque season in full swing, delight guests with grilled stone fruit. Cut peaches, nectarines, or apricots in half, remove the pit, brush with olive oil and drizzle a bit of honey. Grill for a minute or two on each side. Serve with goat cheese, arugula, or as a side dish. Fresh, surprising, and oh, so delicious! Serve this burst of sweetness with your Fourth of July fare. About those pits: if you want another fruit tree, plant in potting soil in a container and watch the new life grow. It's hang time.

MULCH before the heat of summer begins. If you can use an entire truck-load of wood chips, tree service companies are happy to give you free chips. Mulching keeps the soil cooler while decreasing the weed population.

COMBINE arugula, mint, and sage in a food processor with a splash of olive oil and pepper for a mouth watering variation on traditional pesto. Add the grated cheese of your choice to use over pastas, in soups, or whirled in an omelet.

HYDRATE yourself with fruits from the garden including watermelon, peaches, cucumbers, tomatoes, strawberries, and corn. A slice of watermelon provides you with at least ten ounces of

water while a medium peach will give you five ounces of water.

RELIEVE anxiety and stress by cutting a bouquet of lavender, then crushing the flowers in your palms. Inhale the healing fragrance before bed for a restful slumber.

WATCH for snakes! Gopher snakes and King snakes have been slithering through my grass. Don't be alarmed, snakes eradicate rodents including gophers, moles, rats and mice.

SHOWCASE your horticultural talents by mixing textures, colors, and sizes in your garden, always being aware of water, sunlight and soil Ph. needs. A lemon-lime nandina paired with a black adder phormium and a purple salvia are spectacular bedmates.

PEPPER your garden by throwing seeds of Love in a Mist and California poppies. The colors look smashing together and both reseed. Plus Love in a Mist seedpods make fantastic dried flowers.

WANT a lush landscape? Embrace the beauty of leaves. Foliage plants have dramatic impact, especially when grouped together. Hosta, heuchera, coleus, and variegated plants are showstoppers, specifically in shaded areas.

PLANT gladioli bulbs for summer drama with long stalks of trumpet shaped florets that are considered hummingbird heaven. COVER an unsightly fence with clematis. Read the tags to learn the correct sun exposure, then let the explosion of blooms blow your mind. Clematis make great cut flowers, too.

TUCK succulents in between other plantings. Most succulents shoot up spires of blooms as an added bonus. Of course, succulents are very drought tolerant and an excellent choice for our gardens. To get a better idea of the variety of succulents that fare well in our area, visit The Ruth Bancroft Gardens in Walnut Creek. www.ruthbancroftgarden.org

GRILL vegetables (as well as stone fruit) on the barbecue. A variety of zucchini, peppers, and corn are always excellent choices. Don't shuck the husks on the corn to keep the nutrients and flavor inside. Slip basil or cilantro inside for added flavor.

THINK about what bulbs and rhizomes you will want to buy to plant in the fall. Do you want more daffodils, tulips, Dutch iris, anemones or something more exotic? Catalogues are a great way to get your lists started.

THANKS to everyone who has emailed me with positive notes about these columns. I do appreciate all of my readers and want you to be the best gardeners ever!

CELEBRATE the Fourth of July by dressing up in your sparkly red, white, and blue to hang out in your personal paradise.

Let the fireworks fly!

Happy 240th Independence Day.

Happy gardening. Happy growing!



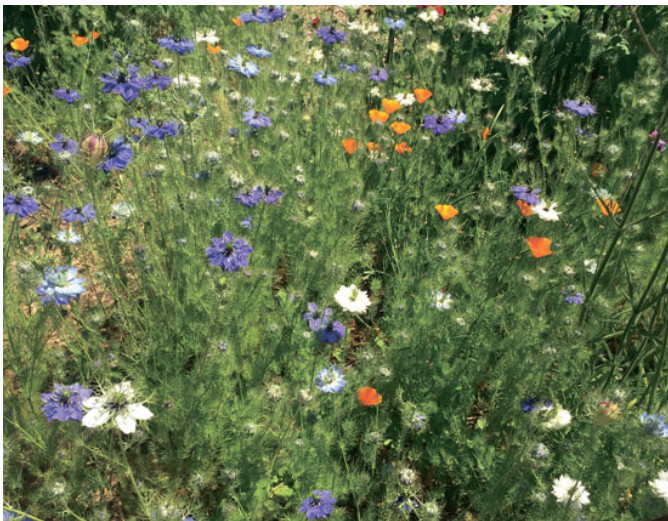
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A close up of a beautiful of gladiola.



Wood chips make great mulch and tree companies offer wood chips for free when you take a truck load! Photos Cynthia Brian



Love in a Mist and California poppies are a beautiful mix.



Snakes are ubiquitous this season. This king snake wound up the abelia.



Sweet potato vine and lavender trumpet vine attract the hummingbirds and butterflies.



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