

Published June 13th, 2018

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



The elegant musky scent of the hot pink Gertrude Jekyll climbing rose adds a robust flavor to teas and is gorgeous cascading over an arbor. Photos Cynthia Brian

remedy for the midday drags. At exactly 4:30 p.m., it was back to work, school and obligations.

Creating your own organic tea garden is easy and incredibly rewarding. Fruits, flowers, stems, and leaves can all be used to create luscious hot or cold beverages that can relax, revitalize, energize and calm. I am a huge fan of citrus. Lemons, limes, oranges, tangerines and tangelos all add a tremendous amount of zip and zest to teas. When I have to perform for a speaking engagement, or on a TV or radio show, I always drink several cups of a delicious natural brew from my garden that includes the juice, rinds and leaves of Meyer lemons, mint, chamomile and honey. My throat and vocal chords are cleared and my nerves are calmed, allowing me to perform with confidence.

Plant Picks

Here are my picks for planting a tea garden in sun or shade. The bonus is that these are hardy perennials that will provide endless ingredients for a plethora of sweet and savory recipes including brewing tea.

- Bee Balm (citrus/spice flavor)
- Calendula (poor man's saffron)
- Catnip (lemony-mint flavor ... cats love to roll in this herb)
- Chamomile (apple scented)
- Coriander (the seeds of cilantro offer warmth)
- Fennel (licorice flavor)
- Lavender
- Lemon verbena (lemony flavor)
- Mint (spearmint, peppermint, pineapple mint, or chocolate mint. Keep contained, if possible, as all mints are invasive.)
- Nasturtium (reseeds itself annually)
- Rose (the fragrance of the rose will determine the flavor)
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Scented geranium and pelargonium
- Viola (light violet flavor)
- Storing

Any herb or edible plant that you enjoy can be made into tea. Harvest early in the morning to capture the essential oils. Place the cuttings in a bowl of cool water to wash off any dirt or debris. Herbs can then be used fresh or they can be hung in a cool dark place to dry. Another easy drying technique is to place cleaned herbs, leaves, and flowers on a cookie sheet to dry in the sun. Or a fun trick to dry your teas is to put the cookie sheet with your herbs on the seat of your car with the windows rolled up. Park the car in the sun and within a few hours, your herbs will be dry and your car will smell garden fresh! Double win.

When storing herbs, make sure to label and date them to avoid confusion later. You can also freeze herbs in zip seal bags or make pretty herbal ice cubes for your next celebration. Ice cubes made from rose petals, violets, and the flowers of herbs are especially intriguing.

Brewing

There are numerous ways to brew your teas. For hot teas, I fill a pretty teapot with the various

"There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea." - Henry James

From the time my daughter, Heather, was 3 years old, we enjoyed a ritual of drinking tea. Of course, it all began with Teddy Bear picnics and pretend doll teas. One day it escalated to brewing "real" herbal teas from the garden until it became our signature sacred Mother/Daughter sacrament where we would solve the woes of the world, and our own challenges, over an exotic potion crafted from what we grew.

Although we had consumed tea as children in my family, the formal tradition of afternoon tea began for me when I was a teen ambassador to Holland where I lived for 18 months. Every afternoon at 4 p.m. sharp, families, shopkeepers, professionals, and everyone else would stop to have a cup of tea. Tea bags were never used. All teas were brewed from loose leaves, and mixing up various concoctions was an honored ritual. Having tea and a "sweet," usually a homemade shortbread or perhaps a slice of cake, was the perfect

ingredients that I think are needed for that day. Add boiling water to the concoction, allowing it to steep for 15 to 20 minutes. In the summer months, I muddle fruits in season - apricots, cherries, plums, peaches, grapes and strawberries. Using a strainer, I pour the tea into my favorite cups. (Tea drinking is a celebratory act and it is more festive to serve your teas in a cup that is appealing.) Another easy way is to use a press pot, called a French press, which I also use for my morning java. When you make your tea in clear glass you get to enjoy the mix of colors. Any leftover tea is poured into a glass pitcher and stored in the refrigerator for a refreshing cold brew.

Many people prefer to make a carafe of sun tea. In a clear glass jug, pour cold water over all of the ingredients you desire. Place the container in full sun with a lid or foil cover. It will take a full day to brew sun tea with the reward of a rich and robust taste.

Whether you enjoy fragrant, sweet, piquant or spicy, tea making is available to you from your garden. After a productive day of working in the garden, I reward my handiwork while sipping a tall glass of iced sun tea concocted from herbs, flowers, and fruits from my own plants. Ah, what a relaxing elixir pausing in the afternoon for tea is.

For years, my daughter and I hosted a radio segment and wrote a column called "Tea for Two: A Mother/Daughter Brew." Today, a cup of tea still connects us in continual conversation.

Plant your garden. It's teatime.

Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Gardening Tips MULCH your yard with three inches of wood chips or other organic materials to maintain temperature, prevent erosion, and keep your plants happy for the forthcoming hot weather.

FERTILIZE with all purpose feed before the heat hits.

PLANT Mexican Evening Primrose along a fence or in a wild setting for a pretty pop of pink that blooms only in daylight and thrives in poor soil.

WATER your garden early in the morning, then at dusk for maximum absorption and minimal waste.

BUY elegant, long-lasting peonies to add to your collection. Peonies like six hours of full sun in well-drained soil and they can live for 50 years or more. They bloom through June and their glossy green leaves remain green through winter when they die back to the ground, reemerging in spring. Peonies are one of my very favorite, no fuss, flowering shrubs.

GROW a tea garden in containers filled with herbs and edible fragrant flowers such as rose, calendula, nasturtium and lavender.

Enjoy your final days of spring with a cup of your homegrown tea.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



Did you know that grenadine is made from pomegranates and its flowers?



Exotic lemongrass mixed with basil is refreshing, especially as iced tea.



Calendula, also known as poor man's saffron, provides a yellow color and light flavor to teas and broths.
Photos Cynthia Brian



If you use cream in your tea, make a lavender cream. (Notice the honeybee in the flower).



Mexican Evening Primrose blooms only in the day and grows in poor soil.



Float a sprig of a scented pelargonium in hot water to infuse tea with a rich, relaxing essence.



Make a delicious homegrown tea of mint, roses, lemons, oranges with rinds, and lavender in a French press and serve in a vintage tea cup.



Cynthia Brian wears hats for garden tea parties.

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are1(r) 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy a copy of the new book, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Available for hire for projects and lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com
www.GoddessGardener.com

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA