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DIGGING DEEP WITH CYNTHIA BRIAN-SHINE IN 2009



Cynthia Brian

The sun was shining brightly and the jonquils were blooming that January winter day so many years ago when my brothers, sisters, and I awoke to find strands of gleaming jewelry strung everywhere on the bushes and vines around the house. Barefoot, we ran outside, not believing our eyes. They had come. The Kings had arrived.

The holiday was "Twelfth Night" or "Three Wise Kings," celebrated on January 6, which is exactly twelve days after Christmas. The celebration was created to honor the Magi, who followed the Star of Bethlehem to visit Baby Jesus over two thousand years ago. Because we are Swiss-Italian and lived in the country, Mom and Dad always told us it was easier for the Three Wise Kings to park their camels outside our house than a house in the city. We had no reason not to believe them.

We loved Three Wise Kings Day because the Magi made us feel special. No one else in our school seemed to receive a nightfall visitation from these Middle Eastern monarchs. And though legend proclaims the Three Kings brought Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh, we were very pleased to receive a piece of fruit, a

bit of candy, and about twenty-five cents in coins from them each year.

But this year was different. They had actually brought us jewels and riches beyond our wildest dreams. I vividly remember the sensation of utter delight when we spotted the shimmering trinkets hanging from the trees! I will never forget the utter thrill of knowing that our landscape was adorned with valuable ornaments from a land far far away.

"We're rich, we're rich!" My siblings shouted. Although we loved the fruit the Magi left us, seeing the glimmering baubles adorning our very own vines was quite magnificent. To solidify the illusion, we found camels' hoof prints and a good amount of camel dung scattered throughout the garden! To top it all off, a note was attached to one of the bushes. The note was an announcement that it had been a great year for the Magi, so they had decided to share their wealth with us!

We couldn't wait to go to school to tell our teachers and all our friends about these extraordinary gifts. Surely others had experienced their delights! But no one else had.

In fact, our ingenious parents had created the illusion solely for us with used costume jewelry from a Goodwill store, and horse manure from our very own barn. My dad had brought out the horses to make the hoof prints, and naturally, we just knew they were camel prints. The nuns at school recall our wide-eyed awe when we retold the tale, and chose to keep our parents' secret. When we told the other children, we were met with disappointed looks. To our dismay, none of them had encountered such riches on the branches of their trees. We immediately shared our booty.

January, the month of winter sleep, offers gardeners the opportunity to dream, to plan, and to imagine. There is not much work to be done in our yards, but we can still begin to chart the days ahead so that we'll be able to share the bounty from our efforts. Curl up with a cup of tea brewed from your home grown Meyer lemon and spearmint, grab your favorite seed catalogues or garden books, and discover new water conserving cultivars for the year. Plan patio hardscapes incorporating rocks, bricks, and cobbles instead of flower beds. Prune a few budding branches from your peach or crab apple tree, put them in a vase and watch their blossoms unfurl. For a scent filled room of sweetness, cut a bouquet of narcissus to place by your bedside for a deeper tranquil rest. For kindness to our fine-feathered friends, design a "Bird Branch" on a deciduous tree or an old stump, hanging feeders and nests for those cold winter nights.

January offers us the chance for a new beginning. To your list of resolutions, include spending more time in nature drinking in the beauty all around us. Decide to compost, recycle, collect rainwater for watering, and grow your own organic vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Exercise your body, mind, and soul by digging deep. As our portfolios dwindle, we can be grateful for what we already have. Being connected with the earth reminds us that despite the turbulent economy, it is up to us to survive and thrive.

Follow your star. My wish for you is to shine in 2009. May you receive the magical gifts of the Magi every day-the love of family and friends, health for your children, the warmth of the home, the peace of the garden, and work you love. These are the true shimmering jewels of the season.



Happy Gardening to You!
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Photo Cynthia Brian



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Cynthia's Digging Deep Gardening Guide for January

"One of the tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon - instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today." Dale Carnegie

Wet and cold, that is what the month of January brings to mind. Although it may be gray and dismal outside, we still have a few errands in our gardens. The dormant season is nearing its end, but freezes and frost can still do damage. Give your houseplants a treat and take them outside for a shower. Plan for spring by looking through mail order catalogs. And don't forget to prune to encourage spring growth.

- CARE for the potted plants you received as gifts of the holiday. Remove wrapping to

allow for good drainage. Trim spent blossoms, water and fertilize regularly.

- LIVING Christmas tree, need to be moved outdoors. Keep them in a large container or transplant into your landscape remembering to determine the placement carefully as they will grow into very large trees.
- BARE ROOT roses are readily available in garden centers now. Soak in water for a day before planting. Make sure to cut off broken roots. Plant the bud union 3 inches above the ground. It is best to buy your roses at your favorite local nursery for better quality while establishing valuable relationships.
- PLANT all bare root fruit trees, perennials, berries and vines. They cost less and will adapt quickly to their new home.
- PRUNE your beds of roses now to ensure healthy bigger blooms. Remove any diseased parts which would infect the new growth and do not put in the compost pile.
- SHARE rose canes with friends and neighbors. By dipping the stems into a growth solution, you can grow new rose bushes at no cost to you. Experiment. It's fun to share.
- MULCH your beds with three inches of organic matter to protect from freezes, provide better drainage while amending the soil.
- DECIDUOUS fruit trees, bushes, flowering shrubs, and cane berries need pruning now. Make sure you are not cutting off the buds for the new fruit.
- SPRAY your second application of a dormant spray to kill the many overwintering insects and diseases after you have pruned.
- BRIGHTEN your landscape by planting primroses, snapdragon, stock, sweet peas, violas, cineraria and pansies which bring exciting color to the grey landscape. Add shimmer to home environment your home by planting in pots for the porch.
- CUT budding branches from fruit trees to place in a vase to watch the petals open. Add a few drops of bleach to the water to prolong the blooms. A few sprigs of narcissus provide perfume an entire room.
- PROTECT LAWNS Rake leaves and litter to prevent grass from smothering.
- FEED the birds! With winter rains and cold, the birds need human help to maintain their body weight.
- TRANSPLANT all those plants and shrubs that you want moved somewhere else safely.
- REPAIR irrigation systems and add drip to your spring schedule.
- REST. Winter is the time of hibernation and sleep. Just as our plants go dormant, we need to give ourselves a break to rejuvenate.

Our gardens can probably expect another season of drought so use the downtime of January to prepare. Happy New Year!

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