

IN THE BACK YARD

Digging Deep—Gardening with Cynthia—WINTER WEARY WONDERLAND!

By Cynthia Brian

What is paradise but a garden, an orchard of trees and herbs full of pleasure and nothing there but delights? William Lawson



Cynthia Brian

It had been a really horrible winter. Rainy, cold, gray, and depressing. We were outdoor kids and had spent too many days inside. The first rainless day in March, my sisters and I decided to run away from home. We told Mom and Dad about our plans to go find sunshine and happiness. With a chuckle, they asked if we needed help packing. "No," we responded, "we're old enough to pack our wagon ourselves." We were three, four, and five years old respectively, living on a big ranch far from the madding crowd. Our grandparents had bought us this red Radio Flyer with removable wooden sides for

Christmas, and we were eager to escape.

The packing began. We included all of life's essentials: our dolls, toy cash register, dinosaurs, pogo sticks, jump ropes, play phone, puzzles, picture books, miniature tool set, stuffed animals, hula hoops, Monopoly money, rock collections, roller skates, a plastic shovel, and our battered shared tricycle, which was tied to the back of the wagon. Items like food, water, clothing, and blankets never crossed our minds.

Excitedly, we kissed our parents good-bye and told them we were off to wonderland. They acted as if running away was a

common occurrence and wished us a safe and happy journey. Mom handed us a sack of sandwiches she had packed, and Dad suggested we take along our dog Bullet (named after Roy Rogers and Dale Evans's dog) to protect us. With our cowboy hats on our heads, our holsters on our hips, and our stick horses as our mode of travel, we started off, singing "Happy Trails to You" as we pulled our heavy load.

Suddenly we saw heaven ahead. Mustard—tall yellow spires blanketing the fields—beckoned us to come play. Breaking into a run, we dashed toward this beacon of springtime. The mustard plants were taller than any of us. We could stand and not be seen by each other a few feet away. "This is it!" we exclaimed.

"Let's set up house!" As we unpacked our valuables, we stomped around in the mustard making rooms for each of us and putting everything in a special place. "This is the kitchen, this is the porch, this is the living room, this is the bedroom, this is the garage." We lay down in the mustard and rolled around, inhaling the pungent fragrance of this intoxicating plant.

Bullet found squirrels to chase and barked with enthusiasm. The sounds of rushing water filled the air and we wandered over to the creek. There we found miners' lettuce, dandelions, wild strawberries, and watercress growing. Pretending we were pioneers, we made a salad using our dolls' utensils and settled in for our first meal together. We thought it was absolutely delicious! Our shoes came off, and we waded into the water but it was too cold to think of swimming or catching polliwogs. We quickly decided that throwing rocks



yellow mustard

Photo Cynthia Brian

would be more fun. Lots of wildflowers—shooting stars, lupines, and poppies—adorned the banks, and we picked big bouquets for our new home in the mustard fields.

The rest of the day was spent playing hide-and-seek in the mustard, arranging and rearranging our treasures, and hunting for new rocks. Time sped by, and before long it was dark. The moon came up, and the night sounds sent shivers down our backs. None of us dared show fear. The coyotes howled, the owls hooted, and Bullet barked at night-foraging rabbits. At first we had retreated to our separate mustard bedrooms, but soon the three of us curled up together and counted the stars while Bullet was posted as sentry. We decided that this was the happiest day of our lives, but we wondered if Mom and Dad missed us.

None of us were awake when Dad came to get his girls. We woke up in our own beds in the morning, the smell of Mom's cooking wafting from the kitchen. At breakfast we all agreed we had indeed found the Promised Land far, far away, and we shared stories of our thrilling adventure with our parents who listened with rapt attention. We didn't realize that our enchanted faraway world was only a mile down the road, on our own property. We had never left the ranch.

There truly is no place like home.

March is the miraculous month when we weary of winter and search for the signs of spring. Although February provided many days of solid rain, this year in California we pray for more to assure us a drought-free summer.

I am just this day returning from a lecture tour throughout the

Caribbean where the sun shone brightly, bronzing my skin and my emotions. The azure warm sea satisfied my senses as I snorkeled amidst underwater gardens. The swaying palms on the beach beckoned me to wander deeper into the lush landscapes where I photographed flowers, trees, and cottages, breathing deeply from the essence of life. Once again, I was that little girl experiencing paradise, or the Promised Land.

Just as quickly as my escape had begun, it was time to return. Thankfully, the cheerful wild mustard blanketing the hillsides and the singing daffodils greeted my arrival as they trumpet a new birth. Flowering peach, plum, and pear trees perfume the heavens and my personal orchard. How I appreciate the emerald hillsides in anticipation of the vernal equinox.

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flowering peach tree

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EVENTS:

On April 16, 2009 Cynthia will be the luncheon speaker at the Moraga Garden Club. Cynthia's new book, *Be the Star You Are!* for TEENS debuts on 9/9/09. Pre-sale orders can be made by contacting Cynthia@goddessgardener.com

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