

• In the Back Yard •

Light, Leisure and Lemonade

Digging Deep—Gardening with Cynthia Brian

“The main purpose of a garden is to give its owner the best and highest kind of earthly pleasure.”

Gertrude Jekyll



Daylily and Agapanthus



Roses



Hydrangea

Photos Cynthia Brian

Over the past weekend, my college friend, a CEO of an international company and self-described city slicker, arrived for a visit. “What would you like to drink?” I asked, expecting she’d want a glass of chardonnay. “Can you make a mojito?” she replied. Thanks to a bottle of rum from my recent lecture tour in the Caribbean, plus mint and limes from the orchard, I created my first Cuban tonic. “What’s on the menu?” she hungrily inquired. “Whatever is ripe!” I retorted as we grabbed a basket and headed to the vegetable garden. She told me she felt like a kid in a candy store as she picked fresh artichokes, lettuce, arugula, fennel, onions, Swiss chard, sorrel, strawberries, loquats, and a variety of savory herbs. On the way up the hill to the barnyard to gather the eggs, we stood under the mulberry tree plucking and devouring ripe red luscious mulberries as a family of deer and a dozen doves competed with us for the juicy fruit. On

the way down the hill, we picked tangelos, Meyer lemons, tangerines, wild strawberries, and plums to add to our feast. “What a treat!” she exclaimed as we swung in the hammocks after our culinary experience. “I never knew fruits and vegetables could taste so terrific. I want your recipes,” my high profile friend commented. Since I don’t use recipes but just cook what’s fresh using herbs and spices that complement the food, I told her she’d have to wait until I had time to figure it out. She may be waiting awhile.

A few generations ago, most households boasted a kitchen garden to supply the family with food. These days, gardening is more a hobby than a necessity. Yet, who can argue the delicious flavor and bountiful nutrition you’ll enjoy by picking a tomato from the vine, snapping a few peas, and popping them all in your mouth accompanied by tangy basil leaves? Whether you live in a high rise, a

city cottage, or in the country, you have the capability of carving out a little space for living green. Hopefully you planted your favorite vegetables and herbs and are now creating your menus around what is ready to harvest each day. Squash, peppers, beans, beets, lettuces, cucumbers, kale, eggplants, tomatoes, carrots, and all the herbs will be vying for your attention. Get creative, eat fresh, and feel the energy of organic. Food straight from the source is not only good for you, it makes you feel good, too!

When it comes to flowers, our gardens are a kaleidoscope of color. The common petunia, daylily, and prized roses are in continuous bloom. Make sure to dead-head as flowers wither to encourage re-blooming and maintain color all season. July is not a time to be planting because of the heat, unless you have unlimited water, and time to monitor the transition. Keep in mind that the rabbits, deer, gophers, voles, and moles are hungriest now

so you’ll want to be watchful for these feasting predators. Birds, bees, and butterflies are friends to our gardens, providing pollination. You’ll want to provide shallow watering dishes for cool dips and plenty of plants that provide food and shelter to keep attracting these flying allies. Butterflies specifically enjoy the buddleia species (hence the nickname “Butterfly Bush”) and bees buzz to aptenia cordifolia (red apple plant). Hummingbirds seek the sweet nectar from brightly colored tubular flowers such as fuchsia, columbine, penstemon, delphinium, salvias, lavender, and trumpet vines.

It’s summer and that means it’s time to enjoy the sunshine, relax with family and friends, and take life a bit slower. Fire up the barbecue, set a pretty outdoor table with bouquets from the yard, and scour your potager for supper. Pick your apricots, plums, and peaches for a scrumptious cobbler dessert. Don’t forget to make a glass of freshly squeezed lemonade, sit on the porch swing, and watch the sizzling sunset, as is my daily ritual. The light at the end of the day is soft and warm and we are reminded that even gardeners need a rest.

Hoist your American flag, be proud to be an American, and celebrate another day of independence. Happy July!



Petunias and Allysum

Photo Cynthia Brian

Cynthia’s Digging Deep Garden Guide for July

“What I enjoy is not the fruits alone, but I also enjoy the soil itself, its nature and its power.” Cicero

It’s hot, hot, hot and that means that our gardens are as thirsty as we are. Summer demands that we pay attention to the needs of our plants. Just as we protect our skin with sunscreen, be aware that many of our precious plants may need to be shaded or given more water. When planning a vacation, don’t forget to prepare your garden for your absence. Just because it’s summer and the living is easy, we still have chores in the backyard. Sharpen your tools and spend some time digging deep.

- MOW lawns at least once a week to maintain their health and keep lawn mower blades sharpened.
- MAINTAIN weed control by pulling young sprouts and composting.
- WATER when the soil is dry.
- CHECK sprinkler systems to make certain you are not over or under watering.
- EMPTY any standing water in your gutters, or other containers to keep mosquitoes from breeding. Add a couple of drops of bleach to bird baths or change the water frequently.
- CUT back snapdragons, petunias, and summer annuals for a second grand August display.
- DEADHEAD roses for continuous blooms.
- FERTILIZE container plantings with nitrogen for greener displays.
- MULCH with three inches of inert materials to retain moisture and keep plant roots cool.
- DISPLAY cut flowers from your garden. There is nothing more beautiful than an original bouquet straight from the yard.
- BEWARE of ticks. Always wash your body, hair, and your clothing after gardening. Take a good look in the mirror to make sure those pesky critters haven’t attached themselves to you. Even after taking every precaution, I’ve had more ticks surgically removed than I care to share.
- HARVEST your fruits. When fruit falls, never let it stay on the ground or brown rot fungus will spread to ripening fruit.
- REAP your produce from your vegetable garden and design dinner.
- SIT back with your lemonade to leisurely enjoy your July garden.

Life is beautiful!

Happy Gardening to You!

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Cynthia is available as a speaker, writer, and host of your events. Call 925-377-STAR for fee schedule and to book Cynthia.



Cynthia Brian Photo Norbert

SAVE THE DATE for Sept. 13, 2009 from 4-9pm for the BOOKS AND BANDS BASH with Dancing Under the Stars benefiting Be the Star You Are! charity. This is the launch party for Cynthia’s newest book, Be the Star You Are! for TEENS. Many local teens are being published. All tickets sold in advance via PAYPAL, check, or credit card. Tickets only \$13 for the event; \$27 for a book and the ticket; \$20 for book only. Visit www.bethestaryouare.org to order today.

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