

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Shimmer, Shine, Sizzle, and Shoot

By Cynthia Brian

"Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves."

James Matthew Barrie, 1860-1937, Author of Peter Pan

Ah, summer at last! Pleasant days sprinkled with orange sunsets, jasmine scented balmy nights, bushels of fresh herbs, vegetables, and fruits, and plentiful wildlife to entertain as well as antagonize friends and family. Living is easier in the sunshine as merri-ment is found outdoors in the fresh air.

August, the warmest month of the year, is abundant with blooms, butterflies, bees, birds, and barbecues. For me, it's always a busy thirty-one days, filled with celebrations, remembrances, photo ops, garden parties, and delightful days digging in the dirt. When it comes to plant specimens, I keep it simple. I like vegetation that is easy to grow. No fuss, no muss, plus color, fragrance, and foliage. If a plant fails, it becomes fertilizer, added to the compost bin, recycled, and re-birthing.

A favorite, simple to cultivate, flower is my heirloom hollyhock. The old-fashioned stock with petals of pink, white, and fuchsia has been in my family for over one hundred years. Honeybees, bumblebees, and butterflies swarm the blooms offering endless viewfinder opportunities. When the flowers are spent, I gather the seed, dry, and scatter in the spring in anticipation of the



A honeybee gathers nectar from Cynthia's heirloom hollyhock.

twelve-foot towers that attract the nurturing insects. At speaking engagements and book signings, I proudly give away sacks of these precious jewels. As a gardener, it is satisfying to share.

The utilitarian nasturtiums are resplendent cascading over planters and potager in hues of scarlet, blood orange, and yellow with lovely aqua leaves. They adorn my salads and float in my lemonade, their peppery personality adding pizzazz and jazz to an ordinary creation. Nasturtiums flower profusely until frost, providing edible art to my alfresco dining table.

Other August standouts in gardens in our area are Star of Bethlehem, hydrangea, zinnias, cannas, begonias, basil, and tomatoes. Ubiquitous impatiens and petunias dress up walkways, beautify beds, and provide a riot of color. Don't discount commoners. Sometimes these are



Fountains, variegated cannas, and hot weather are comfortable companions. Photos Cynthia Brian



The edible nasturtium is a filler, spiller, and thriller.

the hardiest plants for our neighborhoods. My camera has been busy shooting the ordinary pleasures of living in God's country.

The wild kingdom thrives on my property as it does around rural Lamorinda this summer. Driving into my driveway late one night, I was greeted by six bucks, happily nibbling on my deer resistant plantings. (One reader deters deer with plantings of cilantro, although cilantro bolts in heat... like the antlered critters. There is no such thing as "deer proof" except strong high fencing.) These were big boys—two four pointers, two three pointers, and two forked-horn—most likely three generations of males bonding over blooms. I whipped out my camera to snap a photo of my living lawn ornaments as they pranced towards the hills perhaps in route to Santa's play station. I didn't get the photo.

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