

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Hoe, Hoe, Hoe-A Berry Merry Holiday!

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From my Farm Family to yours, Happy Holidays

As soon as the last of the Thanksgiving leftovers are devoured, most of us concentrate our attention on the December holidays. We climb into attics, scour garages, and check the back of our closets digging out ornaments and lights from last year's merriment. In the midst of our decorating fury, spending time in the garden is probably not at the top of most priority lists, yet devoting a few hours at the beginning of the month to hoe, hoe, hoe will add stockings full of joy to your ho, ho, ho.

One of your first tasks is to walk around your yard to identify what needs to be done to tuck your garden in for its long winter's nap. If you have citrus in containers, you'll want to move the pots to protection, either closer to the house, a solarium, or put them in an unheated garage. For frost tender bushes and plants in the ground, cover them with crop blankets in case of a sudden freeze. Since the rains, weeds are already

sprouting. While the ground is soft but not muddy, it's a perfect time to clean out the pesky plants and cover with mulch to deter further growth and prevent erosion from the downpours. Plant the last of the spring bulbs (many are on sale now), and then take inventory of the natural décor your garden offers to jazz up the holiday festivities.

If you grow persimmons, pomegranates, nuts, tangerines, and other citrus, consider boxing them up as gifts for friends or family who aren't gardeners. Bouquets of fragrant narcissus or a bunch of fresh herbs such as rosemary, sage, chives, oregano, and mint tied with a festive ribbon make useful hostess gifts. Cut branches from pines, firs, juniper, and other conifers to swag staircases and doors with fresh garlands. Whether you have hot cider on the stove, gingerbread cookies baking in the oven, chestnuts roasting over the fire, or dried orange slices hanging on the tree, the aro-

mas of the holiday are heaven scents.

Be a style setter by bringing in the berries—cottonaster, pyracantha, pistache, and holly. If you have not been deadheading your rosebushes, cut the rose hips to add to your mantel arrangement along with your collection of old, vintage, or handmade ornaments, magnolia cones, and leaves.

No matter how pretty your front entrance is year round, December is the month to spice it up with lush interruptions of seasonal greens and sparkle. If you have gourds or pumpkins left over from the fall, spray paint them silver, gold, or bronze. Embellish your winter wonderland with decorative birds, nests, angels, or jewels. Layer baskets with earthy moss and real mushrooms to create a mini woodland scene. Welcome visitors with trees glittering with lights and unbreakable ornaments that exhibit your personality.

Celebrate the season of wonder and magic with botanical themes that echo your love of nature. Bake a batch of fudge with nuts as well as a couple of fruitcakes using produce from your garden. Be thankful for the love and charm of family, nuts, and all.

Season's Greenings!



Bromeliads bring a bit of the tropics to the holiday season.