

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Mother, May I?

By Cynthia Brian

“In search of my mother’s garden, I found my own.” - Alice Walker

The robin darted from her nest the moment I walked outside. She’s been laying four blue eggs either on the wreath on the door or in the vertical hanging basket for the past several years. Today her babies hatched arching their little beaks to receive their first meal.

A few feet away, a doe and her new born fawn leapt over the hedge headed for the hills. The momma has been resting daily under the Meyer lemon tree and may have given birth right here at our house.

All this momma and baby interaction encourages me to drive to our Napa ranch to visit my own nurturing mother. Every time I call she is working in the garden, pulling hoses, planting, weeding, pruning, or feeding her multitude of birds. And every time we speak she fills me in on the baubles blooming beautifully. We compare notes. “You really need to see my garden!” she exclaims. She’s right. I do.

Since my computer is in for a hard drive wipe



Nonie, Cynthia's gardening Mom, sitting in the patio with her containers of cymbidiums and cyclamen.



Pink striped azalea looks like a spring candy cane.

Photos Cynthia Brian

(yikes, worst scenario for a writer/media personality), I jump in the car and head to the ranch. The long winding road to our country abode is filled with potholes, yet I relax instantly as I view our meandering creek, the one we used to swim in, catch pollywogs, and sail homemade rafts when we were kids. The masses of lupines and poppies dotting the hillsides and the mooing cattle whisk me back to my youth. I’m home and home is comforting.

Before I even reach the garden, I smell it. Fragrant purple wisteria and ruby red roses wind through the fences. The vineyards are leafing out, and everything looks so green. Mom’s vegetable garden is already planted with a multitude of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, eggplant, and the perennial leeks. A new drip system, installed by my brother, will make it easier for her to keep up with the watering.

“What do you think?” Mom asks as I grab my camera. “Glorious, gorgeous, OMG!” is all I can say as I scan her carefully curated masterpiece of colorful hydrangeas, azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons, clematis, roses, African daisies, tulips, and a multitude of coveted specimens. “Here’s a box, a trowel, and a clipper! Let’s walk,” she says. Mom knows me so well. I can’t keep my hands off her plants as I snip, pinch, dig, and admire. What’s wonderful about “shopping” in Mom’s garden is that, with the exception of the magnificent bougainvillea that dominates one entire side of the 1890s farmhouse, everything will flourish in my Moraga landscape. A garden is to share and my mom is the poster woman of generosity.

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