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## Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

By Cynthia Brian



Evergreens, hydrangea, and lilies create a stunning holiday centerpiece. Photo Cynthia Brian

pleasure to witness the plethora of firs, pines, and other evergreens that will soon become decorated trees and inviting wreaths in local homes. Kalanchoe, Christmas cactus, cyclamen, poinsettia, fuchsia, anthuriums, and pansies are in bloom, brightening the darker days.

Grateful for the recent rains, our garden hours are winding down just in time to gather our golden moments making memories at fun-filled holiday gatherings with family and friends. It's recharging time. Put your feet up, drink hot cocoa, kindle the fire, and smell the last of the roses before Santa Claus comes to town.

GIFT packets of seeds for the holidays. Easy grow treasures include cosmos, peas, sunflowers, and morning glory. Give a wooden salad bowl filled with seeds of lettuce, peppers, cucumbers, basil, and arugula.

FEED your trees while they are dormant. Underground the roots are active and can use the nutrient boost.

PLANT nutrient rich bok choy in your garden. The fiber and sulfur compounds prevent against cancer and bok choy is rich in vitamins A and C. Bok Choy contains 100 percent of your daily beta carotene, an antioxidant that boosts your immune system and maintains vision. It's also delicious chopped in salads, steamed, or added to soups. Do you need more reasons to add this ancient Chinese veggie to your planting list?

TAKE cuttings of coleus, pelargoniums, and geraniums before you prune them back for the winter. Put the stems in a jar of water and when they root, you can transplant them to use indoors.

DIVIDE your peonies, daylilies, and bearded iris if you didn't do it last month. Exchange with friends or find new needy places in your December garden.

BRING the tropics home by adding red bromeliads or anthuriums to your holiday décor.

SAVE birds by going organic. Provide seeds, berries, and safe nesting areas. Add a few native

"Winter, a lingering season, is a time to gather golden moments, embark upon a sentimental journey, and enjoy every idle hour." -John Boswell

With less than three more weeks of autumn, we look forward to the festivities of December. Like a little child, I adore the holidays, the sparkling lights, the smells of gingerbread, and the good cheer circulating among people everywhere. However, I've always been distressed that so many retail establishments begin showcasing Christmas décor in September diminishing the enjoyment of that first weekend after Thanksgiving when yuletide revelry is traditionally unveiled.

According to a 2013 consumer research study, 81 percent of people visiting stores are extremely annoyed by the three-month premature Christmas jingles blasting from the sound system.

Fortunately, most nurseries and garden centers live in the moment displaying the appropriate embellishments for the current season. It's a

plants to your landscape that native birds already enjoy or stop pruning roses to allow the rosehips to form and feed our flying friends.

**PROTECT** roses from extreme temperature changes by covering plants with 8 to 10 inches of mulch above the crown.

**FEED** the soil, not the plants. Continue adding organic materials including hay, leaves, and compost to enrich your soil over winter.

**SPREAD** seeds of a cover crop on any bare soil to prevent erosion, save water, increase soil fertility, and create habitats for beneficial insects.

**SUPPORT** a vole, mole, gopher, and rat free environment by incorporating owl nesting homes. Habitat for owls can be as simple as brush piles or construct a true owl nesting box in an old tree positioned at a minimum 10 to 15 feet off the ground. A family of owls will scarf down several thousand rodents during a season as the young consume two to four a night. No need for harmful poisons when you have a wise owl living chez vous.

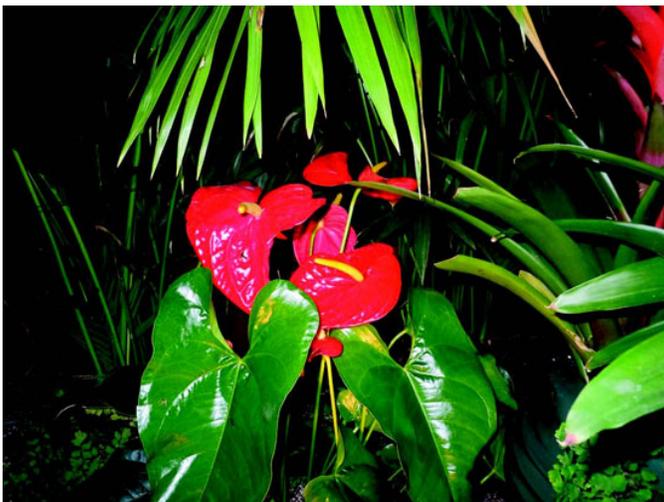
**GROW** wisteria by collecting the seeds from the popped pods. Soak in water for three or four days, scrape off the hard exterior and plant in pots. Within four to six weeks, sprouts will form and you can transplant to an area in your garden that will support this very hardy twining vine. Wisteria can also be trained to be a tree. It could take five to 15 years to bloom and has the potential to live for over 500 years! Now that is a legacy of growing.

**CONTINUE** reusing your gray water for outdoor container plants that won't benefit from any rainy weather. Every drop you save is crucial as we are not out of the drought woods yet, even with the rainy days.

**DECK** the halls with boughs of holly, pyracantha, cotoneaster, magnolia cones, rose hips, or any other merry berry!

**VISIT** 5 A Rent a Space, 455 Moraga Rd #F in Moraga from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Dec. 13 to have your children write Letters to Santa with me and volunteers from Be the Star You Are!(r) charity. I'll have seeds for you, and the kiddies will get candy, cookies, cocoa, and caroling! Info: [http://www.btsya.com/events\\_calendar.html](http://www.btsya.com/events_calendar.html)

**REST**, relax, and rejuvenate. It's break time in the garden.



The bright shiny leaves and fronds of red anthurium sparkle for the holidays. Photo Cynthia Brian



Magnolia cones are bright reddish pink in December, perfect for adding to mantle decorations.  
Photos Cynthia Brian



A holly hedge is merry and bright.



Happy gardening, happy growing, happy holiday glowing! (c)2014 Cynthia Brian The Goddess Gardener Starstyle(r) Productions, llc Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com 925-377-STAR I am available as a speaker, designer, and consultant.

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