

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

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 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.



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

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!® 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

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



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Your friendly neighborhood arborists Darren and Lew Edwards

WINTER TREE TIPS

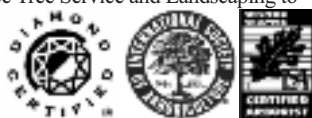
Winter brings cold and rainy weather. "While many trees will be dormant in the winter, exposure to the tough conditions can cause them major stress," says Darren Edwards, Certified Arborist with Advance Tree Service. "Minimize that stress by helping your trees through the cold months. If you take care of your trees in the winter, you will be rewarded in the spring."

Winter can be a good time for pruning most trees, while they are dormant, and pines should only be pruned in the winter months. Removal of large, dead, broken, poorly positioned limbs and corrective pruning can minimize winter storm damage, and maximize optimal spring growth.

So don't wait until it's too late, call your local Arborist at Advance Tree Service and Landscaping to help you with your winter pruning.

Advance Tree Service

Your Authority on Trees and Landscape.



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