

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide For August

By Cynthia Brian

"Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

August is nearly upon us, the most traveled month of the year. Before the craziness of the school year begins, families are rushing to enjoy the last of the lazy, hazy days of summer. Summer has sped by and before we know it, autumn will be here. The drought has been the conversation du jour at every gathering I've attended. There's nothing we can do to prevent a drought, but there are some strategies we can enact to help minimize the effect it has

on our landscapes. As our healthy green foliage droops and wilts, leaves develop crispy brown edges, flowers fade quickly, and everything grows more slowly. The weakening of our plants encourages insect infestation and disease. Before we embark on additional August adventures, it's important to prepare your garden for your absence. This month's gardening guide includes a few tips so that you can carry your "beautiful" with you wherever you go.

- **APPLY** mulch in a layer of two to three inches deep. Mulching your garden will keep the soil cooler while keeping the moisture near the roots longer. Plus mulch shields plants from the direct sunlight.
- **RUN** soaker hoses under the mulch to maximize water savings. Soaker hoses keep the foliage dry, preventing common fungal diseases while reducing evaporation from the heat.
- **REPAIR** leaks in hoses and check your irrigation system before you go on holiday. A single broken sprinkler head will waste copious amounts of water and you won't be happy with an outrageous water bill upon your return.
- **WATER** deeply before you leave on your trip. Most plants need an inch of water a week to stay healthy. Set sprinkler timers accordingly.
- **DEADHEAD** annuals. When your zinnias, marigolds, dahlias and petunias start getting leggy or are spent, clip off the blooms. Plants exert extra energy to produce seeds. By deadheading, you'll get more blooms!
- **WEED**, weed, weed. Even in a drought, weeds sprout up robbing your precious plants of the water they require. Be an extreme weeder and pull out anything that doesn't belong in your garden. Your other plants will thank you.
- **MOVE** container plantings to the shade of an overhang as they demand more frequent watering when days are warm.
- **THINK** about planting a more drought tolerant garden in the fall. If you need to fill in your landscape, consider native grasses, yarrow, and a plethora of beautiful succulents.
- **PRUNE** suckers growing from trees and roses as these zap the strength of the mother plant and may kill the rootstock.
- **PICK** peaches, nectarines and apples as they ripen. Place a bowl on the counter, pack a few in your backpack, refrigerate the extras, or make simple cobblers, pies and crisps, even on camping trips.
- **INSTALL** a dry creek or river rock bed. Your dry creek will be pretty and useful all year long. When winter rains come, the water will be directed to areas you wish.
- **GROW** sunflowers not only for the ornamental or decorative value, but for the nutritious seeds that birds adore. Sunflowers can also bring a smile to your face.
- **ZERO-SCAPE**, actually xeriscape, to conserve water while benefiting from a beautiful garden. The benefit of xeriscaping is a low-maintenance garden that is drought resistant, water conserving, with a habitat for wildlife.
- **DRY FARM** your tomatoes and grapes. The vines may look terrible, but the fruit will be filled with flavor, richness and color.
- **LEAVE** your grass clippings on the lawn to act as recycling mulch. Make sure your mower height is set to three inches high, as high mown grasses can better withstand drought conditions. When winter rains arrive, lawns will bounce back.



A swath of marigolds lights up a soothing garden area.

Photos Cynthia Brian



Get creative with your castoffs. Add art to the garden!



Sunflowers make us smile.