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Digging Deep

By Cynthia Brian



Park a container of salvia, petunia, pelargonium, geranium, and other heat lovers next to a bench. Photo Cynthia Brian

"It's better to be absolutely ridiculous than absolutely boring." - Marilyn Monroe

What a difference a few weeks make. Our weather went from cool, drizzly, and overcast to three digit temperatures in less than seven days, then back again. Our emerald green hills metamorphosed into golden grasslands seemingly overnight. Mother Nature is preparing us for the forthcoming summer solstice. Pool parties, barbecues, and kids playing outside portend a pleasant June. How wonderful it is to sit in a comfortable chaise on the patio on a warm evening admiring the landscape and the stars. Welcome to blooms in June.

I was delighted to have my daughter, Heather (yes, named after the flower), spend a couple of weeks with me recently. The first words out of her mouth as she walked into the garden were "Mom, your landscape looks like a scene from Alice in Wonderland. It's so colorful, bold, beautiful." Indeed, my garden is a riot of hues with roses, gladiolas, lilies, love-in-the-mist, calendulas, clematis, petunias, dahlias, hibiscus, geraniums, pelargoniums, calla lilies, nasturtiums, butterfly bush, guavas, daisies, poppies, osteospermum, chamomile, salvias, lavender, numerous herbs, and flowering succulents. Many of the blooms are edible, gracing my salads, sauces and stir-fries.

There is no mystery to incorporating some summer loving into your garden. My secret sauce is to plant a plethora of perennials and bulbs enhanced by color spots of annuals augmented by shrubs that bloom, trees that bear fruit, with edibles everywhere. Add your unique creative artistry to create your personalized haven and voila! Instant success, year after year.

The elements you must consider whenever you are planting perennials or any plant are soil, light, moisture needs, climate, colors and plant qualities. Once you know what you like, you can layer your landscape to attract the pollinators, birds and wildlife, all the while being water conscious and employing practical earth stewardship.

Butterflies are everywhere and the hummingbirds are the happiest I've witnessed in years, flitting from blossom to blossom with stops at the fountain for a quick drink. Hummingbirds have long memories and when you feed them they will return year after year, even migrating over 4,000 miles to get to their preferred gardens. Favorite sources of food for hummingbirds include the brightly colored blossoms of penstemon, columbine, agastache, monarda, salvia, fire poker, heuchera, rosemary, honeysuckle, fuchsia and any throated vine. Don't forget to add a gurgling water source where they will entertain you with their bathing and sipping antics.

Before hitting store shelves, fruits and vegetables travel an average of 1,500 miles, reducing

quality, nutrition and taste. To increase flavor and boost the health of your family, introduce vegetables, herbs, and fruits into your organic gardening practice. Buy four-inch pots to gallon containers of tomatoes, peppers, squash, cucumbers, eggplants and whatever else you find at your local retailer to enhance your barbecues and patio parties. You don't need a formal vegetable garden. Just tuck plants between your perennials in a place that is easily accessible to your kitchen for easy plucking. Be whimsical. Have some fun. Do as my daughter did and plant basil in a boot, thyme in a wine box, or green onions in a clear jam jar filled with water. Who doesn't love walking barefoot in the grass on a warm summer day? Because of water restrictions, many people have allowed their lawns to die back or have replaced them with native and drought resistant plantings. If you don't have a lawn, your barefooting may have to take place in one of the parks or golf links. The Pearl's Premium grass seed that I sowed earlier in the spring is proving to be quite excellent. Although it is not the lush deep green it was during the rainy days, it has remained a lighter jade color with a watering schedule of every five days, albeit with a few brown spots where the sprinkler missed. To walk on it is heavenly as it is very thick and carpet-like. Weeds are minimal and mowing is currently once a week. As the hot weather increases, I'll be watching closely for its drought resistant tendencies. Thus far, I am very pleased and will over-seed again in fall to enhance the lawn. If your favorite retailer doesn't carry the seed, Pearl's Premium is available on-line at www.PearlsPremium.com. Lawns are the best places for children, cartwheels and croquet.

Summer is almost here and I am definitely in love with the season. Add summer loving to your garden and be anything but boring. Share the love and be a little ridiculous.

Cynthia Brian's Mid Month Fresh Garden Tips

TRY something new. How about growing blueberries? Find a spot with six hours of sunshine, amend the soil to make it more acidic (blueberries like a PH of 4.5 to 5.5), protect the bush from the hungry birds, and harvest for your breakfast and snacks.

ASK questions from gardeners you admire or at your local nursery for tips you can implement.

HANG a hammock or two between trees or posts for a cozy place to relax, unwind, and read a good book. Pretend you are on a holiday.

PLANT a pollinator garden. It's good for the birds, bees, butterflies, moths and healthy flies as well as the garden and you.

OPEN your nature medicine cabinet this summer. Apply aloe on sunburns instead of buying a bottle of burn ointment. Spread honey on cuts and scrapes to reduce healing time. Honey boasts anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

CONCOCT a cocktail with fennel, mint, dill, cucumber, and edible flowers from your garden. Wow your friends with your unique creations.

PLAN ahead for bulbs for fall. Check out catalogs and garden magazines for new releases.

CUT an armful of flowers for beautiful bouquets or arrangements. Perennials will re-bloom.

GET creative with plant markers by using wooden clothespins, utensils or other items headed for the trash.

PICK plums, apricots, cherries, mulberries, and loquats.

PULL out errant blackberry bushes you find growing in your garden. Blackberry plants multiply quickly and will overrun your garden. Buy a thorn-less variety and keep it contained.

PROTECT your plants from deer, rabbits, and gophers with wire, fencing, or organic sprays.

LOWER your stress level by sniffing citrus-oranges, lemons, grapefruit and tangerines.

REPEL mosquitoes and other pesky bugs by placing sage and rosemary on the barbecue. The smoke keeps the insects away.

SOW sweet potato eyes and eat the greens while they are maturing.

DEADHEAD spent perennial blossoms and rose blooms weekly to encourage continuous blooms.

Happy Gardening and Happy Growing!

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Get creative by planting basil in an old boot.



What's summer without a wall of brilliant bougainvillea



Loquats are plump and juicy. Photos Cythia Brian



Magenta roses are perfect for arrangements. Photos Cynthia Brian

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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