

Gardening Guide for February

The Wonder of a Winter Wardrobe

By Cynthia Brian

“Do all you can for as long as you can and when you can’t, do the next best thing!” —Chuck Yeager



A David Austin Gertrude Jekyll rose continues to bloom.

Photos Cynthia Brian

It was pouring rain and I found myself in my gardening clothes sitting on the soggy hill scooting from bush to bush pruning the stray fronds. A smile crossed my face as I recalled a chapter from the New York Times best selling book that I co-authored, “Chicken Soup for the Gardeners Soul,” called “Overcoming Obstacles.” The particular story is “The Next Best Thing” by Ann Pehl Thomson about her elderly parents who in their youth gardened with ease, but in their 70s had weakened muscular systems that caused legs to give way without warning. One morning her mom spied her dad lying flat on his stomach under an apple tree. Alarmed she scurried out to help him but then saw he had a trowel in his hand, weeding. When she asked him what he was doing, he replied, “The next best thing.”

At the time, with over 5,000 entries to be whittled down to 101 stories to sow seeds of love, hope, and laughter, I wasn’t convinced that this story merited a coveted page in our book. Today as I recover from spinal surgery with strict instructions of no BLT (bending, lifting, or twisting), I realize this story is an important lesson in conquering challenges. Being in nature and working in the garden is part of my essence and if it means I will sit, scuttle and scoot to get the job done, that’s exactly what I’ll do.

I haven’t pruned my roses yet. For some reason, my rose bushes are blooming beautifully, despite the storms, winds and flooding. The petals haven’t rotted as they usually do with the moisture and instead stems are bursting with perfect buds. My vases are filled with the fragrance and elegance of my rose garden. A hard prune is necessary to guarantee another season of bounty, yet, for now, that task will wait a week or two.

The rest of my garden has donned its winter wardrobe and there is plenty of other snipping, clipping and cutting to be done. My grapevines, fruit trees, and berry bushes beg to be sheared. I’ll get to them this week. The sculptured look of the bark of my pruned crape myrtles glows against the backdrop of a cloudless cobalt sky. The naked branches of my Japanese maple glow a deep red in the afternoon sunlight. There is something so spectacularly striking about the architecture of deciduous trees with their bare branches swirling towards the heavens. My pear trees are already flowering, and the bees are busy collecting nectar from the loquat blossoms. Under the redwood trees, walking ferns have begun their parade towards the next grove while forget-me-nots cover the ground with their pretty lime green foliage. Soon blue flowers will sprout from their centers and the terrain will be a sea of sapphire. The narcissi have brightened my days throughout the frosty days with their cheery attire of yellow and white petals while perfuming the icy air with their hypnotic fragrance.

With the downpours, the creeks are flowing and the sounds of rushing brooks fill the atmosphere. As long as my house isn’t flooding, I adore the roar of the waterfalls.

Grab your coat, hat, gloves and boots. Wander around your garden to admire the wonder of the winter garments nature has provided. And if you, like me, are momentarily physically incapacitated in any way, get your yard chores accomplished by doing the next best thing.

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A rubber tree with kalanchoe planted beneath is bright and cheery.

