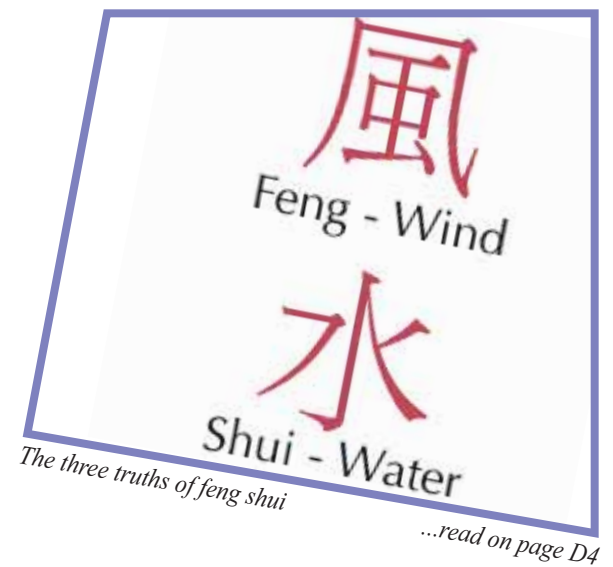


Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Grow your own!

By Cynthia Brian

"There are only two things that money can't buy: true love and homegrown tomatoes!" —John Denver



Artichokes are ready for harvesting.

Photo Cynthia Brian

Is there anything more satisfying than plucking a sun-ripened juicy tomato directly from the vine and munching on it right where you stand accompanied by a sprig of basil? Growing my own food is true love.

Because of the long distances of travel, on Mother's Day, I didn't get the pleasure of spending time with my two adult children. Instead I did the next best thing: I spent nine glorious hours spading, weeding, planting, watering, and mulching my vegetable garden. I sowed seeds of beans, cucumbers, cantaloupes, lettuces, Swiss chard and marigolds. Seedlings of various types of heirloom tomatoes, peppers, zucchini and eggplant were tucked between nasturtiums and calendulas. Within 60 days, I'll begin harvesting fresh, organic produce. Artichokes, beets, sorrel and arugula are already gracing our plates. Grapevines surround the perimeter as a living fence and favorite herbs including thyme, sage, rosemary, oregano, parsley, basil, lemon verbena, chervil, spearmint, lovage, lemon grass, fennel, lavender and pineapple mint form borders.

If you want to enjoy fresh flavor and fanciful flair straight from your yard this summer, these are the final days to sow and plant. Growing your own vegetables and herbs means that you will always have plenty of the most nutritious and succulent ingredients for your meals. You don't need a large yard to accommodate your culinary and dietary requirements. In fact, starting small is best for beginners.

The three essentials:

1. A location with six or more hours of sunlight
2. Rich, amended soil
3. Water

The location can be in the ground or in containers. The key is to have as much sunlight as possible. A raised bed measuring 4 x 4 x 8 feet will offer a great starting point. If you only have a balcony, porch or patio, buy containers large enough to allow roots to thrive.

Rich soil is paramount for growing all vegetables. Buy bags of soil engineered for growing edibles or enrich your current soil with copious amounts of compost. Since it's at the end of the planting season for summer vegetables, buying soil will ensure a better outcome. Make sure that you have proper drainage. You don't want water stagnating or draining too quickly.

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