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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Pick narcissus to add sweet scents to indoor spaces. Photo Cynthia Brian

To combat the noxious air, I have been freshening my home with the calming aromas of hand crafted potpourri and herbal sachets. Although making scents does require time and considerable clean up, potpourri, wreaths, and sachets make beautiful hostess gifts and holiday décor. Be prepared for magnificent earthy scents wafting to your nostrils as you style your ingredients. To fashion your own rustic creations, choose sweet smelling botanicals with strong colors that will dry well. If you enjoy burying your nose in a flower or herb, these are specimens for your project.

My recommendations for making lovely potpourri include:

- rose
- lavender
- chamomile
- nigella
- sage
- thyme
- liquid amber
- rosemary
- bay
- tulip
- orchid
- bougainvillea
- daffodil
- oregano
- yarrow
- eucalyptus
- amaranth
- lemon leaves
- marigold
- nasturtium

I also like to dry citrus rinds and add whole buds of small flowers to the mix. Remove petals from stems and dry on a cookie sheet. If you are in a hurry, you can heat your oven to 150-200 F and put the pan in the oven until the flowers are dry, but not cooked. I prefer to allow them to dry naturally on a counter in my garage as I find the fragrance is fuller and lasts longer.

Once all the leaves, flowers and herbs are dry, it's time to design various "flavors" of potpourri. I make seasonal potpourri in varying color schemes and smells. For holiday scents, add cinnamon sticks, shaved nutmeg or other spices. You can also spritz the mixture with a few drops of your favorite essential oil and toss with your hands before adding the ingredients to jars, bowls, netting or clear wrap to give as gifts.

With the sweet perfume of my garden inside my house, I can turn my attention to books.

As you've probably read, I published my seventh and eighth books recently, an extreme endeavor to publish two books in one year while still working on numerous other projects, yet somehow the task was accomplished. Book One in the Garden Shorts Series, "Growing with the Goddess Gardener" is filled with 24 months of inspiration, tips, photos and stories that you can use now in times of distress. The second book is "Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers Celebrating Gifts of Positive Voices in a Changing Digital World." This book illustrates how similar the various generations are and offers insights on how we can all prosper to make this world a better place.

I am shamelessly promoting these books in this column for three reasons:

1. They will make fabulous, life enhancing gifts for the holidays. (Buy them at <http://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store>)

"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need." - Marcus Cicero

With all of the disasters and tragedies of this year, logic seems to have disappeared. The senseless shootings of innocent people and the devastating California fires have rendered so many of us feeling helpless and hopeless. But in times of turbulence, besides the consolation of close relationships with family and friends, I advise my clients to turn to two things: gardens and books.

The smoke from the Camp and Paradise fires has been so thick and suffocating, that spending time in the garden has been impossible. Continued alerts have been pinging on my cell phone warning me of the dangers of breathing toxins. The alerts advise to avoid being outdoors as the air quality is hazardous to our health. The sky is gray and gloomy with harmful haze reminiscent of Beijing. When the sun pokes through the smoke, it is a roiling red.

2. The proceeds from sales of all of my books benefit Operation Disaster Relief to help the victims of the California wildfires recover. (<http://ow.ly/X0Ia30mF4zZ>)

3. I will continue to donate copies of my books to Operation Disaster Relief that is spearheaded by the volunteers of the top rated local charity Be the Star You Are!(r) 501 c3. (<http://www.BetheStarYouAre.org>)

To borrow a tagline from Sow True Seed, these books are "open-pollinated, untreated, and GMO-Free!" And they are filled with ideas, exercises, and fun activities that you can do indoors even when the air is unbearable outside or the weather is insufferable. I encourage you to support disaster relief by buying copies of the books and start enjoying making scents and sense.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

BANISH the winter blah's with Amaryllis. Try something different with Nymph Amaryllis that showcase distinctive heavily petaled flowers on strong stems.

LOVE the actress Judi Dench? You can now buy her special rose: a sun-kissed shade of apricot with a fragrance of cucumber and kiwi from David Austin Roses. <http://www.DavidAustin.com>

DECORATE with living plants. Popular and easy to grow specimens include Split-leaf Philodendron and Fiddle-leaf Fig to Palm, Dieffenbachia, Zeke and Snake Plants.

MAKE wreaths from cuttings from redwoods, cedars, pines and fir. Prune your trees and use the boughs!

MOW lawns short as the grass is dormant. Winterize with an application of fertilizer to help the grass survive and thrive during the cold months.

ADD color to the winter garden with asters and cyclamen.

LOOKING for plants that will grow in your area? Use Plant Finder at <https://www.highcountrygardens.com/>

REVIVE your soil with mulch and plant a cover crop on bare dirt to bring nutrients and pump carbon into roots to feed microorganisms.

GROW sage (*salvia officinalis*) for culinary and prescriptive enjoyment. Place in full sun with well-drained soil, water occasionally when you notice the leaves curling, and harvest stems above new growth. Don't cut into the wood or the plant will die back.

BUY autographed copies of Cynthia Brian's first edition books with free shipping and extra freebies all benefiting disaster relief at <http://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store>.

PICK sweet smelling narcissus as they begin to bloom to freshen your bathrooms.

PROTECT frost tender plants with burlap, blankets or sheets.

DISCOVER the lotus flower. This time last year I was in Cambodia where every establishment showcased glorious arrangements of lotus symbolizing purity, enlightenment and awakening. We could use more of this botanical symbol of peace and protection.

BREATHE easier with a harmonica class to increase your lung power. Contact Jack Pawlakos, jepawlakos@gmail.com.

CONTINUE being grateful for being alive and living in wild California.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.

Cynthia Brian



Finished potpourri is ready for gifting.



The lotus flower symbolizes peace and protection. Photos Cynthia Brian



Use slices of Meyer lemon as well as leaves to add fragrance to potpourri.



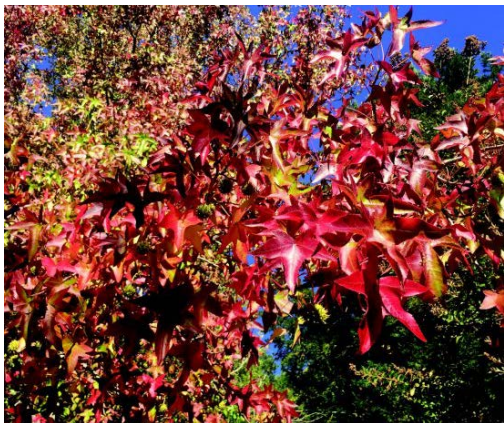
Sage can be added to bouquets or used as incense.



Drying flowers and herbs on a cookie sheet.



A zeke plant is an excellent houseplant choice for areas with low light.



Liquid Amber leaves can be included in autumn potpourri sachets.



Buy Cynthia Brian's books with free shipping, extra goodies, and money goes to Disaster Relief at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are1(r) 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy a copy of the new book, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Available for hire for projects and lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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