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Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for October

By Cynthia Brian



The spectacular Sunken Garden with the 115-year-old arborvitae along the meandering path. Photos Cynthia Brian

flock to this oasis of calm and beauty. Today separate gardens include the Rose, Italian, Mediterranean, Japanese and Sunken Garden. Numerous waterscapes abound. There are boat tours at Butchart Cove, fireworks in the evening, restaurants, tea time, and even a Carousel with 30 hand-carved animals that delight children and kids-at-heart alike.

Although I was enamored by the entire landscape, it was the Sunken Garden that captured my imagination. As an avid and very diligent gardener, I can only imagine the amount of labor that was involved in creating a lush and elegant horticultural masterpiece from a rough, grim, grey quarry of jagged rocks. As I meandered around the paths admiring the handiwork of years of devotion from hundreds of talented plant smiths, I was thrilled to see that the gorgeous flowers blooming in the beds and cascading over the stone banks, were plants that I grow in my California garden. Dahlias, roses, begonias, New Guinea impatiens, cannas, camellias, salvias, rhododendrons, geraniums, petunias, hydrangeas, alliums, acanthus, astilbes, arums, snapdragons, zinnias, euphorbias, fuchsias, heliotropes, hostas, lantanas, marigolds, and even an entire swatch of deep green shamrocks, also known as oxalis, blanketed this serene environment. It was such fun to pass a grouping and be able to answer my husband's constant question: "What is this called?"

But one plant truly stumped me. I had never seen it before and although the entrance ticket includes a small flower and plant guide to the most popular species in the garden, I didn't know what this plant was. Thankfully, The Butchart Gardens has a Plant Identification Center with knowledgeable plant people. I snapped a photo and showed it to the expert. "This is a tropical plant

"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers." - L.M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables

O Canada!

After a hot summer of weeding, pruning, mowing, cleaning, composting and tidying my plots, traveling to Victoria in British Columbia was a welcome respite. Despite the cold and inclement weather on Vancouver Island, we set out to explore the extraordinary National Historic Site of Canada in Brentwood Bay known as The Butchart Gardens.

In 1904, the Butchart family built their home amongst sheltered Tod Inlet surrounded by forests and fields in an area where there were limestone deposits, the perfect conditions for establishing a cement plant. They named the location "Benvenuto," meaning "welcome" in Italian. Mr. Butchart's first barge load of cement sailed from the inlet in 1905 for sale to Canadian cities. As rocks were gathered and piled in select locations and soil was brought in by the wagonloads, the quarry soon metamorphosed into the show-stopping sunken gardens. Every site for planting was meticulously chosen and a lake was created from the deepest part of the quarry, fed by a waterfall and stream.

Still owned and maintained by the Butchart family, the 55 acres of gardens continue to evolve, expand and attract. Over a million visitors a year

that we will soon put in the greenhouse to overwinter. It's called a 'Popcorn Plant' because it smells like buttered popcorn." How marvelous to learn something new every day!

The camellias and rhododendrons were budding but not in bloom and I can only imagine how sensational the grounds must be when they burst into flower. Every season brings new annuals and bulbs. Spring is filled with tulips, crocus, and daffodils reflecting a love for the Netherlands. There are over 900 bedding plant varieties, 26 greenhouses, and 50 full-time gardeners.

A forest of trees including maples, madrones, dogwoods, magnolias, flowering cherry, weeping sequoias, poplars, beeches, and Golden chain trees anchor the scene. There were two unusual and unique trees encased in a rock-walled garden, the Monkey Puzzle Tree, definitely a conifer, but not one I'd seen before.

Wherever I travel, I seek out gardens that will inspire and instruct me to be a better steward of our earth. Butchart Gardens is exquisitely and elegantly designed. With a plethora of water features including streams, lakes, waterfalls and fountains, I was transported to a place of sheer joy and tranquility. Totem poles, bronzes, statuary, and whimsical moss-covered wire sculptures offer a nod to the artistic value of landscaping. To walk in the footsteps of those who lived a hundred years ago knowing that they lavished love on this land, preserving it for posterity as well as the enjoyment and education of the general public was simultaneously humbling and enlightening.

Life was created in a garden. A garden is life unfolding. I returned to my California countryside as October beckons with the changing of the foliage wardrobe and, motivated by my sojourn, immediately got to work with a spark of a new beginning for digging deeper. Although my property will unlikely ever be a Butchart or Giverny, it is my personalized refuge of sweet repose.

O Canada, thank you. Benvenuto October.

Cynthia Brian's Garden Guide for October

CONTINUE watering your yard. Your plants need the moisture now more than ever.

VISIT a public garden for inspiration and ideas.

REFRIGERATE your spring bulbs for the next six weeks.

RAKE falling leaves to add to your compost pile.

PRUNE fruit trees after the harvest.

FERTILIZE begonias and roses to prolong the blooming period.

READ a garden book. May I suggest, "Growing with the Goddess Gardener," available at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store

TAKE a break. The tough landscaping projects start in two weeks!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



The entrance to Butchart Gardens boasts 100 Years of Blooms, actually 115!



A border of dahlias of many varieties and sizes were in full bloom.



The plant that stumped Cynthia Brian: a tropical popcorn plant.



A colorful collage of Cuphea, the cigar plant with Angelonia, and tuberous orange begonias.



Look closely to see the honeybee on this rare violet lace cap hydrangea.



Cynthia Brian takes in the view surrounded by wax leaf begonias and a backdrop of the Ross Fountain and lake. 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 Are! 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy a copy of her new books, Growing with the Goddess Gardener and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Hire Cynthia for projects, consults, and lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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