

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Stars of the garden



Photos Cynthia Brian

A David Austin stunner named Olivia.

By Cynthia Brian

“Won’t you come into my garden? I would like my roses to see you.” – Richard Sheridan

It’s only mid-February, yet it feels like spring. As I write this article, the thermometer in the shade reads 71 degrees. The sun is shining, the skies are clear, and it’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood. Historically the average daily temperature in our area for February is 46.4 degrees. I’m accustomed to dreary Februaries, yet this year is full of cheer. Although we still need more rain, I am delighting in this weather as I finish pruning my roses and grapevines.

Roses are the ultimate garden stars, complementing classic and contemporary landscapes. Many varieties are repeat bloomers, extravagantly fragrant, and easy to maintain. The thorns are a nuisance, yet, sometimes we

have to endure a bit of pain to savor the pleasure. As I’m pruning, I’m wearing two pairs of thick gloves. The thorns still pierce the leather and I find myself extracting tiny pieces of barbs with tweezers from my fingers after an afternoon amidst these stellar actors.

If you haven’t started or finished your annual heavy pruning, you’ll have about two more weeks to accomplish the task to have blooms by mid-April. Roses anchor a landscape offering unrivaled diversity of colors, shapes and sizes. From 10-inch miniature roses to 25-foot rambling and climbing roses, there is a variety for every preference. The scents that emanate from these stunners can be musky, fruity, sweet, and indescribably powerful. In our region, once established, roses will bloom a full 10 to 11 months as long as they are regularly deadheaded. Although roses prefer a sunny location, shade and even poor soil are tolerated.

It’s best to plant roses from January through May and make sure the root has plenty of space to grow. Rehydrate bare root roses in a bucket of water before planting. If planting from a quart or gallon container, remove the plant carefully. Sprinkle roots with Mycorrhizal Fungi to stimulate root growth. Place the stems of bare root roses about two inches below the top of the hole, and for a potted rose, position the plant level with the ground. Backfill with the original soil and lightly tap it with your foot. Water deeply. My secret to rose success is to scratch a scoop of alfalfa pellets in the soil around each bush in March. Every morning, I stir my used coffee grounds into a carafe of water to nurture a different rose daily. They love their jolt of java. Feed your roses according to the instructions that you receive when purchasing. Never over-fertilize. Add mulch or compost to retain moisture. Contrary to popular belief, roses are not fussy. Feed, mulch, water, deadhead and enjoy.

A shining star of the winter garden is the daffodil. Every year daffodils signal that spring is around the corner as they salute the skies with their bright trumpets. Daffodils belong to the genus *Narcissus*. The over 50 species come in all sizes with colors ranging from the ubiquitous butter yellow to pure white, peach, and combinations of yellow and orange. They are perennials, popping up to surprise us just when we need a boost of encouragement. Many vari-

eties will naturalize when planted in a sunny place with slightly acidic soil and plenty of mulch. The deer and wildlife won’t eat them, so they are great bulbs to plant everywhere the deer and rabbits roam. Bulbs planted in fall are now blooming. There is no need to remove the bulb after the flowers fade. Cut back the stems when the foliage is yellow and potato chip crispy. If you insist on digging out bulbs, wipe the dirt off, store in onion bags or pantyhose, and hang in a cool location. Bulbs require air circulation to survive or they will rot. Many of the smaller daffodils, also called narcissi are very fragrant. They make marvelous cut bouquets brightening any room.

The heart-shaped cyclamen is a tuberous perennial that is honored with garden star status. Shades of pink, red, salmon, and white flowers with silver-marbled leaves adorn winter borders and indoor rooms. Cyclamen require almost zero care and very little water. They go dormant when temperatures rise toward summer and return in glory when winter arrives. When grown outdoors, like the daffodil, when you are least expecting to see a riot of color, the cyclamen unfurls its pretty petals. Hardy cyclamen sold in nurseries are to be planted outdoors. Tropical cyclamen for décor as a houseplant won’t tolerate temperatures above 68 degrees or below 40 degrees.

Our shining garden stars may only twinkle during certain times of the year, yet they are always here. Planting and appreciating them helps us grow into kinder humans. Saunter into the garden to say hello.



Delicate, ruffled, Princess of Monaco roses.