

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian, the Goddess Gardener, for August

The Dog Days of Summer



Photos Cynthia Brian

Lacy silk tree and oleanders add color to the landscape.

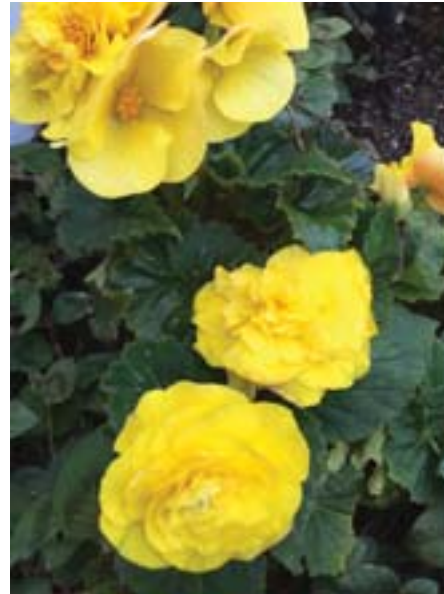
By Cynthia Brian

“Dog Days bright and clear, indicate a happy year!”~ The Old Farmer’s Almanac, 1817

Sirius, the Dog Star, rises in summer in the Northern Hemisphere with the “dog days” traditionally beginning on July 3 and ending on Aug. 11. The ancient Egyptians welcomed Sirius as a forecaster of the floods of the Nile River. They could prepare for the river’s overflow delivering much needed rich soil to their deserts or destruction to their lands. The Greeks and Romans did not appreciate the sweltering weather believing Sirius, meaning “scorching” in Greek, brought drought, disease and disaster. The Roman poet, Virgil, described Sirius as the “bringer of drought and plague to frail mortals.”

Aug. 11 has come and gone, yet the month of August is notoriously hot, dry, and this year, permeated with a global pandemic. And although the historical meaning of “dog days” has nothing to do with our canine comrades, it is a fact that many house-bound families have decided to adopt a hound or two. What better time to romp in the yard with a new puppy than now as we shelter-in-place?

Although you need to keep yourself and your dog well-hydrated in this hot weather, if you planted a succulent garden earlier in the season, you don’t need to waste any water by running the irrigation



Poisonous to all pets, the genus *Begoniaceae* boasts over 1800 species of begonias.



Indoors, a spotted mauve phalaenopsis orchid will bloom for months.

system. Succulents and cactus thrive in the heat and offer texture, color, form and interest when planted with consideration. Silk trees and oleanders provide a long blooming season, but do not let your hound chew on any oleander leaves as they are poisonous. A sparkling clean gurgling fountain can be the watering hole for your pet, while placing a small saucer filled with marbles or stones that I call a “butterfly bowl” will be a lifesaver for butterflies, bees, lizards, and other insects.

While you are out playing with your pooches, glance through your garden to see what projects await attention. I find that these hazy days of August are a great time to assess the needs of my yard. If you have weeds anywhere, they need to be pulled or at least cut to the base before they seed and invade more of your landscape. If perennials have finished flowering, it’s time to deadhead to encourage a repeat bloom. Do your hedges need trimming? Are any sprinkler heads broken? Is your nightscaping working? If your clay soil is compacted, it requires mulch and compost to regenerate the nutrients. Composting is easy and your doggie will probably enjoy helping you to create a compost pile, although don’t let him do his business in it!

Making Compost

To make nutrient-rich compost, all you need is a combination of greens and browns. The greens are vegetable and fruit peelings, grass clippings, eggshells, coffee grinds, tea leaves and other organics. The brown is wood shavings, small branches, sawdust, cardboard and newspaper. Keep a lidded pail under your kitchen sink, in the garage, or at the back door for ease of use and just scrape the scraps into the pail.

... continued on Page D18