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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Nemesia and ferns are excellent bedmates.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it." ~ George Moore

Like most of us who have been sheltering at home for the past 11 months, traveling to foreign lands has not been part of my normal activities. At first, I was immensely disappointed to cancel my 2020 exotic trips, especially the one that would have reunited me with my European pen pal with whom I've been corresponding regularly since I was 9 years old. That's a long time to have maintained a close relationship across thousands of miles.

But, like so many, this past year has found me digging even deeper into communion with nature. I have been inspired by its majesty and motivated to respect our alliance with a stronger devotion by spending many hours outdoors in contemplation as well as work-mode.

A week ago, the hills were still golden brown but with the recent heavy rains, a lushness and verdancy have finally appeared. February nights bring increased

frost and freezing temperatures. We must cover our tender plants with burlap or cloth as protection.

The most necessary garden chore this month is pruning our fruit trees. It is essential to prune your peaches, pears, prunes, plums, apples and apricots while the trees are dormant in winter. Sweet cherries are pruned in summer as they are susceptible to fungal and bacterial diseases. All other fruiting trees need to be pruned to allow for increased sunlight to penetrate the branches which will in turn yield higher quality fruit. Pruning helps battle diseases while developing a better form for a healthier tree.

The tools you'll need are a lopper, hand pruner, pruning saw, and long-handled pruning shear. You may need a ladder if your tree is especially tall but be very careful when using any ladder. Make sure to have a second person with you to hold the ladder since the ground may not be level. Sterilize your tools with alcohol or bleach mixed with water to avoid spreading any disease from plant to plant.

By removing unnecessary limbs, you will be able to shape the tree while providing better access for any necessary spraying. The increased sunlight promotes a larger size of fruit with a uniform ripening time. Insect infestation and other diseases are reduced through pruning because after a rain shower, the limbs will dry more quickly. Pruning appropriately will provide a more beautiful canopy without topping the tree. The sugar content of the crop is increased with the airflow and sun. Harvesting is easier. Pick up a book on pruning to read about the best methods for your various trees or watch online tutorials. If you feel out of your league, hire a professional arborist. Always gather the trimmings from the ground. When dry, use as kindling, shred for mulch, or add to your green bin.

Although this month is not the time to plant annuals and perennials, it is the perfect time to plant any bare-root specimens including roses, berries and fruit trees. Check out the selection at your favorite nursery or garden center. Follow the directions on the packaging for soaking the roots, light pruning, digging the holes, and filling. By late spring most bare-rooted plants are established and flourishing.

Besides pruning and planting bare-root, February is a terrific time to plan for all-season enjoyment and splendor. Recently a delivery was made by someone who hadn't been to my garden since the summer before the pandemic. His first comment to me was: "Your landscape is so beautiful and colorful . it's like falling into a chapter of 'Alice in Wonderland.'" I expressed my thanks for his sweet compliment, although in my mind I was thinking "winter is the ugliest time of the year in my garden."

I decided to look at my yard through a different lens . fresh eyes, as if returning from a vacation. Sometimes when we rarely leave our cocoon, we fail to recognize the evolution of the cycles of attraction. As I walked around my property, I saw what he saw - a hillside covered in sweet-smelling narcissi, rows of pink Bergenia, waves of purple sage, shimmers of calendulas, bushes of azaleas, rhododendrons, and roses, trees of camellias, groves of ferns, mounds of nemesia, orchards of citrus, crocus, calla lilies, and daffodils popping, and the soaring orange plumes of birds of paradise all in full glorious bloom. Even in the middle of winter, my garden is teeming with interest and vibrancy.

Take a walk around your garden and make notes of where you need more wit and whimsy. Know where the sun rises, moves, and sets throughout your landscape. Do you need to add or extend irrigation? Do you have a favorite color palette, or do you prefer a cacophony of color authentically unique to you?

Once you understand your wants and needs, pour a cup of tea, cover yourself with a cozy throw, and peruse a multitude of garden catalogs that showcase bulbs, annuals, perennials, trees, shrubs, grasses, fruits, vegetables and herbs. Research what plants will be best suited to your terrain and micro-climate. Make a wish list noting the months to order, when to plant, and when to expect the show. By creating a calendar of flowering events, your garden will boast attractive appeal all year long. For a dramatic night environment, make sure to add outdoor lighting and lanterns to highlight trees, paths, fences, and walls.

Here are a few catalog favorites that you can order:

White Flower Farm: www.WhiteFlowerFarm.com

John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds: www.KitchenGardenSeeds.com

Plant Delight Nursery, Inc.: www.PlantDelights.com
Bluestone Perennials: www.BluestonePerennials.com
The Whole Seed Catalog: www.Rareseeds.com
Renee's Garden Seeds: www.Reneesgarden.com
Proven Winners Shrubs: www.ProvenWinners-shrubs.com
David Austin Roses: www.DavidAustinRoses.com

Your general state of happiness is connected to how much you enjoy your home. With these garden catalog treasures, you can travel the globe without leaving the safety of your house. Prune, plan, peruse, and dream on.

Happy Gardening! Happy Growing! Happy Valentine's Day!



An old Asian pear tree is pruned in winter. Photos Cynthia Brian



Roses for Valentine Photos Cynthia Brian



Photos Cynthia Brian



A sprig of purple sage. Photos Cynthia Brian



Calendulas add sparkle to the winter, spring, and summer garden.



A layer of frost on a retaining wall.



Cynthia Brian with the February color of purple.

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your spring garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia 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!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy copies of her best-selling books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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[back](#)

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