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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Crabapple blossoms make wonderful cut flowers.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Spring is the time of plans and projects." ~ Leo Tolstoy, "Anna Karenina"

The first few weeks of April will indeed be days of watching, waiting, and planning our projects ... a veritable potpourri of gardening tasks. Instead of sunshine and songbirds, the first few days of spring arrived with heavy downpours and gale-force winds. Not to be discouraged, I put on my mud boots and rain gear to discover the harbingers of spring . my hellebores. Hiding beneath a blooming azalea, I found my green and fuchsia-tinged aristocratic Lenten roses stretching upwards. If you haven't planted any hellebores in your shade garden, add them to your "must- buy" list. These perennial woodland beauties are available in a spectrum of colors including red, burgundy, yellow, green, pink, ivory and lime. Some varieties are even almost black. They are evergreen, deer and vole resistant, and provide long-lived blooms throughout spring. Since hellebores survive winter frosts, they can be planted now next to

ferns, hostas, or other light shade denizens.

Although the weather doesn't look or feel like spring, my garden is awake and desires to delight. The crabapple, prune, and apricot trees boast spectacular color and the buds on the cherry trees are ready to burst open. Iris, anemone, hyacinth, and cyclamen shimmer in the morning dew, and in the next few weeks the tulips and freesia will be at their prime. Pollinators are flocking to the fragrant white viburnum and the blue rosemary. I am a proponent of planting perennials and bulbs because no matter what the season, something is always in bloom. Over the years, and for several months, I planted daffodils and narcissi bulbs on a weekly schedule. My reward is five to six months of continuous flushes of flowers from countless specimens and cross-category hybrids, including the fragrant jonquilla, doubles, and trumpets.

If you haven't already prepared your soil for spring planting, don't waste any time getting started. Add compost, leaf litter, or manure to increase the nutrients and fertility. Chop cover crops before they go to seed. They can be composted or left on the ground to decompose. This green manure will increase nitrogen, and nutrients, and improve soil structure and quality. After cutting my cover crops, I will scatter them around the landscape, then wait three weeks before planting to allow for the breakdown. If the soil is not being fed, it is feeding on itself, and that will spell disaster. After your new crops are sowed, apply a layer of mulch for added protection, water retention, and erosion control.

The ground is too cold and wet to scatter seeds so many people have started their sprouting endeavors indoors. If this describes you, remember that before you transplant outdoors, your seedlings will need to be hardened off. Once we have reliable days of sunshine, hardening off is an easy process performed over seven days.

On day one, move your seedlings outside in filtered sunlight for one hour, then bring them back indoors.

On day two, the seedlings get two hours of sun playtime.

On day three, offer three hours.

Repeat each day adding one extra hour of sunshine before bringing them back inside.

By the end of seven days, it is usually safe to transplant your seedlings wherever you want them to establish. Use your best judgment and make sure the soil and temperature are warm enough.

Don't forget to spread organic snail and slug bait or your new sprouts will be supper for these gastropod mollusks.

Continue harvesting your winter vegetables of broccoli, kale, cauliflower, spinach, Swiss chard, and salad greens. Although my arugula is bolting to set seed, I continue to cut the leaves and flowers to use in my salads. Once the days get hot, I'll dry and save the seeds for scattering in the fall. Speaking of seeds, make sure to read the instructions on any seed packet you purchase. Many seeds must be soaked to help with germination. Wait to plant your vegetable seeds until the soil reaches 65-75 degrees. Most seeds require a planting depth and width that is twice the seed size, except for tiny seeds such as lettuce, celery, and dill which can be scattered and lightly raked. Tiny seeds don't like to be buried because they need sunlight to germinate.

Camellias have been illuminating the garden for several months, but the substantial storms have knocked a plethora of blossoms to carpet the ground. Pick up and destroy all fallen camellia blossoms as a prevention against camellia petal blight. If leaves are distorted, pale, and fleshy, you might have camellia leaf gall which causes the leaves to turn white and fall off. The best control is to pick up and destroy any affected leaves before they turn white.

Clematis leaves are beginning to unfurl on what appears to be dead vines. Don't be tempted to cut back unless you know what type of clematis you have. There are three types of clematis: Group 1: woody-stemmed bloom on last year's stems. Prune after flowering in spring.

Group 2: double and semi-double varieties bloom twice. Prune after spring flowers fade and cut back

dead wood in winter.

Group 3: large blooms that appear in summer and fall grow on the current year's growth. Prune severely in winter leaving two buds on each stem.

These are just a few of the garden potpourri of chores that can be accomplished in early April in anticipation of spring sowing later in the month. Lawns will welcome an aerating and feeding anytime now. Shrubs, trees, and ground covers will benefit from fertilizing this month. For more ideas, check out my book, "Growing with the Goddess Gardener" available at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store> or wherever you buy your garden books.

Happy Growing. Happy Gardening! Happy Spring!

Mark your calendars:

April 15: Orinda Garden Club ("OGC") 2023 Plant Sale

9 a.m. - 1 p.m., Orinda Library Plaza, 26 Orinda Way, Orinda

The sale will include perennials, vegetables, succulents, annuals, natives, as well as pollinator and drought-resistant plants. For more Plant Sale information, see <https://www.orindagc.org/plantsale-public.html>?

April 29: Moraga Community Faire

11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Visit the Be the Star You Are!r booth sponsored by MBJessee Painting (www.MBJessee.com) and Dr. Brian Sheaff Family Dentistry (<http://www.drsheaffdentistry.com>) for free seed planting for kids, book signing, and giveaways. Info: <https://www.bethestaryouare.org/copy-of-events>

April 17- May 17: Be the Star You Are!r charity Shoe Drive

Campolindo High School. Chaired by Ella Kalpakjian. Drop off any clean, wearable, used, or new shoes and boots for all ages.

May 1-June 30: The BTSYA Shoe Drive continues at these sponsored locations: Mark Hoogs State Farm Insurance (629 Moraga Road?

Moraga, 925-254-3344, www.TeamHoogs.com) and 5 A Rent-A-Space (455 Moraga Rd. #F, Moraga, 925-631-7000, <https://5aspace.com/>).

For more information, visit <https://www.bethestaryouare.org/shoedrive>



Bee on viburnum blooms Photos Cynthia Brian



Blue-eyed star grass is a perennial early spring bloomer. Photos Cynthia Brian



Fennel has delicate fern-like foliage and delicious bulbs for salads and roasting. Photos Cynthia Brian



Arugula is starting to bolt, yet still tender and delicious. Photos Cynthia Brian



Cynthia Brian with blooming amaryllis. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia Brian 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. Her newest children's picture book, No Barnyard Bullies, from the series, Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures is available now at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store>. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com

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