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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Blue-eyed star grass is a California native
Photos Cynthia Brian

"All through the long winter, I dream of my garden. On the first warm day of Spring, I dig my fingers deep into the soft earth. I can feel its energy, and my spirits soar."-Helen Hayes

The minute the air warmed, I headed to the garden. Spring is finally here and without a doubt, it is my favorite season. This year it is especially meaningful because, this, my first spring article, is the 500th column that I've written for the Lamorinda Weekly. Yes, you read that correctly. Since 2008, although not all of them were about gardening, 500 original articles penned by me have been published in this paper. Thank you all for publishing, reading, and commenting.

People often ask me where I get my ideas for new columns. The simple answer is-in nature. When I am out in the garden I am totally focused on the tasks at hand. I listen to the bird songs, the rustling wind, the mooing cows, the fluttering leaves, and the croaking frogs. No earbuds, music, or podcasts while I'm working because

the sound of the outdoors helps me be present to ponder.

Before I go out, I slather on the sunscreen and fill my water canister so that I stay hydrated while weeding, seeding, and feeding. When it is cold, I'll wear long pants and a sweatshirt, but when it gets hot, I prefer a tank top and shorts.

This is what my garden gear consists of:

* Two pairs of gloves: a pair of surgical gloves underneath my garden gloves

* An Insect Shieldr permethrin-infused kerchief wrapped around my neck to keep the ticks away.

* A scarf on my head with a ballcap covering it.

* My garden apron with pockets for my pruning shears, sunglasses, and seeds.

* Rubber boots with two pairs of socks.

In past years, before I donned the Insect Shieldr permethrin-infused kerchief, ticks would attack my neck. Three times ticks had to be surgically removed because they were too close to vital organs. This past week, on day three of the warm weather, I worked in a tank top. Alas, a tick tagged me on the shoulder. I only noticed it after my shower. ...

Beware:

A word of caution for the year-ticks are everywhere. They hide in grass, trees, bushes, and weeds. They are bloodsuckers and will attach themselves to you and your pets. They also can migrate from you to someone else or to/from your pet. After being in the garden, make sure to wash your clothes, and your body, and check for ticks. If you find one, do not twist or squeeze. Use a sharp, clean tweezer to lift the tick, and don't touch it with your hands. Wash the area thoroughly with soap and water and apply alcohol. Ticks carry bacteria and can cause Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and other diseases. If you can't remove the tick, call your physician as soon as possible. Contact your doctor if you experience an allergic reaction. The longer the tick is in your body, the higher your chances of an infection. If possible, snap a photo of the tick and put it in a jar or Ziplock bag to show the health care professional. According to the California Department of Public Health, "An infected western black-legged tick must be attached to a person and feed for at least 24 hours before it can transmit the bacteria that cause Lyme disease." Find more information at cdph.ca.gov.

The tick I pulled from my shoulder was small and I couldn't save it or photograph it. Yet, my shoulder is still swollen and sore from the toxins. I will now follow recommendations to apply 20% DEET before going into the fields. I will also wear Insect Shieldr permethrin-infused long sleeves, despite the heat.

Spring Action:

We have much work to do now that spring has sprung. It is time to get our hands in the dirt. In one week, we experienced torrential rain, followed by hurricane-force winds, and then the sweet sunshine of perfect days. The wild weather reminded me of a quote from Mark Twain: "In the Spring, I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours."

Weeds sprouted like beanstalks while flowers, shrubs, and trees burst from bud to bloom. It's going to be a long and arduous task for me to weed my hillside as the flowers and weeds are intermingled, which means that each weed must be plucked by the root by hand. No weed whackers allowed else all the flowers and perennials would be destroyed.

What's on your to-do list?

Check irrigation systems and test sprinklers. If you have a lawn, the sprinkler heads may be buried underneath a mat of new grass.

Re-seed lawns to fill in gaps or to make them lusher. Fertilize with an organic spring formula to feed the soil. I always check the weather so that I go out in the rain to accomplish these tasks. By re-seeding and feeding while it is raining, the seeds and nutrients will penetrate.

Weed carefully and steadily. The days are longer, so it is easier to get a few chores done after work.

It's important to remove weeds before they go to seed and spread. Each day I make sure to fill at least a five-gallon bucket. For weeds that have roots that will multiply and spread when even a tiny piece is left in the soil, I mix a gallon of 30% vinegar with a cup of table salt, and 1/2 a cup of dawn detergent and spray it where needed. Be cautious as this mixture will kill anything it touches. It is especially effective for poison oak and bindweed. Weeds may go in the compost pile if they are not poisonous or have seedheads. Euphorbia, oleander, hemlock, poison oak, ivy, bindweed, bull thistle, and any other noxious or toxic plants are best bagged and disposed of in the trash. According to the Weed Science Society of America, a "noxious" weed is "any plant designated by federal, state, or local government officials as injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or property."

Bait for snails and slugs. These pests target sprouts and new growth. When you see a mucus track or holes in your cabbage leaves, you have an infestation. There are many methods to eradicate them. Spread Sluggo which is considered safe around children, pets, and edible plants because its main ingredient is iron phosphate. You can go out at night with a flashlight and pick them up one by one. Copper barriers also deflect the activities of these gastropods. Sprinkle diatomaceous earth around your garden as these mollusks prefer not to crawl through it. Cheap beer in cups is a remedy I've used repeatedly. They aren't getting drunk, they are attracted to the yeast, and they drown. Raccoons, opossums, mice, and birds feast on these grimy slimy pests. Since slugs and snails multiply rapidly, control the infestation.

Amend your soil with compost and mulch as a solid foundation before you plant.

Add new gravel to garden paths and reinforce wood, brick, or stone edging.

Enjoy the exploding colors as spring unfurls.

There are many more actions to be taken in our spring gardens. In my 501st article, I'll continue with recommendations. In the meantime, dig your fingers into the dirt and let your spirits soar!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing! Happy Spring!



Plant a container with freesia, cyclamen, stonecrop, and a small palm. Photos Cynthia Brian



Edible flowers of arugula. Photos Cynthia Brian



This fluorescent pink azalea blooms in a pot. Photos Cynthia Brian



The delicate flowers of a flowering plum tree. Photos Cynthia Brian



Blue Dutch iris.



Get a head start with seedlings in a greenhouse.



A yellow and blue odyssey of boxwood, oxalis, and periwinkle.



Cynthia Brian of StarStyler Empowerment.

For more gardening advice for all seasons, check out Growing with the Goddess

Gardener at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/books>. 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 which was just honored as the 2024 Nonprofit of the Year by the Moraga Chamber of Commerce. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Her newest children's picture book, Family Forever, 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 <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com>

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