

Published August 5th, 2020

## Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Blackberries are sweet and profuse this season.  
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Summer afternoon - summer afternoon; the two most beautiful words in the English language." ~ Henry James

The blackberry bushes flanked the horse stables on my grandparents' ranch. My grandmother was a genuine horse whisperer. She lovingly cared for a herd of adopted steeds and rode in parades in her fancy Western wear. She even trained the horse for the television show, "My Friend Flicka." Together, after an early morning gallop through the fields and vineyards, she would give my cousin and me an empty pail and challenge us to a blackberry picking contest. Our reward was a big bowl of berries with fresh cream dusted with cereal. I adored my horse-loving grandmother and those luscious summer blackberries.

Although I've always treasured horses, I stopped liking blackberries when I started growing my own. The thorns are menacing, and the bushes sprout everywhere with their underground runners. In the heat of summer, my days are filled with pulling out blackberry vines from flower beds instead of picking fruit. But this year I have a bumper crop of big juicy berries in an area where I've allowed them to flourish. I decided to risk the scratches to re-live the free-flowing glory days spent with my grandmother riding horses and gobbling blackberries in rich purple cream. It's a short season for blackberries and they like it hot.

Meteorologists have predicted that 2020 has a 75% chance of being the hottest ever recorded. The good news is that we grow many specimens in our gardens that thrive in the heat. The bad news is that the Arctic is rapidly warming and climate change is sinister. We must strive to reduce our carbon footprint while we indulge in the summer flavors of favorite fruits and vegetables and the beauty of heat-tolerant blossoms.

Unless you can water deeply and daily, August is not an optimal month to plant anything. But it is a month to enjoy the high-temperature lovers. Tomatoes, tomatillos, beans, peppers, eggplant, beets, zucchini, basil and corn are a few of the vegetables/fruit that demand six to eight hours of sunshine to flourish. Other summer fruits that require heat to ripen include peaches, pears, plums, nectarines, cantaloupe, watermelon, apples, blueberries, figs, and, of course, blackberries. Limes are the only citrus that require a blistering summer to be at their best. By growing your choices in containers, specifically tomatoes, peppers and herbs, substantial sunlight can be guaranteed by moving the pots to different areas and watering when necessary.

I have a pistache planted in a large ceramic cask that has already turned a vibrant red while other in-ground pistache trees are still a brilliant green. Crape myrtle trees, hollyhocks, and agapanthus pop into magnificent blooms when the thermometer rises. Lavender, salvia, sage and roses grow vigorously in summer. Ubiquitous oleander and the common geranium beat the heat with a profuse of petals lasting until the cold weather begins.

As a child, the four o'clocks lining our country road opened daily exactly at the prescribed hour. The ones that perennially sprout in my Lamorinda garden germinated from those ranch heirloom seeds do not live up to their namesake. My errant sun-worshippers open at 8 a.m. and close by 4 p.m. Blissfully, right on cue, just as my hillside is looking drab, dry, and dismal, my Naked Ladies poke their long necks out from their mounds. Every year I delight in their ability to shimmer when most everything else is withering.

The big question in the cauldron of August is when and how to water. Just because a plant is drought resistant or heat-tolerant doesn't mean it doesn't get thirsty. To keep our garden healthy, we can't under-water or over-water. What's the secret? The optimum time to water is very early morning to prepare your garden for the day. The roots will retain the moisture and the plant will stay hydrated. Watering in the afternoon wastes water as it evaporates before it can saturate the soil. The evening is also a good time to water as long as the leaves have enough time to dry out. Watering at night encourages fungus, insects and rot. Deep-root watering is always better than sprinkling. Adding three inches of mulch around all plants and trees will aid in keeping the moisture level correct while keeping the roots cooler.

If you have a swimming pool, pond or fountain, you may discover that honeybees appear to be suicide bombers this month. Rescue them. When it is scorching, bees search for water then return to the hive to let other bees know the location of the source. A group of 15 or more may tap the pool surface bringing back the droplets to receiver bees. According to entomologists, the water is then deposited along the edge of the wax comb while bees inside the comb fan their wings to circulate the air conditioning. Bees prefer hive temperatures of 95 degrees Fahrenheit, so they like it hot, too!

August will be a sizzling month. Make sure you and your garden stay hydrated. Enjoy the fruits, vegetables, and flowers that relish the swelter. Pick a basket of blackberries, with or without horse-back

riding.

Stay cool and enjoy a summer afternoon of hot, hot, hot!



Oleanders come in all colors and bloom throughout the warmer seasons. Photos Cynthia Brian



This pistache in a pot has already changed to its autumn red coat. Photos Cynthia Brian



Four o'clocks can grow in poor soil and are supposed to open at 4 P.M. Photos Cynthia Brian



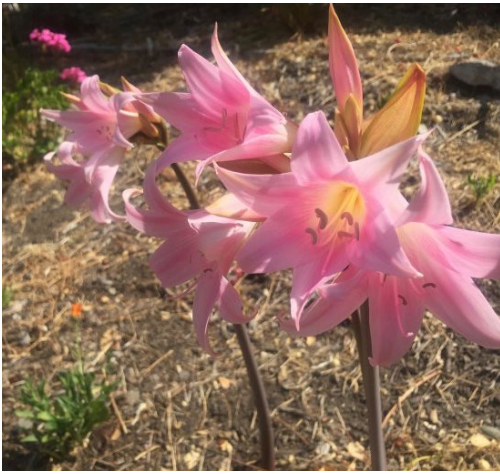
A favorite of hot weather, watermelon Crape Myrtle. Photos Cynthia Brian



A white agapanthus glows at night.



Geraniums of all hues enjoy the heat of summer.



The long necks of Naked Ladies sprout from the dry ground.



Cynthia Brian likes it hot, hot, hot! 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](http://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](http://www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store). Cynthia is available for virtual writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com) [www.GoddessGardener.com](http://www.GoddessGardener.com)

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA