

## Digging Deep-It's Springtime in Cynthia's Garden

By Cynthia Brian

*"There is no time like spring when life is alive with everything."* Christina Rossetti.

Exactly twenty-one days after Miss Misty Banty Hen began nesting, six puff balls of peeping power hatched in my chicken coop ushering in the month of May. Each year I anticipate the signal that spring is in full swing by surveying the bird houses scattered throughout my property, fol-

lowing the flutter of little wings accompanied by the choir of songbirds. I thrill to the boisterous duet of frogs in love in my neighbor's yard and delight in the hopping cottontails nibbling at the sky colored petals of Blue Star Creeper growing in my grass. My world is alive with springtime vitality.

What a joy to garden in May!

A sensory extravaganza of sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes awaits anyone who braves the

warm sunshine to explore the outdoors. Allergy sufferers may need assistance from their medical professional as they venture outside to breathe in the exquisite essence of the vernal season.

Wild flowers enhance the hillsides and roadways. Gardens are a cavalcade of color perfuming the air with the fragrance of lilac, mock orange, trumpet vine, and roses. Tangerines, Meyer lemons, and oranges are sweet and ripe for the picking while aromatic herbs of thyme, rosemary, dill, and parsley season my vittles.

Warm days remind us it is time to get out the patio furniture and spruce up the deck...summer is around the corner. Spring cleaning applies to our home exteriors as well as interiors. Visit nurseries and garden centers to discover the newest selection of gardening opportunities and to examine the spectacular new varieties of perennials and color spots.

If you are like me and enjoy



water features, consider digging a small pond and filling it with gold fish to eat the mosquito larvae in the summer. Or add a gurgling fountain or waterfall to your landscape to entice the birds to drink and bathe. There is nothing more soothing than the sound of water splashing.

With your garden in order it is time to start planning for garden parties and dining al fresco. Whether you enjoy an acre or a tiny patio, every occasion is much more festive outdoors!

So let's get started. We have much to do!



### Cynthia's Digging Deep Garden Guide for May

*"Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine to the soul."* Luther Burbank

- ∞ PLANT summer annuals such as cockscomb, cosmos, dahlias, petunias, phlox, sweet alyssum and marigolds. Buy in six packs for better root development.
- ∞ SOW melons and pumpkins from seed or seedlings. Plant vegetables in raised beds for easier tending.
- ∞ GROW tomatoes in containers to harvest them nearer the kitchen.
- ∞ MOW lawns weekly and scatter another dose of nitrogen-rich fertilizer. Make sure to use organic products for the healthiest grass.
- ∞ BLOW leaves and other debris into a pile for composting.
- ∞ FEED annuals, fruit trees, roses, and any plant that may be yellowing.
- ∞ WEED while the weeds are still small. Be diligent. Add healthy plant matter to the compost pile along with eggshells, fruit skins, coffee grinds, leaves, and lawn clippings.
- ∞ PRUNE hedges, evergreens, flowering shrubs, vines (like wisteria), and rhododendrons after flowering. Shear suckers growing from trees and roses so make sure to shear. Pinch flower buds to encourage a thicker and more bountiful blooming period.
- ∞ DANCE in old socks in a field of wild flowers then plant your socks in a special area of your yard. I learned this secret when I was writing Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul. Every year I am surprised by my new "wild things." If hiking is not your style, tromp through a patch of Forget-Me-Nots as year after year, they are determined to be remembered.
- ∞ DEADHEAD roses as blooms are spent to encourage rapid re-budding.
- ∞ PATROL for gophers, voles, and moles. Consider burying wire mesh while planting. Beware! These invaders love rose roots.
- ∞ REMOVE old foliage around the new growth of perennials. Keep mulch several inches away from the stems. This will help prevent disease or rotting.
- ∞ REMEMBER to let tulip and daffodil foliage yellow and die before cutting back so sufficient nourishment resets the embryonic bulb for bloom next year.
- ∞ MULCH around your trees and plants to keep in moisture and prevent weeds from cropping up. Use straw, bark, and compost. If you have chickens like I do, add the manure to the compost pile and let it age to prevent burning of plants. Turn the soil about 6" deep to ready the flower beds for additional planting. Use natural materials which are safer for the living organisms in your garden -- including you!

Enjoy the beauty, the bounty, and the blossoms of springtime in your garden.

Until we meet again, keep digging deep!

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