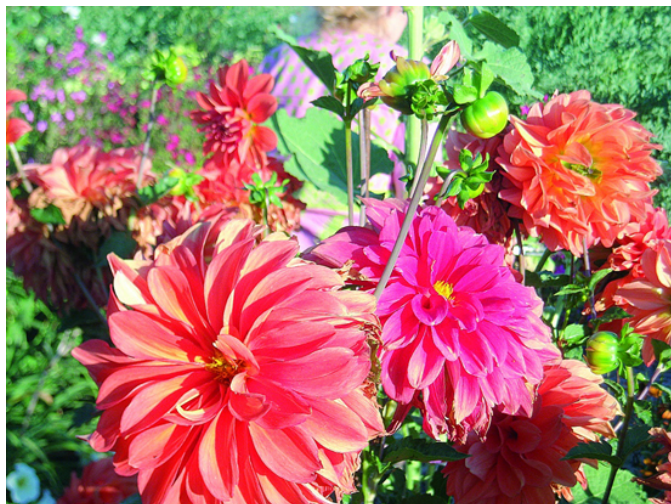


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Gardening with Cynthia Brian: HARVEST GOLD

By Cynthia Brian



Sunset-hued dahlias Photo Cynthia Brian

For our September wedding, my husband and I received numerous household gifts in avocado green and harvest gold. In 1975 those were the interior design choices de rigeur. I was not an orange, yellow, or green girl and, although grateful for the kind thoughts, didn't embrace that specific indoor color palette.

Outdoors, the kaleidoscope of the autumnal spectrum is stunning. Two weeks ago I was lamenting the wretchedness of my vegetable patch with a garden gal pal. "I've had only ten tomatoes and six ears of corn," I confided. The long rainy season and cool summer hadn't allowed our gardens to flourish. Then a welcome heat wave arrived and presto, September sizzles with satisfaction. The sunset-hued dahlias are so colossal and perfect that they look like silk. The berries on the grapevines are finally turning purple, the pumpkins have plumped, and the sunflowers are stretched to their sky height.

Over the weekend, my friend and I grabbed a wheelbarrow and headed into her plot. She built her vegetable and cutting garden near a creek amending the soil with silt, manure, and compost. After sowing, she

topped the ground with several bales of hay to keep the weeds out and the moisture in. Despite her observation that this year's harvest didn't compare in magnificence to last year's crop, I was regally impressed.

We plucked baskets of sweet red and white raspberries and mixed them with the fresh strawberries. Radicchio, cabbage, kale, squash, and tiny cherry tomatoes filled our baskets. There were flowers galore in all colors of the rainbow. Hollyhocks are a family favorite that have been grown from the same seed stock handed down through the generations. Her garden boasted ruffled fuchsia hollyhocks mingled with rivers of scarlet nicotiana and curry coreopsis.

Back in my own orchard, I have been nibbling on peaches, tangelos, prunes, pears, and tangerines. The apples make superb pies, sauces, and, of course, are the perfect fast food in the car. My peppers are just now ripening and I've had a continuous crop of red leaf lettuce. Interestingly, my experiment with growing tomatoes in containers was my true success story this year inter-planted with basil and jalapenos.

What are you harvesting right now? The herbs of fall are plentiful and at their peak of perfection. Basil, fennel, parsley, and cilantro want to bolt, so continue to pick off any blossoms to foster continued growth until the cold weather sets in. Dig up your garlic and hang the stalks in your shed or garage. Cut back mint that has become leggy.

Watching the grazing cattle on golden hills while eating fresh produce alfresco on a warm autumn evening is my idea of California living. I'll take the avocado green and the harvest gold any day as long as it is growing in nature.

Cynthia's Digging Deep Gardening Guide for September

"It's difficult to think anything but pleasant thoughts while eating a homegrown tomato." - Lewis Grizard

Indian summer is here with its characteristic warm days and cool, crisp evenings. The show of spectacular colors begins to emerge and it's time to think sunset and gold. It won't be long before the roads will be painted with trees changing their color. Summer is waning as autumn approaches. It's harvest time! We reap the bounty of our months of growing. Organize a dinner party with your nutritious abundance. Autumn is the reward of our spring and summer labor.

- DIVIDE iris rhizome now. You don't need a lot of space to enjoy the beauty. Try planting a few in 18-inch diameter containers on your balcony or patio.
- PLANT rust, yellow, and orange chrysanthemums and red and gold marigolds to brighten your walkways.
- SOW seeds of kale peas, kohlrabi, turnips, and cabbage for a winter crop.
- CLEAN your garden tools with alcohol.
- RAKE leaves and compost.
- PICK any fruit that has fallen to the ground. Feed it to barnyard critters if you have them.
- PULL any tired annuals and yank out the last of the weeds. Prune back

perennials.

- ALLOW perennials like black-eyed Susan, coneflowers, and sunflowers to re-seed. The seeds are a gourmet treat for our birds.
 - SPEND time outdoors enjoying the sunshine and the cavalcade of colors.
 - MARK your calendar for September 25 from 10-3pm when teen volunteers from Be the Star You Are!(r) charity will sell plants and trees for a donation at the Moraga Pear Festival in the Moraga Commons. Also free kid activities.
 - DIVIDE any crowded perennials and share with a friend.
- Good time to dig your dahlias.
- READ catalogues or garden guides to find the new bulbs for November plantings.
 - FIRE season is in full flame. Be alert and make sure to clear all brush from around your home perimeter.
 - DEADHEAD your roses and geraniums. They will keep blooming until mid winter.
 - EAT a fresh tomato topped with a couple leaves of basil for a sweet afternoon treat. Yummy!
 - PRESS apples for the tastiest apple juice and cider ever!
 - GRAB a camera and start shooting photos of your fall garden.
 - HAMMOCK time is quality time. Swing awhile.

Autumn truly is the most beautiful mosaic of the seasons. Celebrate the beauty, the bounty, and the bliss. Until next month,
Happy Gardening to You!



Sunflowers Photo Cynthia Brian



Pumpkin Photo Cynthia Brian



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