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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian-Goals for the Garden



A scarlet tipped chartreuse cymbidium paired with blush bergenia blossoms brighten an indoor hall.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"The doctor can bury his mistakes but an architect can only advise his client to plant vines." - Frank Lloyd Wright

Every year at this time I spend hours of coaching sessions helping clients create goals for the upcoming year. The beginning of a new year excites one to give birth to new ideas and design a vision for the future. Unfortunately by February 1, statistics indicate that most people have abandoned their goals. Resolutions can be set and accomplished all year long when you make SMART goals. SMART stands for

SPECIFIC
MEASUREABLE
ACHIEVABLE
RELEVANT
TIMELY

Recently while I was working with a regular client, she asked me if I would help her set her garden goals for the year. Of course, I was delighted and after writing my own garden goals, I felt the exercise would be worthwhile for the loyal readers of Digging Deep. Last year I modeled this gardening column after my motto, Read, Plant, Grow. This year I propose Explore, Experiment, Experience.

Now that it is winter, the inclement weather presents the perfect opportunity to design our dreams. There is little manual labor to be done outdoors. It's time to exercise our brains, explore the possibilities, and decide how we want our landscapes to serve us for the future.

Let me begin by describing the steps to SMART goals. When creating SMART goals for your garden, always ask yourself, "what do I mean by that?"

1. SPECIFIC-Planting rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, and oregano is specific, while wanting an herb garden is not.

2. MEASURABLE-Planting rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, and oregano the third weekend of May is measurable. Your actions must be calculable so you know when you have achieved success. We can not measure "wants".

3. ACHIEVABLE-Planting rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, and oregano the third weekend of May so that I'll have a bounty of flavorful herbs for my 4th of July barbecue is achievable. Be realistic about what you can truly accomplish. Success breeds success. When we set goals that are reachable, we feel competent.

4. RELEVANT-Planting rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, and oregano the third weekend of May so that I'll have a bounty of flavorful herbs for my 4th of July barbecue to enhance the tasty enjoyment and continued health of my family and guests is relevant. To be relevant, the goal must really matter to you. If you don't have a good reason for doing it, you'll drop the goal after a few weeks of attempts.

5. TIMELY-Planting rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, and oregano the third weekend of May so that I'll have a bounty of flavorful herbs for my 4th of July barbecue to enhance the tasty enjoyment and continued health of my family and guests plus savor a summer of palatable satisfaction provides an end point. Even if you want to have a goal forever, put an end date to a cycle, then start anew when accomplished.

What's on your list of things that you've always wanted in your backyard but never had the time, money, or inclination to accomplish? A sampling of suggestions besides planting your herbs may include creating, adding, building, buying, cleaning, or planting

- A butterfly garden
- A cutting garden
- A vegetable plot
- A barbecue box
- A meditation meadow
- Attractions for birds, bees, and hummingbirds
- Pathways to paradise
- A perennial patch
- Play structures
- Swings from giant trees

- Relaxation regions
- Benches and outdoor sitting rooms
- Space, mood, and spotlighting
- Ponds, waterfalls, fountains, and water features
- Compost bins or piles
- Succulents and cactus
- Endemic, natural specimens
- Fruit orchard
- Vineyard
- Seasonal bulbs
- Fire pit
- Outdoor kitchen and dining area
- Trellises and arbors
- Sculpture scenario
- Aviary
- Hillside wine cellar
- Rock wall
- Patio, deck, retaining walls
- Rain garden
- All weather furniture
- Hammock hanging
- Sport court
- Animal enclosures
- Junk pile
- Library of garden books

One of the items on my agenda for the year is to enrich my vegetable garden with compost, mulch, legume planting, and crop rotation. The date for each task is chronicled and I have written down in my gardening journal the specifics, how I will measure, achieve, be realistic, and time my endeavors. My reward will be a healthy harvest of delectable freshness that I'll be able to share with family, friends, and colleagues.

Hard work, sacrifice, and commitment deserve applause. Create SMART garden goals and celebrate your diligence. Use the winter months to pause, relax, and reinvent while you become the architect of your dreamscape. Plant purple lilac vines (*Hardenbergia violaceae*) to cover those fences and walls that you want hidden in winter.

Writing your garden goals will enable you to realize your vision one step at a time. As Lewis Carol wrote in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will do." With SMART goals for your garden desires, you will create a road map to greener success harvesting happiness. Dreams are goals with timelines. Dream big and always write down your SMART garden goals. Then sit back, stay warm, and relish the downtime of winter with a delectable cup of rose hip tea.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for January

"Let nature be your teacher." - William Wordsworth

The narcissus perfume the chilly air with intoxicating scents, the sprouting mushrooms are fungus umbrellas for the garden fairies and tired rose bushes beg for branch reduction. With the merriment of the holidays now memories of a bygone season, we forge into the future with high hopes of a brighter economy and hospitable weather. With only a few things to do in the garden in January, perhaps you can settle in for a long winter's nap.

- RECYCLE your Christmas tree through the waste services program.
- CUT your final bouquets of roses and blooming perennials for indoor enjoyment.
- PROTECT plants from freezing by covering with tarps, blankets, or plastic.
- PRUNE your roses, berries, geraniums, fruit trees, crepe myrtles, and other woody perennials before the end of the month. This is the time for severe cutting.
- SHARE your rose canes with garden friends. After cutting the canes 12 inches or shorter, dip in a rooting solution before planting.
- COMPOST kitchen scraps, ashes, coffee, tree, and all organic materials.
- READ garden magazines and bulb catalogues.
- DREAM about the garden environment you've always wanted.
- VISIT winter gardens in other areas to gather ideas.
- MOVE Christmas azaleas and cactus to a patio or porch.
- DECLUTTER your shed or garage in anticipation of spring action.
- SHARPEN your tools, clean, oil, and store.
- PLANT color spots of cyclamen, azaleas, bergenia, and pansies.
- MOVE potted conifers outdoors in preparation for the next holidays.
- PLAN your garden. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Write SMART goals.
- BUY new rubber boots for those muddy slopes.

- HARVEST beets, potatoes, and turnips before the freezes.
- ENJOY the beautiful blossoms of cymbidium orchids in your home decor.
- CELEBRATE 2011 in style and with substance by being organic.

Remember, don't be intimidated by last year's mistakes. Failure is fertilizer. Throw your "malfatti's" on the compost pile and grow a new garden.

Explore, experiment, experience. Happy New Year!
Happy gardening to you!

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Cynthia is available as a speaker and consultant.



Narcissus mingled with Russian Sage brighten the winter landscape with beauty and perfume.



Purple Lilac Vine is a colorful winter blooming vine for fences, walls, and arbors. (*Hardenbergia violacea*)

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