

Gardening Guide

Hurray for May!

By Cynthia Brian

“There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter.”— Rachel Carson



Sangria will be served on the pink patio with African daisies.

Photos Cynthia Brian

The intoxicating waft of sweet jasmine filled my nostrils as I opened my front door and stepped onto the porch. Droplets of rain still clung to the leaves of the Japanese maple while the bright orb of sunshine broke through the cumulus clouds encouraging the clematis to reveal their splendor.

May! Magnificent May!

Between the copious showers and the solar assistance, spring is alive and lush with the grandeur of flora. My entire garden is bursting with surprises of color, textures and forms. Plants are sprouting that I thought had long ago failed. The orchard trees are abundant with the tiny beginnings of the luscious fruit that will ripen in summer and fall. Scampering from branch to branch, squirrels entertain while stealing the bright orange loquats in their harried feeding frenzy. Birds, lizards, frogs, spiders and other garden collaborators are active in their pursuit of the bounty of the month.

Yet, alas, weeds, weeds, everywhere. I spent every weekend in April in addition to hours daily before and af-

ter work pulling, composting, pulling, composting, pulling, and composting. The good news is that the soil is amenable, and although weeding is tedious and exhausting, I am able to pull most of these grasses and undesirables by hand. After all of my April preparations, including soil amending, I am finally ready for May planting. Seeds have been carefully sown for okra, beets, carrots, jalapenos, arugula, pole beans, bush beans, rattlesnake beans, peas, chard, corn, pumpkin, cucumber, a variety of lettuces, greens and kohlrabi. On Mother's Day I'll plant seedlings of tomatoes, eggplant, and squash. I am excited to tend to this living family of friends.

When I was a child, this was my most favorite time of the year (Christmas excepted) because we were able to dig in the dirt, plant our vegetable garden, and moreover, savor the succulent smells of the soil of spring. When my children were young, getting them involved in the outdoor projects was paramount. Invite your children to plant a garden with you. Kids love getting dirty. We were told that we had “clean dirt” because after a day in the garden our bodies and

clothes were washed. (My Mom used to brush us off with a broom, too!) Children will be fascinated with worms, bugs, frogs and lizards. Gardening together forms family bonds with memories that will last forever, as you witness mine have. We were given our own plot of land to grow whatever we wanted and I did the same for my kids. My son's name remains on the gate where he began his “Veggie Garden.” Suggest that your child grow a pizza garden filled with tomatoes, peppers, onions, basil, and oregano or maybe a butterfly and bee heaven where pollinators will gather. Think easy-to-grow plants such as lavender, sunflowers or poppies.

Make sure to spray yourself and your clothing with bug repellent. Ticks are ubiquitous this season hiding in the tall grass and shrubs just waiting to jump onto a heart-healthy human and start the blood sucking. Mosquito larvae are already hatching. With all of the rain, get ready for mosquito madness. Scour your property for the tiniest accumulation of water in a container and dump it out. Old tires are notorious breeders of mosquitoes as water gets trapped in the inner rims and the larvae multiply and hatch quickly.

Spring is healing. It's new birth. It's a refresher course on living. Step outside your front door. Inhale the fragrance. Observe the beauty. Then get into your garden for a day of play. Hurray for May!



Shirley poppies cascade over a container.