

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Dancing Naked Ladies and strutting wildlife

By Cynthia Brian

"Those who danced were thought insane by those who could not hear the music." ~Unknown



Deep pink Naked Ladies flanked by midnight blue agapanthus and purple crape myrtle

Photos Cynthia Brian

Can you hear the music? Or are you insane?

Dancing in the breeze, Naked Ladies are South African natives in the *Amaryllis belladonna* family with bare, unadorned stems that turn their faces to the sunshine. The long straight necks and the perfect pink throats of the Naked Ladies brighten every late summer landscape. In our climate they bloom at the same time as agapanthus, making for a lovely yin yang interaction of pinks and blues. When little else is blooming in the blazing summer sun, and the deer have dined on garden delicacies, the toxic bulbs of Naked Ladies can always be counted on to put on a brilliant ballet.

In winter and spring the bulbs grow leaves that are glossy and spear shaped, often mistaken for agapanthus. By summer the leaves have died back and only the heads of the bulbs can be seen. Miraculously one morning you'll walk into your garden to witness a sprouted leafless stem, soon followed by a pretty pink face. Naked Ladies will bloom for four to six weeks, swaying to the music of the wind. As soon as the blooms fade, cut the stalk back to the ground. Since the plant is now dormant, this is the time to divide the clumps to replant bulbs wherever you want a patch of Naked Ladies

for the next year. If you scatter the fresh seeds from the dried flowers, they may germinate in as little as two weeks, but will take as many as six years to flower.

Naked Ladies are not fussy at all. They can be planted in gravel, dirt, or enriched soil as long as they are planted in the sunshine. They will last for many years with little to no care. Once established they require minimal water, thus they are a great flowering solution to drought inclined climates. A single bulb will multiply into a clump of bulbs, yet the clumps don't travel far. When the clumps are bare, they resemble a turtle's back. It is best to plant in groups. If you plant in rows, they will remain in rows until you transplant the bulbs elsewhere. *Amaryllis belladonna* are also spectacular long-lasting cut flowers.

Naked Ladies are not the only specimens strutting their stuff in our yards. Raccoons, deer, skunks, coyotes, squirrels and turkeys are in unafraid abundance this August. As I approached my home driving from work, a family of three deer polished off my gladioli on my driveway. I see them daily roaming the neighborhood munching on every edible while coyotes provide a nightly chorus of howling

from the hills. Outside my back door, a skunk sniffed in search of food. No sooner had the skunk slinked away empty handed than a huge raccoon pranced onto the patio, also seeking dinner. Both nocturnal creatures are gorgeous to admire from behind glass but are not to be approached as they dance in the dark. (I snapped photos instead.) Make sure to remove any pet food from outside and tighten garbage can lids to avert their nightly invasions. The squirrels have been ravaging the grapevines. The grapes are not quite ripe but are certainly sweet and delicious to those bushy tailed rodents. Since I can't control the parade of turkeys flying into my garden, I've learned to admire their dances. Sometimes two or more families with two-dozen chicks will trot across the plot, scratching, clucking, yelping, purring, flapping and gobbling. My reward for allowing them into my space is a collection of beautiful feathers to adorn my creations.

Take a peak outside and listen to the music. Nature is dancing.

"Great dancers are not great because of their technique – they are great because of their passion." ~Martha Graham

... continued on next page