

## Cynthia Brian's Gardening guide for May

# Mother (Nature) knows best

By Cynthia Brian



The beautiful blooms of the horse chestnut tree attract bees to the garden.

Photos Cynthia Brian



A candy cane striped amaryllis opens in the afternoon sunshine.



Plant fennel to attract beneficial insects and pollinators.

*My mother said to me,*

*"If you become a soldier, you'll be a general;*

*if you become a monk, you'll end up as the Pope.*

*Instead, I became a painter and wound up as Picasso."*

*~Pablo Picasso*

AREN'T moms the greatest?

When I was a little girl, I wanted to be a world famous ball bouncer because I thought I was fairly great at bouncing balls and catching them. My mother told me to go for it.

Then of course, I added to my "want to be" numerous times while both of my parents applauded my bravado. My hands were either always writing or digging in the dirt and I wound up as The Goddess Gardener!

When I lived in France I had the opportunity to investigate the majestic gardens of the charming chateaus. The elegant gardens mesmerized me, especially Château de Chenonceau spanning the River Cher in the Loire Valley where females ruled the designs. But it was the gardens of Impressionist artist Monet that influenced me most. The first time I visited his Giverny masterpiece, a profusion

of magenta, pink, and purple tulips augmented by white bearded iris greeted me. It reminded me of my time living in the Netherlands where fields of tulips thrived amongst the windmills. The color scheme was enchanting.

After returning stateside, I determined to model my landscapes after Monet's painter's palette with plants that only reflected a variety of shades and hues of purple, pink, blue, and white. My mother warned against such folly. "Gardens are filled with the colors of the rainbow. Just wait. Mother Nature will decide what's best for your garden."

Of course I didn't listen because I had my mind set on a specific plan. I planted a variety of species that boasted my favorite colors including iris, gazania, lilac, wisteria, tulip, anemone, periwinkle, jasmine, ice plant, freesia, candytuft, azalea, camellia, fuchsia, rose, rhododendron, and more. For the first two years my landscape did resemble an Impressionist painting. It was spectacular.

Then a 17-day freeze occurred, killing most of my plantings. When spring arrived, many of the plants sprouted once again but this time they were yellow, orange, white, or red. The hybrids had reverted to their na-

tive colors after the freeze. Mother Nature was teaching me who was in charge.

I embraced my mother's approach to gardening to allow all the colors of the rainbow to shine in my garden. Soon the burgundy grew next to the orange gazania, and yellow daffodils sang along with the fluorescent pink ice plant. The effect has been stunning.

My mom also warned against invasive plants that mask as attractive: ivy, mint, Mexican primrose, vinca, jasmine, and the worst of which is euphorbia esula, also known as leafy spurge. All of these grow in my garden and I am constantly pulling, prodding, and attempting to keep these handsome, yet insidious species in check.

Although lovely mixed with flowers cascading from a container, in the ground, ivy climbs and chokes trees, killing them. Ivy is also a favorite habitat for rats. Mint is delicious muddled in mojitos and chopped into salads, but not so exciting when it spreads to your lawn. Mexican primrose with its dainty pretty pink flowers spreads quickly jumping into spaces where other plants are preferred. It looks dreadful when it develops powdery mildew towards fall.

... continued on next page