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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



A path leads to lavender, roses and succulents.
Photo Cynthia Brian

"Never does nature say one thing and wisdom another." - Juvenal

Excited about the glorious weather at the beginning of May, I spent two days getting out the patio furniture from storage, washing it thoroughly, and adding fresh, comfy pads to the chaises and chairs. My husband power-washed the patio on Mother's Day as I hung the double hammocks and finished the outdoor decorating in preparation for family barbecues and garden gatherings. My entire landscape had exploded with magnificent blooms of roses, azaleas, rhododendrons, bearded iris, peonies, pelargoniums, sedums and African daisies. The horse chestnut and locust trees were laden with cascades of white flowers while lavender and jasmine scented the air with the fragrance of heaven.

My weather app reported sprinkles on the horizon but Mother Nature had torrential rains planned. As the gray skies opened and the downpours continued, I scrambled to store the furniture, pads and hammocks

under our awnings and in the shed, but not before everything, including me, was drenched. Another lesson learned . we can't stop the rain . nor do we want to.

Actually, I am always happy when it rains as my garden gets a big drink of life-giving liquid. In those weeks of warm sunshine, the ground had quickly dried out, making it difficult to weed, to plant, and to dig out my rocks that had been buried in the winter mud. This wet weather provided another opportunity to get my chores done more easily, albeit wearing a semi-waterproof hat and jacket.

The seeds scattered in April never sprouted. I'm not sure if they drowned or were washed away with the copious amounts of rain or if the birds dined on them.

I decided to buy seedlings of tomatoes, peppers, zucchini and cucumbers and try once again to sow seeds of beets, carrots, arugula, lettuce and beans. Several gallons of boxwoods were also purchased to replace the dead ones in my hedge. It's hard to resist buying truckloads of plants when everything is so enticing. As I grow wiser, my rule is to only buy what I can personally plant within my time limits. It's a good rule for anyone to follow.

As you start planning your spring and summer planting, remember the garden design guide of planting in odd numbers: groupings of three, five, seven (or more) plants help to create a more natural and aesthetically pleasing look to the human eye. To achieve this, plant the same variety of flowers in each odd grouping, or create color blocks with several similar varieties.

For fragrance, pollinators and beauty, add lavender to your garden in full sun and well-drained soil. Lavender doesn't like soggy soil so plant slightly above the soil surface so the water drains away. Lavender makes an excellent companion plant to roses, controlling the nasty pests and attracting the beneficial insects. When planting your roses, give them breathing room because when roses are crowded they become susceptible to powdery mildew. Roses also need well-drained soil, compost, and natural fertilizers. As blossoms fade, deadhead the stems to ensure continued blooms through winter. Together roses and lavender make a sweeping sight.

My favorite old-fashioned peonies are blooming and available to purchase and plant in full sun. Peonies offer gorgeous flowers in a multitude of colors and shades and their foliage will add structure to your garden until they die back in winter. Peonies are perennial and will probably outlive all of us.

It's time to plant summer blooming bulbs: gladiolus, crocosmia, dahlias, begonias and lilies. Crocosmia, also known as firecracker plant, blooms all summer in fiery shades of red, orange and yellow. It requires little care and combines well with other ornamentals to create a beautiful scene in your yard. Crocosmia is also a magnet for hummingbirds and provides a vivid splash of color to containers. I like to gather them for my indoor arrangements as they are long lasting as cut flowers. You'll find a wide selection of summer bulbs at your favorite nursery and garden center.

Succulents are always a wise choice for drought areas. Sedum dendroideum is a shrub-like perennial plant with yellow blooms that attract bees. It thrives in warm weather, doesn't need much water, and continues to expand in size. You can cut off pieces and plant in other areas to create a succulent hedge. The deer will eat its fleshy stems so it is not a good specimen in areas where the animals roam.

Every day I learn something new in the garden, usually by the mistakes I unwittingly make. I'm excited about the forthcoming summer, yet I am reveling in this spring season that has included plenty of rain. The more I rake, dig, weed, plant, sweep, and mulch, the more I grow wisdom.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for June

CUT back daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, bluebells, freesias, and other bulbs once the leaves have turned crispy yellow.

ADD companion plantings of Oriental poppies, alliums, delphiniums, daylilies, salvias and peonies.

RESCUE newly hatched nestlings without feathers that have fallen out prematurely by putting them

back in the nest, if reachable. If you find baby birds with feathers on the ground, leave them alone. The parents of these fledglings are probably nearby bringing them food before they learn to fly.

PLANT summer blooming bulbs including gladiolus, crocosmia, dahlias, begonias and lilies. Plant the bulb pointy side up, but if you are not sure, plant your bulbs sideways and they'll find their way to the surface.

ADD risers to sprinkler heads in boxwood hedges that are too short to eliminate death by drowning. Boxwoods don't like too much water.

FILL bird feeders with fresh seed.

CLEAN patio furniture (maybe again) in preparation for warm weather.

SHARPEN lawn mower blades.

WEED, weed, weed. With the ground still moist, this is an opportune time to do round three of weeding so that the plants you love will get more water and nutrients to survive the summer.

READ the Guide to Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation. It is essential that every family create an emergency plan. For information on what you can do in your landscape to help protect your home from wildfires, read Firescaping: <https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1305/Digging-Deep-with-Cynthia-Brian-for-May-FireScaping.html>

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing!



Princess of Monaco rose. Photo Cynthia Brian



Crocosmia, the firecracker plant, combines well with baby roses and snapdragons. Photo Cynthia Brian



An elegant purple bearded iris. Photo Cynthia Brian



Pink Bonica shrub roses flanked by cornflags. Photo Cynthia Brian



Bright yellow flowers on a hedge of sedum dendroideum.



Fluorescent crimson rhododendron glistens in the rain.



Old-fashioned yet imminently fashionable, baby pink peonies.



Cherry-colored pelargoniums add brilliance to a garden.



Cynthia Brian under the pistache tree. Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are! 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy a copy of her new books, Growing with the Goddess Gardener and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Hire Cynthia for projects, consults, and lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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[back](#)

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