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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Pale pink roses imbue solace in warm weather.
Photo Cynthia Brian

"I should like to enjoy this summer flower by flower as if it were to be the last one for me." - Andre Gide

Summertime and the living is easy! Or is it?

This year will be a year like no other highlighted by the frightening health pandemic and sorrowful civil unrest. As the economy slowly reopens, people are clamoring to shop, dine, socialize, get haircuts, and have their teeth cleaned. The line of masked individuals waiting outside reopened stores for their turn to enter is a testament to the yearning to gather. Protesters fill the streets across the country demanding needed national changes. It's time to listen, re-evaluate, and educate ourselves. Connecting with the natural world is one prescription for finding healing and balance.

While I was researching grants to assist the literacy charity, Be the Star You Are!

(www.BetheStarYouAre.org) financially survive during this crisis, I marveled at a constant question: How have you pivoted? At first, I had no idea what that question meant. What did we have to do to pivot? Where were we supposed to pivot to? After many Zoom conferences, meetings, webinars, and phone meetings, I finally understood.

But how can pivoting apply to gardening? The entire world is experiencing chaos. People who have spent minimal time with nature, who have never thought of growing anything, have become interested in planting and protecting. I've had emails from individuals from

many walks of life who want to get their hands in the dirt as they are sheltering at home. As they decide to pivot, nature is a salve. When times are stressful, gardens become a refuge. Shoveling, digging, pruning, planting, and watching seedlings grow into something to admire or eat are therapeutic endeavors.

Whether you decide to grow a few herbs on a windowsill, tomatoes on a balcony, or an abundance of your favorite vegetables, flowers, and fruit in a large garden, there is nothing better than a summer of flavor and colors grown in your personal paradise. When you pivot to your garden, you'll slow down a bit and feel appreciation. Research consistently indicates that being around growing plants benefits you physically, psychologically and emotionally. You'll decompress, gain more muscle mass, increase aerobic endurance, reduce stress and experience more joy.

Summer has always been my most favorite season because of the delightful warm weather and bountiful baskets of fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs that I harvest from my orchard and potager. The plethora of glorious blooms constantly changes keeping my elation peaked. Unlike most people, I prefer not to travel in the summer months to other destinations. Instead, the beauty of my backyard becomes the playground for family and friends where we barbecue, engage in lawn games, watch the flamboyant sunsets, and wander the grounds watching the parade of wildlife.

Flowering plants are hummingbird, bee, and butterfly magnets while the seeds attract the birds. Agastache, echinacea, hollyhock and roses enchant for months. In my orchard, the loquats, mulberries, tangelos, citrus and plums are ripe. The birds, deer, turkeys, squirrels and I skirmish for our fair share. Soon apricots, prunes and peaches will be ready for harvesting and the wrangling will begin again. I adore these encounters with nature. There is abundance for all.

My field of chamomile is richly fragrant and the petals when plucked and dried will make a comforting tea. The seeds from nigella (love in the mist) have scattered throughout the orchard creating a sea of blue. Bumblebees race from star-shaped blossom to blossom grabbing the sweet nectar. Roses mixed with osteospermum (African daisy) will provide continuous blooms into the fall with frequent deadheading. Lovely on the shrub, the blue hydrangeas are almost as stunning in a dried arrangement. An intriguing plant is arum italicum, also known as Italian Lords and Ladies. In late spring, the creamy-white flower is cupped at the base of the plant resembling its relative, Jack-in-the-Pulpit. In mid-summer, striking red-orange berries rise in a columnar formation where the foliage has died back. This tuberous perennial plant self-sows and can become invasive if your yard is small. If you have a woodland area where bergenia, heuchera or hellebores thrive, it is quite stunning. Beware, all parts of the plant are poisonous. Don't let it grow in your vegetable patch!

This summer is destined to be unusual. I plan on adhering to COVID-19 directives to shelter-in-place while refraining from attending large gatherings or even small ones. I'm working from home, wearing a mask and gloves whenever I venture out, constantly maintaining a minimal six feet distance between others, and am continuing to sanitize everything. Hopefully, we won't go back to what was considered normal in the past and instead take better care and be more aware, of one another and the health of our planet.

This year I am happy and grateful to enjoy the summer flower by flower. My planet pivot is to play in my personal garden paradise.

What's your planet pivot?

Stay safe. Stay healthy. Stay strong. Wash your hands. Cover your face!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for July

PIVOT for stress relief to your garden sanctuary.

PREVENT grubs (the larvae of June bugs) by treating your lawn with an organic granular treatment to get rid of larvae. Raccoons, skunks, and moles enjoy grubs as a source of protein.

BOND with children or a partner by planting edibles you will enjoy together.

DRESS for the dirt by donning gloves, sunscreen, hat and an apron. If you are doing heavy weeding, wearing overalls is a win.

DRY three to five sprigs of blue hydrangeas for a long-lasting summer arrangement.

COLLECT the white blossoms of chamomile for a soothing tea.

PLANT Lilliputian miniature roses in a container for a movable dash of color.

PICK a basket of mulberries if you are lucky enough to have a tree.

GROW citrus to maintain a constant supply of vitamin C. Dwarf varieties of lemons, limes, tangerines, tangelos, oranges and grapefruit are available to be grown in half barrels.

PREVENT fires by removing debris, dead branches and refuse from around your home and yard.

CUT all tall grass and keep lawns and shrubs watered.

SAVE rose petals to make bath balms and rose water splashes.

SUCCESSION planting is the key to a plentiful supply of summer greens including lettuces, arugula, beets, carrots and radishes. Sow your favorite seeds every three weeks as you consume.

CHECK yourself for ticks after every outdoor excursion. (To date, I've removed three!)

ADD hydrogen peroxide to fountains to purify the water without harming the birds.

MAINTAIN social distancing and wear a mask when you leave your home.

TAKE care of Mother Earth.

BE SAFE on Independence Day.

Happy gardening. Happy growing. Have a flowerful Fourth of July!



Miniature roses flanked by African daisies (osteospermum)



Mulberries are tasty treats for people, birds, squirrels, and deer.



A field of chamomile.



Branches filled with vitamin C rich tangelos.



Cynthia Brian adheres to "Never leave home without it!" Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your spring garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia 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!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy copies of her best-selling books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Cynthia is available for virtual writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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