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## Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian, the Goddess Gardener, for August

By Cynthia Brian



Lacy silk tree and oleanders add color to the landscape. Photos Cynthia Brian

shelter-in-place?

Although you need to keep yourself and your dog well-hydrated in this hot weather, if you planted a succulent garden earlier in the season, you don't need to waste any water by running the irrigation system. Succulents and cactus thrive in the heat and offer texture, color, form and interest when planted with consideration. Silk trees and oleanders provide a long blooming season, but do not let your hound chew on any oleander leaves as they are poisonous. A sparkling clean gurgling fountain can be the watering hole for your pet, while placing a small saucer filled with marbles or stones that I call a "butterfly bowl" will be a lifesaver for butterflies, bees, lizards, and other insects.

While you are out playing with your pooches, glance through your garden to see what projects await attention. I find that these hazy days of August are a great time to assess the needs of my yard. If you have weeds anywhere, they need to be pulled or at least cut to the base before they seed and invade more of your landscape. If perennials have finished flowering, it's time to deadhead to encourage a repeat bloom. Do your hedges need trimming? Are any sprinkler heads broken? Is your nightscaping working? If your clay soil is compacted, it requires mulch and compost to regenerate the nutrients. Composting is easy and your doggie will probably enjoy helping you to create a compost pile, although don't let him do his business in it!

### Making Compost

To make nutrient-rich compost, all you need is a combination of greens and browns. The greens are vegetable and fruit peelings, grass clippings, eggshells, coffee grinds, tea leaves and other organics. The brown is wood shavings, small branches, sawdust, cardboard and newspaper. Keep a lidded pail under your kitchen sink, in the garage, or at the back door for ease of use and just scrape the scraps into the pail. When the pail is full, pour into a 3 x 3 x 3-foot enclosure in an out-of-the-way area or buy a compost tumbler. If you have chickens or rabbits, add their manure to the batch. If you made a pile, with a pitchfork, turn the compost regularly. Keep the contents damp, and when the compost turns crumbly with a texture of a chocolate cake, it is ready. Add it to your flowerbeds as a fertilizer, moisture retainer, and soil enricher.

Although we want to discourage our furry friends from munching on our plants, if you want a beautiful flowering plant that is not harmful to indoor pets, look no further than orchids. My spotted mauve phalaenopsis orchid has been blooming continuously for the past four years. Orchids are trouble-free and undemanding. Just leave them alone, put an ice cube once a week in their container, and let them beautify your home. Outdoors, begonias are now gorgeously in full bloom and they are toxic to all animals.

Our dogs watch us eat and they may be inclined to want to join the party. Use caution and knowledge when feeding your canine anything but dog food. Grapes will be ripening in the next few weeks but as delicious as they are for humans, don't be tempted to feed any to your dog. Grapes can be toxic to a dog, damaging the kidneys, and for some, even eating one grape could be fatal. Beets and cucumbers are ready to be harvested along with tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and numerous herbs. If you plant tomatoes in a large pot with parsley and basil, you can move the container to follow the sun. In small amounts, ripe tomatoes (not green, too much solanine), cucumbers, peppers (specifically red), and eggplants can contribute to a healthy immune system for your dog. Consult your veterinarian before dispensing any fruit or vegetable to your pet.

Summer is the time to pick and dry fresh herbs to be savored all year. Home-grown herbs have more flavor than store-bought varieties. If your dog has bad breath, a sprig of mint or parsley will remedy the odor.

It's easy to dry your own by following these simple steps.

### Drying Herbs

"Dog Days bright and clear, indicate a happy year!"~  
The Old Farmer's Almanac, 1817

Sirius, the Dog Star, rises in summer in the Northern Hemisphere with the "dog days" traditionally beginning on July 3 and ending on Aug. 11. The ancient Egyptians welcomed Sirius as a forecaster of the floods of the Nile River. They could prepare for the river's overflow delivering much needed rich soil to their deserts or destruction to their lands. The Greeks and Romans did not appreciate the sweltering weather believing Sirius, meaning "scorching" in Greek, brought drought, disease and disaster. The Roman poet, Virgil, described Sirius as the "bringer of drought and plague to frail mortals."

Aug. 11 has come and gone, yet the month of August is notoriously hot, dry, and this year, permeated with a global pandemic. And although the historical meaning of "dog days" has nothing to do with our canine comrades, it is a fact that many house-bound families have decided to adopt a hound or two. What better time to romp in the yard with a new puppy than now as we

1. Harvest herbs in the morning after the dew has dried. Make sure to pick herbs before they begin to flower. Flowers can be used in all food preparations, but to save your herbs, it's best to have foliage, not flowers.

2. Make a clean cut using a sharp shear. Don't pull herbs or you may disturb the entire plant.

3. Rinse in cool water, pat with a towel.

4. Choose a hot, dark and dry spot where temperatures will be 80 degrees or higher without any humidity. A garage, shed, attic, porch, or even a closet can work. Light degrades the essential oils, thus, make sure the area will be dark.

5. For large leaf herbs such as basil and mint, the best drying method is to place the stems on a rack or screen to allow for air circulation. A window screen works great.

6. For small to medium-sized leaves such as parsley, sage, thyme, dill or cilantro, gather into bunches of a dozen stems and hang from the rafters. Don't hang herbs in the kitchen as steam and the brightness will destroy your craft.

Most herbs only take a week to three weeks to dry perfectly. They can then be put in airtight jars or canisters and stored for future use. Dried herbs make excellent gifts for a cook who is a non-gardener, too. Most herbs are a healthy additive for dogs, but, again, always consult with your vet first.

Although the dog days of summer are over, you still have time to romp with Rover and watch the twinkling Dog Star in the predawn darkness. Sirius will be the brightest star in the heavens for the next 210,000 years shining with glints of red and blue sparkles!

Happy gardening. Happy growing.



Poisonous to all pets, the genus Begoniaceae boasts over 1800 species of begonias. Photos Cynthia Brian



Indoors, a spotted mauve phalaenopsis orchid will bloom for months. Photos Cynthia Brian



Pots of tomatoes with parsley and basil can be moved to follow the sun. Photos Cynthia Brian



Humans love grapes, but grapes can mean death to dogs. Photos Cynthia Brian



Freshly harvested beets are good for dogs. Don't feed them canned beets.



Armenian cucumbers are crunchy and low calorie, good for pooches



Shine with succulents as they add texture and form to a garden.



A butterfly bowl with marbles affords bees, butterflies, and lizards a drink without drowning.



Cynthia Brian suns with her dog.

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](http://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](http://www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store).

Cynthia is available for virtual writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures.

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[back](#)

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