

Published July 21st, 2021

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Blue agapanthus is a staple of summer gardens.
Photo Cynthia Brian

the Acanthus plant.

Agapanthus:

Another rhizome spreader that is hardy in drought times, yet pretty in bloom is the Lily of the Nile or African Lily that we know as Agapanthus. The rhizomes retain water and divide easily to plant in other locations. They prefer a sunny location, although I've seen many beautiful specimens growing in the shade. The sky blue, midnight blue, or white trumpet-shaped flowers bloom June through the end of August with stalks that reach 4 feet high. The elegant strap-like leaves are evergreen. When planting, work compost and organic matter into the soil and continue to fertilize during the growing season. Deadhead when the flowers fade and toss them on the compost pile. Wear gloves when working with this plant as it is poisonous and could cause an allergic reaction in those who are prone to plant allergies.

Bougainvillea:

A gorgeous tropical vining shrub, bougainvillea flowers are modified leaves called bracts blooming in colors of yellow, orange, white, and my personal favorite, fluorescent pink. Native to arid climates, bougainvillea thrives in hot weather and needs full sun while requiring a minimum of H2O. On our ranch, bougainvillea covered one full side of our two-story farmhouse delighting our family year after year with a spectacular showcase of hues. Plant bougainvillea on a strong structure or well-made fence. It can be pruned when it starts to rain or after flowering. Since it is susceptible to frost, cover with burlap in the winter to protect it if your plant is small enough.

Bower Vine:

This is the most perfect flowering evergreen vine for pergolas, arbors, and trellises. Grow bower vine over awnings, around windows and doors, or as a gate climber. It is easy to care for, doesn't invade a roof or siding, and is a swift grower. Blooming throughout spring, summer and fall, flowers are pink and white with deep-throated trumpets attractive to hummingbirds. I grow bower vines in full sun and partial shade. Once established they don't require much water while providing year-round beauty with their shiny green leaves. Prune whenever the vine needs a bit of TLC as this vine is not fussy. Cut stems to add to indoor arrangements. ... continued on Page D12

Crape Myrtle:

The crape myrtle is hands-down one of my very favorite specimens because of its beauty and interest in every season. In summer the bush or tree is covered in showy flowers, in fall the leaves change to gorgeous red, umber and gold, in winter the leaves fall off showcasing beautiful bark, and in spring the shiny green leaves sprout. All crape myrtles bloom on new wood and come in colors that include watermelon, red, white, pink, lavender and purple. I prune my purple shrubs in early winter to 12 inches from the ground and by summer they have grown to 3 feet high. Prune trees periodically to keep them shaped. Although crape myrtles prefer acidic soil, they will grow in sand, clay or loam. The Chinese Lagerstroemia indica crape myrtle is prone to powdery mildew so look for a cross with the Japanese L. fauriei to enjoy glorious blooms, attractive bark, and leaves without any issues. They are drought resistant, too!

"When the sun rises, I go to work. When the sun goes down, I take my rest. I dig the well from which I drink, I farm the soil which yields my food, I share creation. Kings can do no more." ~ Chinese proverb

In the sizzling heat of summer, many annuals go to seed and flowers fade. Thankfully there are plants besides cacti and succulents that enjoy the higher temperatures. Most of my favorite summer bloomers are perennials that once established require minimal irrigation.

My top 10 summer flowering favorites include acanthus, agapanthus, bougainvillea, bower vine, crape myrtle, crocosmia, daylily, hollyhock, hydrangea and rose. I also am a huge fan of the Naked Lady, but it sprouts its neck later in August, lasting through the fall months.

Acanthus:

Also known as Bear's breeches, Acanthus can be deciduous or evergreen growing from rhizomes. It is drought tolerant with shiny oval leaves lobed with spines and spires of flowers that are purple, white, pink, cream or green. It doesn't like full sun when it is hot, so it may be best to grow Acanthus in partial shade. The flower spikes can grow to five feet. I like it as a back border plant or to line a path. The good news: butterflies flock to it. The bad news: deer devour it. Cut it to the ground in the fall and it will re-emerge in the spring. Greek Corinthian column capitals were and are modeled after

Crocosmia:

This firecracker plant boasts a tropical origin with bright blazing orange, yellow and red flowers that light up the summer garden. In our region, they start blooming right in time for the fireworks of Independence Day and continue until autumn. Their sword-like foliage offers spiky interest to the landscape. Hummingbirds and butterflies are especially attracted to the trumpet-shaped blooms while deer and rabbits stay away. The corms naturalize and the stalks make excellent floral displays. After the flowers are spent, the seedpods provide additional appeal.

Daylily:

Sometimes called "ditch weed," daylilies will grow anywhere! Their botanical name is *Hemerocallis* from the Greek word *hemera* meaning day and *kallos* meaning beauty. They tolerate every kind of soil, are extremely low-maintenance, and require minimal irrigation once established. They are not a true lily as they have fleshy roots as opposed to bulbs. The leaves grow from a crown and the flowers form on a leafless stem called a "scape." Most do not self-sow. Divide the roots every three to five years to create more plants. Each flower blooms for only a day, but each scape will have a dozen or more buds that will continue to open. A variety of colors and shades are available with butter yellow being the most ubiquitous. Every part of the daylily is edible. Sauté the buds in butter, garlic, and a little white wine for a delicious veggie treat that tastes like asparagus mixed with peas.

Hollyhock:

Happy memories surround the legacy of my hollyhocks. I can't remember a time when hollyhocks were not growing in my mother's or grandmother's gardens. My seeds are heirlooms from several generations of family gardeners with a history that goes back over a hundred years. Hollyhocks are the classic cottage garden staple that every gardener should include for spiky tall stalks of pink, white, magenta, and red blooms that will continue until winter. A member of the hibiscus family, this self-seeding China native grows best in full sun in rich, well-drained soil. Because they grow to 15 feet or more, plant toward the back of the garden or near a fence. By deadheading when the flowers fade, you will encourage continuous bloom production. Prune to the ground by winter and save the seedpods to share.

Hydrangea:

Another favorite plant for generations of gardeners, hydrangeas produce abundant blooms in partial sun. They are thirsty plants and need mulch around them to improve the soil texture and maintain moisture. Pruning hydrangeas is tricky because it is necessary to know what type you have as different hydrangeas require different pruning times and methods. The most common hydrangeas are Bigleaf, Oakleaf, Mountain, and Climbing which are pruned after summer blooming. They rebloom on "old wood" which are the stems from the previous season. Panicle and Smooth hydrangeas bloom on new wood (the stems from this season) and must be pruned before the buds form. I'm looking forward to trialing new Panicles from Proven Winners which will include Limelight Prime and a space-saving Fire Light Tidbit that will have cream-colored flowers covering the plant in summer, then turning to pink and lasting through frost.

Rose:

No introduction is necessary for the fabulousness of the rose. Roses are the most versatile, beautiful, and coveted plant in every garden. When gardeners proclaim roses to be the bedrock of their landscape, they are not exaggerating. Roses come in every color, shade, petal, and size to suit every desire. Roses are a diverse group of plants that include shrub roses, carpet roses, floribundas, hybrid teas, climbing, old roses, rambling roses and tree roses. Their shapes and structures differ. Some look like peonies, others have a single floral pattern. There are rosettes, cups, doubles, pompons, button-eyed, incurved, recurved and quartered. My favorites are David Austin roses with intoxicating fragrance, fine foliage, disease resistance, and stunning flowers. Over a hundred roses grace my landscape and I am constantly adding more. As Emma Goldman stated, "I'd rather have roses on my table than diamonds on my neck."

When the sun rises, I go to work, spending as much time in nature as feasible. Consider planting some of my perennial favorites to enjoy elegance and exquisite allure throughout the summer months.

Stay cool, hydrated, and share creation.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



The pink bower vine is the perfect vine for everywhere! Photo Cynthia Brian



A purple shrub crape myrtle begins to bloom. Photo Cynthia Brian



This pink single hollyhock is from 100-year-old heirloom seeds. Photo Cynthia Brian



Hydrangeas prefer partial sun to thrive. Photo Cynthia Brian



A close-up of a light-yellow daylily.



A fluorescent pink bougainvillea graces the fence line



Cynthia Brian in summer

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your summer 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. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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