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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



The muted colors of the forest are reminiscent of an Impressionist painting. Photos Cynthia Brian

"Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul." ~ Henry Ward Beecher

Are you feeling grateful? Although I feel thankful for every day that I walk on this earth, after such a tumultuous 20 months, this year my heart is overflowing with appreciation. Throughout these times, my garden has been my sanctuary, my refuge, and the place where I recharge. The abelia is blooming and that makes me cheerful.

Autumn is a splendid season with cooler weather and nature's spectacular showcase of colorful leaves on shrubs and trees. Maple, Japanese maple, tallow, crape myrtle, pistache, liquid amber, beech, black gum, sumac, aspen, dogwood, ginkgo biloba, tupelo, red oak, and many more species are just a few of the magical specimens whose leaves metamorphose from green into vibrant red, yellow, orange, purple, crimson, brown, russet, tan, bronze and scarlet. During the growing season, the green in leaves is a product of the

chlorophyll using sunlight to manufacture sugars to feed the tree. As the weather cools with shorter days and longer nights, biochemical changes occur allowing a painter's palette of vibrant and muted hues. The most stunning displays happen after a succession of sunny, warm days followed by crisp and cool nights. Moisture in the soil is also a factor that can delay or speed up the color.

I have just returned from experiencing splendid fall colors on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. On some of the riverbanks, the tree colors were muted as if in an Impressionist masterpiece. In gardens and parks, singular specimens were neon bright as if painted by Frederick Church.

Before I left, my trees were only beginning to change colors. When I arrived home a few days later, the leaves had already fallen, carpeting lawn, patio, and driveway in a thick layer.

My husband was anxious to clean up the leaves and I had to beg him to not put the leaves in the green bin. Fallen leaves are great for the compost pile and as a natural fertilizer for other plants.

Here's what you need to know about fallen leaves: Keep them in your garden!

We can reduce emissions from landfills by managing the leaves by leaving them around the root zones of plants, shrubs, and trees to suppress weeds, provide shelter for beneficial insects, maintain moisture, control temperature, and return nutrients to the soil which plants will reuse. Microorganisms help small leaves decompose quickly. Larger leaves may need to be mowed to break them up.

In 2018, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, over 10.5 million tons of yard trimmings were deposited in landfills, producing copious amounts of greenhouse gas.

Layering leaves in your landscape is also critical for wildlife habitat that benefits the ecosystem of thousands of different species. From earthworms, caterpillars, and pill bugs to toads, lizards and salamanders, leaf litter is alive with promise. Squirrels, birds, and yes, turkeys depend on layers of leaves as a food source during the winter months.

If you have a garden service, deter them from blowing leaves into the street where drains can be clogged and water quality in waterways can be compromised. Encourage these providers to create a pile of this organic material which will naturally break down to be used as free compost in your garden.

Since the downpour of the recent bomb cyclone and atmospheric river, mushrooms of many sorts have sprouted. It's tempting to want to harvest fungi for a delectable holiday recipe but unless one is an expert mycologist, it is wise to purchase mushrooms from a trusted source as many of the 11,000 species that grow in North America are poisonous and deadly.

Persimmons, pumpkins, and squash supply part of the cornucopia of colorful edible produce that is healthy and delicious for any autumn feast. Fuyu persimmons sliced thinly add panache to fall salads and make crunchy, tasty snacks. Hachiya persimmons must be very soft, almost mushy, before they'll release their sweetness. They are delicious as a fresh dessert or made into puddings, cakes, and breads. Pumpkins and squash are superfoods that will boost your immunity and increase your intake of vitamins and minerals including vitamin C, magnesium, vitamin B6, potassium, vitamin E, folate, fatty acids, and other micronutrients. Along with gourds, they also create stunning displays on your Thanksgiving table.

Although many people may disagree, I am grateful for the gobblers that grace my grounds. The wild turkeys eat fallen rotten fruit, fertilize the orchard with their excrement, and respond to my attempts to talk turkey. In other words, turkeys amuse me.

As I look out upon my fall garden, I am comforted by the tranquility, the colors of the vegetation, and the changing of the seasons. Mostly I am thankful to be alive and healthy and this year, have the ability to celebrate together as a family, along with the wild turkeys, deer, squirrels, raccoons, skunks, and other critters in our rural arena.

With the shopping season in full swing, give the gifts that keep on giving by purchasing any of my award-winning books from www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store. Proceeds benefit the literacy charity, Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3 and you'll receive a plethora of additional gifts with every purchase.

Mark your calendars: Join 5 A Rent-a-Space and Be the Star You Are!r on Saturday, Dec. 4 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for free family fun at Santa Day. Enjoy hot cocoa and treats while kids write letters to Santa, take a free photo with Jolly St. Nick, and receive a tree ornament kit. Thanks to Mark Hoogs Team (www.TeamHoogs.com) at State Farm Insurance for sponsoring Be the Star You Are!r For more info visit www.BetheStarYouAre.org.

Wishing you a bountiful, healthy, and love-filled Thanksgiving. Celebrate a Gobbler Gratitude Day! Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



The bright crimson of the beeches. Photos Cynthia Brian



Hachiya and Fuyu persimmons are perfect holiday fruits. Photos Cynthia Brian



Don't eat the mushrooms sprouting unless you are knowledgeable. Photos Cynthia Brian



Pumpkins and gourds for Thanksgiving. Photos Cynthia Brian



Abelia blooms brighten the garden.



Cynthia Brian in the autumn garden. Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your winter 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 books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD and special savings. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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