

• In The Back Yard •

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia

By Cynthia Brian

"He who plants a garden plants happiness!" Chinese Proverb

Having been born and raised on a farm, listening to the earth and understanding the seasons has always been an essential part of my life. My parents extended their wisdom about nature as my father tended acres of crops while my mother expanded into flowers and vegetables. I remember how we all anticipated spring...the smell of the blossoms, the freshly tilled earth, and a promise that another year of rebirth had begun.

Gardening is to me the same as life itself. My Moraga garden supplies my family with food, flowers, butterflies, bees, birds, frogs and a multitude of thrilling surprises. I talk to my flowers, trees, and shrubs and they just seem to know how much I love them by constantly showering the landscape with an ever-changing display of blooms and beauty. In these times of extreme stress, my private therapy is to go into my garden to spade the soil, pull weeds, and prune the roses. My children have always enjoyed the outdoors and our many animals romp with us as we work. The ever-changing garden invigorates and energizes us.

I invite you to discover the many secrets of your Lamorinda garden. Follow my simple gardening tips and you will be handsomely rewarded. Let nature

whisper its greenhouse delights as we take pleasure in digging deep.

March heralds the beginning of spring here in Lamorinda. Ah, we take a sigh of relief as we enjoy the warmth of the sunshine, longer daylight, and the green hills all around us. The gardener in us can't wait to get our hands dirty. The air is filled with the fruity fragrance of flowering cherry, plum, and crabapple tree blossoms. My remedy for an instant invigorating breath of early spring is to prune a few branches from my favorite tree. I bring my bounty indoors and arrange the branches in a large glass vase set on my kitchen island where I can enjoy the beauty of the bouquet. Since bulb beds are coloring the gardenscape, cut a selection of daffodils, tulips, or Dutch iris for a glorious springtime arrangement as we celebrate the vernal equinox, the official beginning of spring.



Cynthia Brian



Photo Cynthia Brian



Photo Andy Scheck

Cynthia's Digging Deep Garden Guide for March

- **BE ALERT** for oak moth larvae on your oak trees. If you notice large masses of green droppings on the ground, call in the professionals.
- **LAWNS** are ready to be mowed regularly now. Feed with high-nitrogen fertilizer. If weather is dry, seed or sod new lawns. Pull any weeds, making sure to get the roots. To control crabgrass and broad-leaved weeds, visit your local garden center for organic sprays then pay careful attention to the labels.
- **SOIL PREPARATION** is important for all new flower and vegetable gardens. Spade and till, adding organic soil amendments and compost from your pile. Work in a dry complete fertilizer.
- **COMPOSTING** is important for all your grass clippings and spring prunings. Do not put any diseased plants or weeds into your pile. Add fertilizer and keep moist for speedier results.
- **PERENNIALS** such as day lilies, agapanthus, yarrow, and phlox need to be divided while they are semi-dormant. Replant healthy pieces after division.
- **FERTILIZE**. This is the best time to feed all plants including fruit trees, annuals, roses, and shrubs. Mature trees need their nitrogen booster. Wait to fertilize rhododendrons and camellias with an acid fertilizer until next month and then when they are finished blooming. (I use coffee grounds!) Don't forget to give food to your potted plants as well.
- **PEST CONTROL** is important for all the new growth that may attract creepy crawlies this month. Wash aphids off with a hose or use a spray gun with a little household detergent. Keep your vigilance on baiting or picking slugs, snails and earwigs off your delicate plants.
- **VEGETABLE** planting time is here for potatoes, herbs, beets, peas and carrots, peppers, and eggplant. Still time for broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower as the ground is still moist and damp. When the soil warms up which is usually next month, vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and squash can be planted.
- **BULBS**. Your summer will be more beautiful when you take the time to plant warm weather bulbs now. Choices include begonias, dahlias, gladiolus, watsonia, and callas.
- **PROTECT**. Use netting to keep the hungry mouths of birds, deer, and small animals from eating your vegetation.
- **PRUNE** pelargoniums and geraniums for fuller summer blooms.

Remember there are no failures in the garden, just fertilizer. Have fun, dig deep, and connect with nature.

HAPPY GARDENING TO YOU!

Dan Bernie, Taking Care of Moraga

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In 1980, Bernie contacted Lieutenant Priebe, of the Moraga Police, to propose that juvenile offenders from Lamorinda work for the Town to offset minor offenses. The system worked well until Bernie's responsibilities increased and he needed more manpower. Now he works with the "Work Alternative Program." The workers serving in Moraga are sent by the Walnut Creek Court and have been condemned for minor offenses such as DUI. They labor for a 25 cents an hour, for a day or as long as six months. "Most of the time we receive an average of two or three workers per day," explains Bernie, "we usually ask them to pick up trash along the road, weed our parks, dig ditches, paint, etc... Basically, anything that can be done without using electric tools."

And there is a lot of weeding to do in Moraga. The town is the leader in Integrated Pest Management (I.P.M.) in Contra Costa. "We do not use any type of chemicals anymore in our parks, including the Hacienda," beams Bernie. Children can roll in the grass; families can picnic

in the parks with a total peace of mind. This is very demanding in terms of manpower, since all weeding is done manually, so the continuation of the Work Alternative program is the key to maintaining the program.

Bernie stressed that the support of the Town Council, which unanimously approved the IPM policy in September of 2006. Bernie believes that this kind of non-toxic treatment is the way of the future, "I wouldn't want to put anybody in harm's way," says the ex-Marine.

To keep our parks clean, Bernie took another original and humanitarian initiative. He hired "Future Explorers," a group that gives work to mentally disabled workers under strict supervision. "They do a fantastic job for about \$19,000 a year," explains Bernie. "I just have to explain what I expect to the supervisor and the workers take great pride in their work."

Bernie also has responsibility for the quality of water that goes down our drains and into our creeks. "Changing behaviors takes time and our effort is placed on education," said

Bernie. Developers, both large and small, need to learn ways to ensure that no spillage from construction will reach the reservoirs, gardeners need to be taught not to blow dead leaves into storm drains, and residents need to learn to wash cars on their lawns.

For the years to come, Bernie's biggest concern is to keep good staff. "PG&E and EBMUD love to get people coming from our department, they are well trained and are not afraid to work." Then of course roads are high on his list, even if his boss, Public Works Director and Town Engineer Jill Mercurio, is big on preventative actions that will save the Town money down the road. "We are lucky to have such quality people working for Moraga," concludes Bernie, "from the Town Manager who is an expert at selecting the best department heads since I've been here, to our Director Jill Mercurio who has brought the Department to an all new level, the residents are in good hands."

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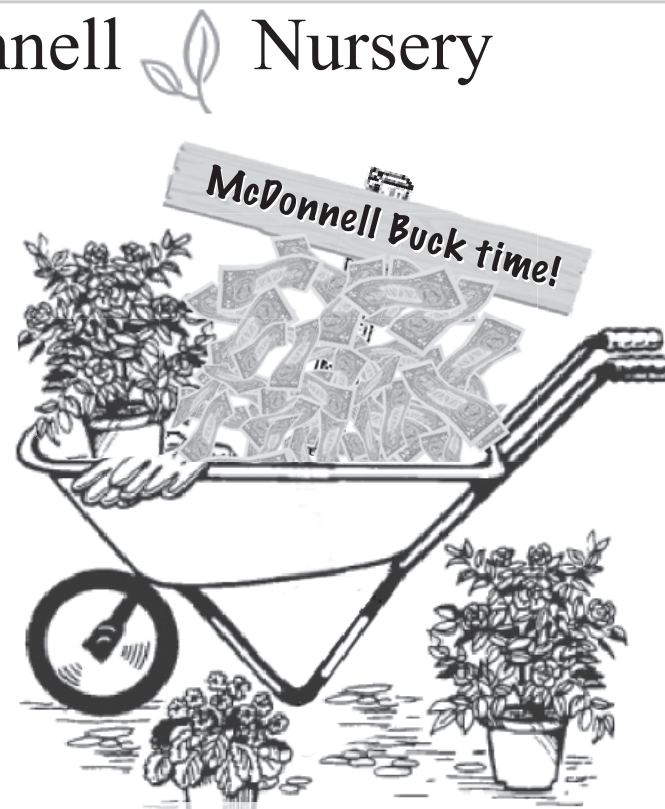
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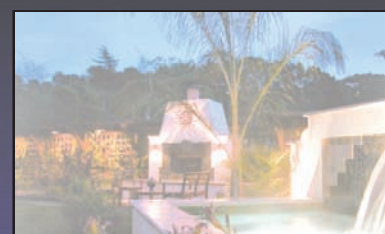
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