

Digging Deep -The Plum Pretty Sister, By Cynthia Brian

"Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant."

Robert Louis Stevenson



Justin was a climber. By one and a half, he had discovered the purple plum tree in the backyard, and its friendly branches became his favorite hangout. At first he would climb just a few feet and make himself comfortable in the curve where the trunk met the branches. Soon he was building himself a small fort and dragging his tractors and trucks up to their new garage.

When Justin was 3, I became pregnant. My husband and I explained to him that we were going to have another baby as a playmate for him. He was very excited, kissed my tummy and said, "Hello, baby, I'm your big brother, Justin." From the beginning he was sure he was going to have a little sister, and every day he'd beg to know if she was ready to play yet. When I explained that the baby wasn't arriving until the end of June, he seemed confused. One day he asked, "When is June, Mommy?" I realized I needed a better explanation; how could a 3-year-old know what "June" meant?

Just then, as Justin climbed with his dog in his arms to the top of our Orinda home's plum tree, he gave me the answer I was looking for...his special tree. "Justin, the baby is going to be born when the plums are ripe. You can keep me posted when that will be, okay?" I wasn't completely sure if I was on target, but the gardener in me was confident I'd be close enough.

Oh, he was excited! Now Justin had a way to know when his new baby sister would come to play. From that moment on, he checked the old plum tree several times a day throughout fall, winter, and spring to report his findings.

June finally arrived, and so did the purple plums. At first they were fairly small, but Justin climbed his tree anyway to pick some plums off the branches where the sun dappled near the rooftop. He brought them to me to let me know the baby wasn't ripe yet.

I felt ripe! I was ready to pop! When were the plums going to start falling from that darn tree?

Justin would rub my tummy and talk to his baby sister, telling her she had to wait a little longer because the fruit was not ready to be picked yet

Then one day, it happened. Justin came running into the house, his eyes as big as saucers, with a plastic bucket full to the brim of juicy purple plums. "Hurry, Mommy, hurry!" he shouted. "She's coming, she's coming! The plums are ripe, the plums are ripe!"

I laughed uncontrollably as Justin stared at my stomach, as if he expected to see his baby sister erupt any moment. That morning I did feel a bit queasy, and it wasn't because I had a dental appointment. Before we left the house, Justin went out to hug his plum tree and whisper that today was the day his "plum pretty sister" would arrive. He was certain.

As I sat in the dental chair, the labor pains began, just as Justin had predicted. Our "plum" baby was coming! I called my parents, and my husband rushed me to the hospital. At 6:03 p.m. on June 22, the

day that will forever live in family fame as "Plum Pretty Sister Day," our daughter was born. We didn't name her Purple Plum as Justin suggested, but chose another favorite flower, Heather. At Heather's homecoming, Justin kissed his new playmate and presented her with his plastic bucket, full to the brim with ripe purple plums. "These are for you," he said proudly.

Although we moved from the home that housed Justin's favorite plum tree, the first tree to be planted in our new yard in Moraga was a purple plum, so that Justin and Heather could know when to expect her special day. Throughout their growing-up years, the children spent countless hours nestled in the branches, counting down the days through the birth of leaves, flowers, buds and fruit. Our birthday parties are always festooned with plum branches and baskets brimming with freshly-picked purple plums. Because as Mother Nature—and Justin—would have it, every year the purple plum has ripened exactly on June 22.

Cynthia's Digging Deep Garden Guide for June

"Show me your garden and I shall show you what you are." Alfred Austin

School's out, summer is here! Gardeners are enjoying the labors of their spring planting efforts. If you haven't already planted your annuals, warm-season lawns and vegetables, June is our final chance before the hot weather sets in (and the EBMUD water rate hikes!) Weed seeds are germinating faster in this warm weather, so be sure to hoe and pull while they are still small. Get your swing set primed for children's play and enjoy a barbecue in the patio as the honeysuckle perfumes the air!

Ah, the lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer are upon us. Relax, rejuvenate, and frolic in your garden bliss while you give your yard a tune up.

- **RAKE** with an iron tine rake any fern rhizomes that are overtaking your garden. Ferns like slightly acid soil rich with humus.
- **TREAT** your houseplants to light summer sunshine. Acclimate them slowly, water thoroughly, and inspect for insects. While they are outside give them a shower to wash off their dusty leaves.
- **SPRAY** plants with a garden hose using a hard stream of water to eliminate white flies. Check under the leaves. If the water doesn't work try this potent organic insect killer: In a blender pulverize 6 tablespoons red peppers, 3 cloves garlic, 2 onions. Strain through a cheese cloth. Dilute 50/50 with water and spray on pests. Add a little detergent to make the solution stick to the leaves. Works like a charm!
- **CONTROL** powdery mildew which shows up on roses, apples, begonias, zinnia, and crape myrtle by thinning the branches for better air circulation. Refrain from watering late in the day.
- **FERTILIZE** using time release doses of fertilizer on annuals and vegetables.
- **PLANT** summer blooming annuals such as petunias, salvias, verbenas, marigolds, cosmos, zinnias. Check your nursery for the latest varieties.
- **LAWNS** such as dicondra go to seed this month. You can plant warm weather lawns such as Bermuda.
- **SAVE** water by watering early in the morning. Water deeply and less frequently avoiding run off.
- **WATER** summer means using more water. Clean your drip system remembering to soak trees such as magnolia with a deep soaker.
- **VEGETABLES** to plant in June include corn, cucumbers, squash, beets and Swiss chard as well as several herbs such as basil, chives, cilantro, and lavender.
- **CUTTINGS** of azaleas, fuchsias, hydrangeas, chrysanthemums, and carnations will propagate if sown.
- **PINCH** buds for more blossoms later.
- **COVER** your fruit trees with netting as the delicious apricots, peaches, cherries, loquats will be devoured by hungry birds.
- **WEED** and hoe, before old weeds send out new seeds.
- **COMPOST** to stimulate microbial activity to limit nematode populations.
- **WARM** yourself with a portable fire pit as cool June evenings are cozier with a fire.
- **SURROUND** yourself with natural aromatherapy by placing containers of fragrant perennials on the perimeter of your patio.
- **DESIGN** a culinary herb barbecue bed with seedlings of basil, chives, marjoram, oregano, parsley, sage, thyme, savory, tarragon, and cilantro.
- **DRESS** up an enclosure with a large rustic mirror, iron stars, or outdoor decorative towel hangers.
- **FRESHEN** up your lounge chair pads with a thorough cleaning. If they are beyond repair, it's time to toss and buy new ones or do like I do, and use recycled fabrics to make new pads. Eclectic, fun, and festive.
- **SAVE** water by showering while your sprinklers are watering your garden! (Okay, maybe that's not a great tip, but be conscious of our water supply!)
- **CREATE** an edible floral arrangement using branches of plums to adorn your kitchen counter. Plums are a delicious nutritious snack that everyone in your family will enjoy!

Whatever you do this summer, save time to bask in our gorgeous Lamorinda weather, spend time outdoors with friends and family, have fun and remember that these are the good 'ole days!

HAPPY GARDENING TO YOU from the Ultimate Mom Gardener, Cynthia Brian! cynthia@star-style.com.

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