

In the Back Yard

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Lions, Tigers, and Bears...Oh My

"Nature teaches beasts to know their friends." William Shakespeare

By Cynthia Brian



Bees at work

Photo Cynthia Brian

As I was wandering through my gardens, I began to count the varieties of wildlife that inhabit my personal Garden of Eden. There were cottontails, a family of deer, including three bucks, quail, hummingbirds, doves, finches, mockingbirds, robins, blue jays, an assortment of unidentified birds, and the lone hooded oriole. Soaring

overhead were red tail hawks and buzzard vultures while on the ground the gophers still plagued my lawns, and the raccoons raided my recycle bin. Scampering across the hills were two coyotes and a red fox, and I discovered the tracks and scat of bobcats. Skunks make their occasional appearance while slithering from my apple tree to my vegetable

garden was a three-foot long king snake. This indeed is the wild kingdom.

Meandering through my orchards, I looked down to recognize a plethora of plants that were named after animals. With a chuckle, I decided to discover what "animal" species flourish in my dirt. Here's a list of flowers, bushes, weeds, and trees, in no particular order, that all are named after a creature from the land, sea, or air.

Which ones do you have in your paradise?

Lambsquarter	Deerweed
Cats Ear	Wolfs Bane
Chick Weed	Dogbane
Coyote Bush	Foxglove
Buzzard	Henbane
Breath	Horse Chestnut
Duck Salad	Lambs Ear
Cockle Bur	Leopard's Bane
Flea Bane	Bee Balm
Henbit	Donkey Tail
Goosefoot	Butterfly Bush
Turkey	Locust Tree
Mullein	Cockscomb
Horseweed	Gopher Plant
Pig Weed	Hen and Chicks
Prickly Ox Tongue	Pussywillow
Goose Grass	Skunk Plant
Foxtails	Snake plant
Cat Tails	Starfish
Swinecress	Flower
Birdseye	Zebra plant
Pearlwart	Dandelion
Goosefoot	Bear's
Fat hen	Breeches
Dogwood	Tiger Lily
Elephant Ears	
Catnip	

Do you have more to add to this list? I have always named my animals after other animals. We had two dogs named Wolf and Bear, a horse named Spider, and a goose named Cat. The only the critter named properly was the potbelly pig, appropriately called Miss Piggy. No wonder nature gets confused when our nomenclature is off species!

After my last column about Smart Summer Solutions, I received a wonderful tip from Carol, a reader in Orinda, who had a successful suggestion for the gopher invasion. Her remedy for those pesky invaders is to put chocolate Exlax in their holes. She doesn't think it kills them, but she did say they leave for at least a year. When they do return, they get



Happy Gardening to You!

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another laxative feeding and they disappear once again. I'm experimenting with her novel idea now and will keep you all posted. With all the owls perched in my oak trees, one would think that the gophers, moles, and voles would provide a feast fit for these night hunting hooters.

Speaking of pests in the garden, I have received several questions about non-chemical ways to rid the yard or slugs and snails. Since it's summer, your garden should not be too infiltrated, but come winter, these voracious munchers attack your plants with an appetite that could feed a rhinoceros. If you have frogs, toads, and snakes, you are in luck, as snails and slug infested beds are an all-you-can-eat buffet. When you water too much, or have a shade garden, you are creating the perfect habitat for a bumper crop of slugs. In my book, Be the Star You Are! 99 Gifts for Living, Loving, Laughing, and Learning to Make a Difference, I wrote a chapter called The Gift of Creativity whereby I give you my secret formula for ridding your garden of these vermin. You start with hand picking these mollusks (wear gloves as they are slimy), and then perform a new step called "The Snail Stomp". If you don't like dancing, you might fill containers with beer to allow these slippery sliders to crawl in for a drunken drowning. (Actually the snails and slugs aren't drawn to the alcohol but to the brewing fermentation of the hops.) Barriers such as copper strips, wood ashes, soap shavings, and anything salty also work.

If you are battling aphids, try dousing your plants with a strong hosing of water. You may also need to put a tablespoon of liquid detergent in a spray bottle and spray both sides of the leaves. Repeat as needed until the bugs have disappeared. Introduce ladybugs into your garden, and they'll clean up your plants in no time as aphids are their favorite food. An adult ladybug will eat up to a thousand aphids a day. In ancient times, ladybugs were considered good fortune and predicted a bountiful harvest. Release lady bugs in the morning or after sunset and make sure to water your garden before releasing so the lady bugs drink the moisture from your leaves, thus deciding to live in your garden.

At no other time of the year are backyard birdbaths and ponds more important than now when it is late summer. I admit I am always writing about the benefits of birds to the healthy climate of our gardens because they are the lions of our suburban jungles. In summer, most birds eat insects and if you don't have a birdbath, a fountain, or a saucer of water for them to bathe



Birds taking a bath in a fountain

Photo Cynthia Brian



California Kingsnake

Photo Cynthia Brian



Photo Cynthia Brian

and cool themselves, you may miss one of the great joys of the season. Don't fill water to the top because although birds may be able to drink, they won't be able to splash around. You can put rocks or pebbles in the birdbath that they can stand on. Replace the water often and if possible, install a re-circulating pump. One last thing when positioning your birdbath—make sure it is in the open away from predators. Although birdbaths may look great with plants draping over them, birds won't play in them because of the possibility of peril. Also, be on the look-out for baby birds falling from

nests. Just this morning I found what I thought was a dead baby but when I picked it up, the little bugger was still breathing. After wrapping it in a cloth, I warmed it on a heating pad, climbed a ladder to find the nest in the Japanese Maple tree, and returned the infant snugly to its siblings. A few minutes later the three mockingbird fledglings were hungrily calling for mom.

The next time you go out into your backyard sanctuary, be on the lookout for lions, tigers, and bears. Of course, you may recognize them as dandelions, tiger lilies, and bears breeches! Oh my!

Cynthia's Digging Deep Garden Guide for August

As we approach the end of summer, it's time to start thinking about our fall gardens. Since we have a mild winter here in Lamorinda, fall is an excellent time to sow many of our garden favorites for a winter and spring maturity. I'll be writing more about fall plantings in the next issue of Digging Deep, however, I want to encourage you to spend a few of your last lazy days of summer pondering how you can continue to grow your own healthy food throughout the winter. A few of the vegetables to put on your fall planting list are beets, peas, kale, lettuce, spinach, Swiss Chard, and radishes. By growing your own food, you have control over the nutrition and freshness your family will enjoy. Most of all be soothed and comforted by the joys of nature.

What's in full bloom in August besides roses, oleanders, society garlic, and marigolds? Enjoy clematis, hollyhock, dahlia, lobelia, zinnia, petunias, bougainvillea, pink bower vine, buddleia, gladiola, cannas, pentstemon, Shasta daisy, begonia, agapanthus, yarrow, potato vine, pink silk trees, crepe myrtles, lavender, celosia, firecracker plant, geranium, my favorite four-o'clocks, and many other summer annuals. Snip a few sprigs to bring summer indoors.

"Flowers have an expression of countenance as much as men or animals." Henry Ward Beecher

- DEADHEAD summer annuals and perennials for a burst of fall color. Be careful to leave some foliage as photosynthesis is still in process to nourish the plant for the upcoming winter.
- FILL your fountains with fresh water and watch the bird show. Add one near your office window for a bit of relaxation and distraction throughout a long day.
- SOAK deeply. Lawns need special attention during the heat.
- PRUNE the suckers that grow from trunks of trees and roses. They zap the strength of the mother plant and can kill the rootstock.
- CLIP sprays of roses to enhance both your indoor and outdoor entertainment.
- LAWN mower blades need to be set to the highest position so than grass roots are shaded from the hot August sunshine.
- HARVEST fruits and vegetables. Fresh picked corn, tomatoes, pears, and zucchini are the tastiest this month.
- PICK herbs in the morning, use fresh, or dry upside down in a cool dark room for later culinary creations.
- SEARCH for snails and slugs by flashlight at night and try my original "Snail Stomp" dance.
- RAKE any fallen leaves, remove diseased stems and leaves from plants.
- PULL dandelions from your lawn and toss in your salad for extra zip and vitamins.
- ADD a container filled with brightly colored zinnias and marigolds to spice up your patio.
- WATCH for baby birds falling from nests. When you find a baby, keep it warm until you can locate the nest where you'll gently return the flier.
- PULL out the pillows and plop on your lawn to watch the stars.
- FIRE up your barbecue to grill peaches, pears, and nectarines straight from your trees for a tasty, healthy dessert.
- SWING in your hammock and read a book.
- TEACH a friend to dig deeply. Love is in the air!

May the sun shine in your garden and the stars in your heart.

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