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In the Back Yard

Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia
Naked Ladies and Nasty Non-Natives

"More in a garden grows than what the gardener sows." Spanish Proverb

By Cynthia Brian



Mixed container of herbs and flowers: dill, parsley, basil, zinnia, snapdragon Photo Cynthia Brian

Let's go into the backyard to admire the Naked Ladies," beckoned a male friend of mine. To the non-gardener, this sentence sounds like a racy pick up line, but to the avid gardener, these bulbous lilies in the Amaryllis family (*Lycoris squamigera* and *Amaryllis belladonna*) fill our senses with satisfaction. Watching these bodacious beauties sway in the breeze is intoxicating.

Native to southern Japan, Naked Lady *Lycoris squamigera*, is appropriately known as Magic Lily and Surprise Plant. Within the genus *Amaryllis*, *Amaryllis belladonna* is one of two species, hailing from the Western Cape of South Africa. In late August, early September, they suddenly sprout tall, curvaceous necks stretching towards the sunshine, boasting five to seven four inch long fragrant pink trumpets. The foliage resembles that of agapanthus appearing in the winter and dying back as soon as the weather warms. We always allow the leaves to wither and die without pruning, lest we lose the unexpected arrival

of these graceful charmers of summer. Naked Ladies appeal to my landscape longings for four reasons:

1. Once planted, they require no work with the exception of pruning their stems once the blooms are spent.
2. They are drought tolerant, pests don't bother them, and they grow in sun or shade.
3. They naturalize, coming up year after year, offering their cheery pink faces just at a time that my garden is looking worn and weary.
4. The deer don't eat them!

Writing about Naked Ladies reminds me of a story from my teenage years that I learned about a few years ago at the wedding of my niece. Growing up on the farm, my sisters, brothers, and I were responsible for cultivating the vineyards and performing numerous necessary ranch chores before we were allowed to participate in other activities. When my sisters and I had dates on Saturday night, we were still required to tractor the fields before going out. This presented a problem because we wanted to wear summer dresses and none of us wanted a "farmer's tan" (dark arms to above the elbows, white skin everywhere else) so we came upon a brilliant idea. We decided to plow the fields in our bikinis in an effort to get the work done and get a full body tan. As long as we wore our cowboy boots, my Dad had no problem with us working this way. We'd slather on the baby oil, climb aboard the Caterpillar, Ford, or John Deere, and row-by-row we'd plow the orchards. Evidently one day my Dad noticed

several pick up trucks lined up along our fence. He rode over in the Willy jeep to investigate the crowd of young men peering towards the vineyards. "May I help you gentlemen?" my Dad inquired. "No," responded one of the boys, "we're just watching those three girls over there driving tractors buck naked!" My Dad glanced in the direction of their gleaming eyes. He then glanced at his shotgun on the jeep. Looking directly at the teens, Dad said, "Well, gentlemen, those naked girls on those tractors happen to be my daughters and if you know what's best for you, you'll be moving on!" The trucks sped down the country road in a nano second. Of course, from a distance we did look like naked ladies because the dust and dirt caked to our babied oiled bodies gave us the appearance of being brown all over. My Dad never mentioned a word about this interaction to any of us and we continued to plow the fields in our bikinis until we all moved away from home. To this day, we remain naked ladies, preferring to garden in our bikinis!

The Nasty Non-Natives

Although both the *Amaryllis belladonna* and the *Lycoris squamigera* are highly poisonous if ingested, they are welcome sparkling immigrants to our landscapes. California is home to over 4,200 native plant species and is recognized internationally as a "biodiversity hotspot." We also have over 1,800 non-native plants growing in the wilds of the state with about 200 of those becoming what I call the "nasty non natives." These invasive plants disrupt natural habitats, displace natives, and have the potential to spread explosively. Unfortunately, Lamorinda is home to many of these pest plants.

Since fall is one of the best times to improve your soil, it is also the best time to rid your ground of weeds before the seeds have an opportunity to take root. Weeds that are left standing in autumn usually return with vigor in the spring. My suggestion is to learn to identify the predators, get out the hoe, and dig deep. Don't put these in your compost pile as the seeds may germinate and spread more of the nastiness.



Happy Gardening to You!
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Here's a short list of the invasive nasty non-natives that you may encounter in your gardens or on hillsides nearby:

- Yellow starthistle*
- Pampas grass*
- Artichoke thistle*
- Scotch broom*
- Wild fennel*
- Himalayan Blackberry*
- Cotoneaster*
- Water Hyacinth*
- Leafy Spurge*
- Myosporum*
- Poison Hemlock*
- Purple Loosestrife*

Coming up on September 13th, Be the Star You Are!® volunteers will decorate the tables at the Books and Bands Bash Benefit with leaves from the vineyards and ripe home grown fruit. Naked Ladies, bikinis, and nasty non-natives will not be admitted. (Get tickets at www.bethestaryouare.org)

"The only limit to your garden is at the boundaries of your imagination."

Thomas D. Church



Passion Flower Photo Cynthia Brian



Naked Ladies Photo Cynthia Brian

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Cynthia's Digging Deep Garden Guide for September

School is back in session. Indian Summer is approaching with warm days and cool evenings. Our summer vegetables are in their final flush while perennials stop producing buds as their growth slows. Zinnias continue to cheer us, bougainvillea blooms brightly, silk trees inspire awe with their pink puffs, and the passionflower intrigues. These are not lazy days in the garden. The coming season is ideal for preparing the soil, planting for spring, harvesting, and overall yard maintenance.

- DIG AND DIVIDE crowded perennials when they have finished flowering.
- SHARE divisions with friends.
- HARVEST your final season's crop of corn, squash, tomatoes, and peppers.
- PLANT your winter vegetables now.
- ADD color to your summer parched landscape by visiting your local nursery to find the new fall arrivals.
- WEED thoroughly and dispose of the weed seeds in your green recycle bin. Don't compost.
- FEED acid loving plants such as roses, azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons, and fuchsias.
- RAKE leaves as they fall and add to your Biostack or compost pile along with lawn clippings and other nutrient rich materials.
- PRUNE Naked Ladies as their flowers begin to wither. If you let the flowers go to seed, you won't get blooms from your bulbs next season. If you want to divide the bulbs, after blooms are spent is the only time to do it.
- BULBS are appearing in the stores. Plant daffodils, freesias, and anemones any time but refrigerate tulips, hyacinths, and crocus for at least six weeks and plant when the soil is cooler.
- BUY copies of my new book, Be the Star You Are!® for TEENS to encourage young adults to live, learn, laugh, lead, and play in nature.
- MIX herbs and flowers in containers for double duty enjoyment.
- STAKE trees for the upcoming autumn winds.
- DEADHEAD your roses weekly to encourage flowering through December.
- PICK your late harvest apples, Asian Pears, and grapes now. If you have more than you need, donate them to a local food bank. (www.foodbankccs.org)
- COME meet me in person at the 10th anniversary celebration of Be the Star You Are!® charity at the Books and Bands Bash Benefit on September 13 from 4-9pm at Holy Trinity Cultural Center in Moraga for an afternoon of dancing, chatting, and fun. I'll be happy to answer all your gardening questions and share stories of the naked and the nasty! Get your tax-deductible tickets at www.bethestaryouare.org or call 925-377-STAR.

Enjoy the splendor of September, sharpen your hoe, and we'll meet in the garden again next month for more digging deep!

HAPPY GARDENING TO YOU! ©2009 Cynthia Brian www.GardeningwithCynthia.com