

# In the Back Yard

## Digging Deep—Gardening with Cynthia Tonics, Tricks and Tips in the Garden

By Cynthia Brian

"I have never had so many good ideas day after day as when I work in the garden." -John Erskine



Cynthia and her mom

A few years ago when I was writing my book, *Be the Star You Are!*—99 Gifts for Living, Loving, Laughing, and Learning to Make a Difference, my good friend and fellow author, Dr. Bernie Siegel gave me some very sage advice. "Cynthia," Bernie said, "there is nothing new in life. Don't make yourself crazy trying to reinvent the wheel. Write from your heart, be your unique self, and let your personal experiences tell the story." At first I questioned his counsel. Didn't Christopher Columbus discover a New World in his search for India? Aren't new plant species announced every spring? Surely I must have some completely original philosophy that I could share.

As I devoured book after book from all the great thinkers of the world, I realized that so many of my ideas, thoughts, and dreams that I was certain were unique to me,

had also been dreamt by other people. I had to admit that perhaps Bernie was correct and there wasn't anything absolutely original, just new ways of doing old things with practical people piggybacking on the practices of yesteryear.

I took a walk through my garden as I always do when I really need to clear my head. When I need inspiration, the garden never fails to provide fresh fodder. The evidence I sought was growing all around me. Here were plants, weeds, trees, grasses, and reeds that have been in existence for hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years, or maybe since the beginning of time, yet, today they grow in my backyard in a fashion that I have designed and orchestrated. In fact, the plants that are the most robust are the ones that have been growing without any human interference: the heirloom tomatoes from my

childhood farm, the hollyhocks grown from seeds brought to America from my grandparents in the late 1800's, the grape vines that my dad planted for me from cuttings from

his vineyards. My most fragrant roses are my old roses while the most disease resistant are the newer hybrids. Old and new are living happily side by side.



Hibiscus

Photo Cynthia Brian



Fruit from the garden for a party

Photo Cynthia Brian

### Cynthia's Digging Deep October Gardening Guide

"The only limit to your garden is at the boundaries of your imagination." -Thomas D. Church

All of this pondering gave me the idea that my fellow gardeners might be interested in my gardening satchel of tricks, tonics and tips that incorporate time tested rituals of bygone days with the technological revolution. Because of space restrictions, I'm listing just a smattering of magic to make your garden grow this fall. Attend one of my garden lectures for further enchantment and tales of digging deep.

#### Techno Scarecrows

The best remedy I have discovered to keep the birds out of my vegetable garden and the hawks away from swooping down to kill my baby chicks is a gift of the technological age. CD's and DVD's make stupendous scarecrows! Save your unwanted or broken CD's and DVD's. String a wire across a fence or between two posts high enough so that you won't decapitate yourself when you are watering. Cut strips of wire to your desired length. Put through the CD or DVD hole and tie to the wire going across your garden. The reflection from the disks keeps the birds and other flying predators away. At Christmas, I tie ribbon through my CD's and hang from trees in my front yard for a twinkling, glittering holiday surprise. Ribbon rots, therefore it is only useful for short periods of time.

#### Vegetable Soup

When you steam vegetables, don't toss that nutritious broth. Your potted plants are thirsty and will appreciate the extra vitamin bath.

#### Dirty Nails

Although I wear both plastic gloves and leather gloves when I'm in the yard, my nails suffer. I now scrape my nails on a bar of soap before I dash into the dirt. When I'm finished pulling the weeds, pruning, and planting, all I do is scrub my fingernails with a nailbrush. Clean machine.

#### Keep Your Eye on the Bulb

Are you someone who plants bulbs in the fall, enjoys their blooms, then forgets where you planted them? Although I never dig up my bulbs, including my tulips, many gardeners do this religiously. If you have a relatively small plot, an easy way to remember where you planted your bulbs is to plant your bulbs in 4 inch pots, then plant the pots in the ground allowing a small amount of the rim to show. When it is time to dig up the bulbs, all you have to do is pull out the pot. Dust off the bulb and apply medicated baby powder, then store in burlap sacks in a dark, dry place.

#### Match Maker

When planting your fall vegetable plants, throw three or four matchsticks into each hole before planting. The sulphur kills insects as well as gives your plants a boost. Sulphur is good for the soil, too.

#### Golf Game

Wearing golf shoes in the garden is an easy way to aerate your soil. While you are at it, use an old golf bag to carry your long handled tools around the yard. Roll your shovel, rakes, and hoes to their desired destination. If your lawn is sprouting mushrooms, sprinkle dry laundry detergent as you walk with your fertilizer broadcaster. Water well. A hole in one!

#### Garlic Breath

Just like vampires, insects do not like garlic. Put a couple of cloves of garlic in each of your rose bushes to bid farewell to aphids and other nasty gnats.

#### Reading Material

Newsprint makes great mulch because the zinc in the ink keeps away bugs and insects. Save your papers and layer them about two to three inches thick on the bare ground. Cover with wood chips or other shredded mulches. The newspapers can be tilled into the soil, or left to decompose because they are wood fiber based.

#### Hot and Dry

This is definitely a new take on an old idea for drying herbs. Pick your fresh herbs and place them flat on a newspaper in the back seat of your car. Roll up the windows and park in the sun. It sounds like herb abuse, but within a day, you'll have fresh dried herbs for gifts or culinary creativity. As an added bonus, your car will be detoxified and smell great. My preferred herbs for the car dry method are mint, basil, and fennel.

#### Bounce It

Are you plagued with yellow jackets, mice, or rats? A sheet of dryer fabric softener (like Bounce) keeps these pests away. Put sheets under your house, on the patio, in your pantry, or wherever you have a problem. You'll be able to eat al fresco without the yellow buggers biting, and the rats and mice won't stay in a location that has been bounced.

#### Seed Harvest



Seed saving is as old as civilization, yet many gardeners prefer to buy new packets each year. Why not put the dollars back in your wallet, get out a brown paper bag, and harvest the pods and seeds from your bolting favorites? Clip off the ripened seeds or florets and put in the bag. Tie off the bag with a rubber band or string and hang in a cool, dark, place. In about two weeks the chaff separates from the seeds. Shake the bag vigorously.

Remove the stems, chaff, and any leaves by spreading everything on a cookie sheet. Store the seeds in a sealed jar and label with the name and the year. Coriander, dill, marigolds, zinnias, calendula, hollyhock, beans, gourds, melons, squash, fennel, parsley, and pumpkins are the simplest to harvest. Expect a great crop next season.

So there you have it! Not a complete list of all my tricks, tips and tonics, but at least a primer to get you going. Gardening is the greatest teacher and Mother Nature is the wisest mom. Of course Bernie was right. No matter what I think up, it has probably already been tried. That's okay. If a tip, trick or tonic works, bring it on!

Happy Gardening to You!

Pick up a copy of Cynthia's new book, *Be the Star You Are!* for TEENS at [www.bethestaryouare.com](http://www.bethestaryouare.com). All proceeds benefit charity.

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