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Gardening with Cynthia Brian: SOW EASY

By Cynthia Brian



Oxalis-The Shamrock Plant Photo Cynthia Brian

There is a Zen saying that perks my sensibilities as I gaze at the emerald green hillsides, listening to the gurgling of the stream by my house. "Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself." Hooray! Spring has sprung as my very favorite season shines its sunny warmth on my garden oasis. It's time to dig out my spades, hoes, shovels, rakes, and other paraphernalia from my shed to clean, sharpen, and begin the exhilarating phase of planting. As part of my Read, Plant, Grow commitment to you, I pledge to make sowing simple.

In today's busy marketplace, it is sometimes challenging for the beginner or novice gardener to decide exactly how to begin. I'm taking the guesswork out of selected spring projects to jumpstart your outdoor rooms while packing nutrients into your diet with fresh picked vegetables, fruits, and herbs. What I've discovered by lecturing at a variety of venues across the world about home and garden topics is that the majority of cultures, including younger gardeners are seeking three things:

1. They want to grow their own food.
2. They want to grow fresh herbs and flowers for both increased culinary flavors and sensory fragrance.
3. They desire that their homes, both inside and outside express their unique style.

Thinking as broadly as possible, I've created a fail-safe way to get started, no matter what your expertise level.

Gardening Essentials

Tools:

- Shovel
- Rake
- Hoe
- Wheel Barrow

- Hand trowel
- Pruners
- Loppers
- Saw

Cans or buckets

Personal Items:

- Gloves
- Hat
- Sunscreen
- Carry bag or bucket

Fundamentals:

- Containers
- Stakes
- Soil
- Mulch
- Fertilizer
- Tree ties
- Bird netting
- Garden hose wit nozzles/wands
- Plant labels
- Pots, troughs, saucers
- Grow boxes
- Watering Can

Optional:

- Lady bugs to be released
- Praying mantis eggs
- How-to books, magazines,

and DVD's on organic gardening,
vegetables, fruits, and herbs
- Pet or deer fencing
- Lectures on gardening basics
(I'm available to speak to
your groups and clubs!)

Once you have the essentials, it is time to design your personal project. A few savvy suggestions follow:

1. Fruit trees: Plant dwarf fruit specimens in attractive containers for easy access. Container gardening is especially great for apartment or condo dwellers and for those with small patios. You'll find many citrus including Meyer lemon, oranges, grapefruit, tangelos, and kumquats that are perfect for pots. If you have a larger area, consider semi-dwarf or full-size varieties of apple, cherry, apricot, prunes, plums, pears, peaches, guavas, and loquats. Add omega 3's, antioxidants, and vitamin E to your diet by planting nut trees, including walnuts and almonds. Espaliering fruit trees such as apple creates a wonderful focal point when creating outdoor rooms with edible components.

2. Vegetables by seed: Grow boxes provide an excellent way to your start your favorite seedlings. Add good soil and place in an area where your new plants will enjoy at least eight hours of sunlight. Buy the freshest seeds possible as older seeds may take longer to germinate, or not sprout at all. Your local garden center will have numerous packets to choose from including easy to grow carrots, peas, radishes, lettuces, kale, escarole, beets, and zucchini, but don't rule out ordering more exotic seeds from other sources. Make sure to do the research as growing requirements vary from seed to seed.

3. Herbs: Everyone loves herbs for their flavor, fragrance, and medicinal qualities. Most herbs are very easy to cultivate by seed including basil, sage, parsley, cilantro, chives, oregano, dill, lavender, and mint. Herbs are purifying, stimulating, and relieve symptoms of flu and colds. The flavors that herbs add to drinks and food are indescribable. I can't imagine cooking without them and especially love how the lively tang of chopped mint, basil, and Italian parsley enhance my salads and vegetable dishes.

4. Forever flowers: Spring flowers, especially bulbs, are profuse because of the longer days of light and warmer temperatures. Enjoy the beauty and perfume of tulip, freesia, hyacinth, rose, sweet pea, peony, anemone, amaryllis, and heather. Cuttings of cherry blossoms make fantastic fragrant in-door displays. Start planting for summer blooms too. Even if you think you have a brown thumb, plant corms of gladioli now for gorgeous summer flowers. Dahlias, agapanthus, and daylilies are also easy to grow. The deer delight in gladioli, agapanthus and dahlias, thus, I suggest planting them where raiders don't forage. Daylilies are indestructible making them excellent candidates for gardens with children and critters.

5. Kids and crops: Grow healthy children by encouraging them to plant what they love to eat. Kids enjoy getting their hands in the dirt. Radish, lettuce, peas, cucumber, pumpkin, and cherry tomato are fun and easy to grow. Consider mixing together fruits, flowers, and vegetables in large containers for bountiful beauty and culinary contentment. Miniature roses interwoven with trailing herbs planted in half whiskey or wine barrels work well for patios.

With these straightforward strategies, sowing seeds is simple, pleasurable, and creative. Allow your garden to become a high impact architectural element that is aesthetically and nutritionally satisfying for the entire family. Whether it is food, flavor, or star style, your garden can provide it all when you Read, Plant, Grow!



Cynthia Brian's "forget-me-not" tools of the trade Photo Cynthia Brian



Tulip Magnolia in full splendor Photo Cynthia Brian



Field of Dreams-Cynthia Brian in her wild mustard patch



Close up of crab apple branches Photo Cynthia Brian



Blue Star grass, dandelion, naturalizing daffodils Photo Cynthia Brian

Happy Gardening to You!

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Cynthia's Digging Deep

Gardening Guide for April

"Trees burst into blossom and put on fresh leaves when spring comes around." Homer
On my radio show, Starstyle-Be the Star You Are, an author friend, the late Jim Rohn, commented about the rebirth of the land. During the interview he warned "Don't pause too long to soak in the aroma of the blossoming flowers, lest you awaken to find springtime gone, with your seed still in your sack." He knew me well. I get so jazzed about plunging my hands into the soft spring earth to feel the energy emanate throughout my spirit, that it is easy for me to squander the days snapping photos of the blooms while inhaling the sensual surrounding scents. Get those spades and shovels ready. There is work to be done. It's time to smell like dirt at the end of the day. Enjoy every blessed moment in the outdoors. Spring is here and it's time to rejoice!

- TUCK attractive edibles into your flowerbeds, and your garden will become a feast for the eyes as well as the palate.
- PLUCK dandelion blooms from lawns before mowing. Feed to birds, chickens, rabbits, or toss into your salads if you have not used chemicals on the sod.
- MIX bulbs, annuals, perennials, and herbs when planting in containers for a long-blooming display.
- AERATE lawns now to allow air and water to reach grass roots. Rent a machine or walk around in spiked golf shoes.
- FERTILIZE by using plant spikes, liquid fertilizers and by mixing organics into the soil.
- DIVIDE any root bound perennials and replant in other parts of the garden or give to fellow garden lovers.
- HARVEST any root crops now that were overwintered such as carrots or parsnips as the quality diminishes as the weather warms.
- HANG baskets filled with dramatic plantings of colors and textural flowers such as coleus, sweet potato vine, or begonia. Wire baskets lined with moss and filled with a growing medium provide the best results, allowing you to plant the full surface, including the bottom.

- LOOK for annuals with long blooming periods. Make sure to plant shorter varieties like trailing petunias towards the front of your garden with those that may need staking such as tall snapdragons towards the back.
- REMOVE energy-zapping suckers from the base of crabapples, cherry, plum, and apricot trees. Also remove suckers from rose bushes for fuller, happier blooms.
- REPOT houseplants. Remove plants and move to a bigger container with new soil and fertilizer. Water well. Clean old pot with 2% bleach, dry, and use for another specimen.
- PLANT chemically untreated vegetable seeds packaged specifically for increased health benefits.
- IDENTIFY pests before using any insecticide, natural or not. Healthy gardens breed beneficial insects which may be destroyed by biological controls.
- HANG your birdhouses and fill the bird feeders. You'll be rewarded with the song of fledglings soon.
- FRUIT trees such as apples and cherries need pollinator trees of a different variety to bear fruit. Most peaches are self-fruitful. Make sure to ask your garden center professional if you need two trees.
- CLEAN out water features. Use ½ cup bleach in a gallon of water to sterilize fountains and birdbaths, allowing them to dry in the sun before refilling. Do not use any chemicals in ponds that have fish, frogs, or pollywogs, but do remove extra roots and fallen leaves.
- TILL the soil only when it's dry to prevent damaging soil structure. If you squeeze a handful of dirt and there is water in it, do not cultivate.
- RELEASE ladybugs into the garden as natural gatekeepers. Live ladybugs are available now in most garden centers.
- CONTROL weeds by pulling them out immediately upon sprouting or spray with a mixture of white vinegar and water on a sunny day for organic eradication.
- PICK bouquets of tulips, peonies, roses, and freesias to brighten every room. Branches of crabapple blossoms festoon your interiors with outdoor pleasures. You are a God or a Goddess in your garden. Dance in the moonlight, thrill to the sounds of an awakening nature, enjoy each day anew. Salutations to springtime! Happy Gardening to You!

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