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November 2010 - Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

## PRESCRIPTION FOR LIVING: GARDEN GYMS

By Cynthia Brian

*"Look up, laugh loud, talk big, keep the color in your cheek and the fire in your eye, adorn your person, maintain your health, your beauty and your animal spirits."*

William Hazlitt, 1778-1830, Essayist

An Arabian proverb states that the who has health has hope and he who has hope has everything. I have always believed that health is wealth. With the obesity epidemic spreading like wildfire across our country, people of all ages are flocking to the gym to tone, tighten, and tackle the battle of the bulge.

I am not one of them. My prescription for a better body, mind, and spirit is to take a walk on the wild side. I'm into nature and my membership is in my own personal garden gym.

Along with bicycling and walking, gardening tops the list of ways to combat stress and lose weight according to the National Institute of Health. For optimal well being, it is recommended that we participate in at least thirty minutes of moderate intensity physical activity daily. It's easy to fulfill

those requirements when you are a real dirt digger.

Burn up those calories this autumn while getting your garden in shape too. Strenuous exercise is the key to losing weight by burning more calories than you consume. Thirty minutes of garden calisthenics will get your heart pumping and your buttocks bumping. The good news is that you don't have to perform the chore all in one swoop. Breaking up the activities into a minimum of eight-minute periods will accomplish the same goals as long as you stay the course for the half hour.

If you are like me, you'll spend more time than thirty minutes with the pruning, raking, composting, deadheading, harvesting, lifting, mowing, pushing, and inspecting. You are stretching your muscles when you reach to pull errant weeds or pick fruit from a high branch. Lifting rocks, pushing wheelbarrows, shoveling mulch are similar to weight training because of the resistance involved. My arms always look better after I've carried yards of gravel in five gallon buckets to carpet a new path. Squatting to plant builds shapely legs. When I

get warm, I jump in the pool to swim a few laps or run through the sprinklers to tame my inner child. Instead of exercise machines, I have garden tools. Who needs a cross trainer when you have an alfresco aerobics studio?

There are added benefits to building your garden gymnasium besides body sculpting. With regular workouts, you'll reduce cholesterol levels, decrease blood pressure, slow osteoporosis, lower your risk of diabetes, increase flexibility and strengthen your joints. Sure, you'll get tired and may ache, but it's the feel good type of pain for a job well done. Naturally you want to learn the proper way to lift, bend, and carry to avoid back, shoulder, and knee strain, always maintaining the strength in your core.

You don't need expensive clothing for your garden workouts. Slather on the sunscreen, don a chapeau, gloves, clogs, or boots, and you are set. Wear safety goggles when using power tools or sprays. Bring a container of water with you to keep you hydrated. If you grow fruits and vegetables, your hunger can be satiated as you exercise.

Everyone is welcome at this free gym. The elderly and the disabled can exercise by utilizing raised bed plantings. Kids can water, rake, and plant while learning patience, responsibility, and the circle of life. It's no secret that gardening is a great workout and finally medical journals are touting the benefits of our backyard fitness centers.

If you live in an apartment or the city without a garden, don't despair. Skip the treadmill and head to the parks. Whether you waddle, walk, or hop, get into the woods to experience the natural wonders. Today's generation of young peo-

ple suffer from "nature deficit disorder" said author Richard Louv when I interviewed him on my radio show, *Starstyle-Be the Star You Are!* We are so plugged in that we have tuned out our biological world and Mother Nature's rhythms. A hundred years ago America was an agrarian society and people kept fit and healthy by working the land. We are fifty pounds heavier than fifty years ago since the age of technology beckoned us indoors. Science is validating what moms have always known-being outside in the fresh air is good for us.

Typical calories burned by a 180-pound person in thirty minutes:

- 61: Watering manually
- 162: Raking, planting
- 182: Pruning, weeding
- 243: Chopping wood, pushing a mower
- 344: Double digging
- 40: Sitting on the couch

Like all exercise programs, consult your physician before beginning anything strenuous or new. To maximize your experience, listen to your body. I find I lose track of time when I am gardening. My anxieties dissipate, I think more clearly, and my creativity flourishes. Gardening reduces tension, trauma, and strain. I wouldn't be surprised if in the near future doctors medicate their patients with instructions for trail hikes, green belt walks, and gardening chores.

Build your confidence, flexibility, adaptability, and wellness. Write yourself a prescription for healthy living. Join the gardening gym rats and turn your failures into fertilizer by growing a strong body, mind, and spirit this autumn and forever.

Look up, laugh out loud, and keep the fire in your belly. Beauty and health are yours.



Robins get drunk eating Pyracantha berries. Photo © Cynthia Brian



Plump Pomegranate heralds holiday season. Photo © Cynthia Brian



The perfect November rose in hues of Thanksgiving. Photo © Cynthia Brian

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Wild turkeys prowling and preening-probably happy not to be part of the Thanksgiving feast. Photo © Cynthia Brian

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### Cynthia's Digging Deep Gardening Guide for November

*"Some people are always grumbling because roses have thorns. I am thankful thorns have roses."*  
Abraham Lincoln

It is the time of year when we take stock of the abundance around us and give thanks for our good fortune. Our finances may be experiencing a drought, but as long as we continue planting the seeds of hope and love, we all will harvest from the garden of life. Thanksgiving is a day of celebration for what we have. Be grateful that we have dirt to dig in and roses are still in bloom.

- **EAT** healthy by savoring autumn's harvest-apples (fiber), pumpkins (vitamin A and omega 3's in the seeds) cranberries (vitamin C, K, and manganese), sweet potatoes (vitamins A, E, C, B and potassium)
- **SELECT** the largest, plumpest bulbs from the nursery bins. Plant early, mid season, and late blooming bulbs in the same bed for continuous color next spring. A good rule of thumb is to make a hole two times the height of the bulb.
- **PLANT** garlic and onions. Nothing is more potent than fresh garlic. Keeps the vampires at bay.
- **ERADICATE** earwigs, snails, and other creepy crawlies by raking remaining leaves and weeds now.
- **CONNECT** with nature and your family on an invigorating hike through our local trails.
- **FERTILIZE** lawns with a second application of nitrogen.
- **CHOOSE** amber and saffron colored trees at your garden center before the leaves fall while you can personally witness the sensational display.
- **DEADHEAD** roses regularly to maintain blossoms and fragrance until January.
- **ALLOW** rose hips to develop on a selection of your bushes for vibrant Thanksgiving color and vitamin C to ward off a winter cold.
- **SOW** seeds for hardy annuals including hollyhock, sweet alyssum, bachelor button, and forget-me-not's.
- **DRY** the scarlet leaves from liquid ambers to use for your holiday décor.
- **CREATE** a natural cornucopia with a plethora of branches, berries, vines, and gourds to spice up your terra cotta Thanksgiving table.
- **WATCH** the wild turkeys parading and preening.
- **SET** up a croquet tournament on the lawn on Thanksgiving to get the family and friends involved in active fitness fun before the feast.
- **HARVEST** the last of your pumpkins, squash, apples, and nuts.
- **EXERCISE** to get in shape for the holiday festivities by raking, mowing, planting, digging, and playing in your landscape.
- **SHOOT** photos of the fall foliage to share with friends.
- **ENRICH** your life with gratitude. Nature surrounds us and we live in abundance.

Enjoy the final vestiges of fall, the warmth of family reunions, and the splendor of November. At this time of Thanksgiving may we remember the wise words of Henry Ward Beecher. "Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul." Wishing you a joyful, soulful Turkey Day filled with nature, vitality, and humor.



Cynthia Brian savors the fabulous fall foliage. Photo © Cynthia Brian

Happy Gardening to You!