

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian Plant a Playground

By Cynthia Brian



A summer centerpiece with blue and white Nigelia in a copper bucket. Leeks and onions have been picked for roasting.

Whether the result is a horticultural masterpiece or only a modest vegetable patch, the hope for a glorious future is at the heart of all gardening. Marina Shinz, photographer

Every morning after making my early bird rounds of my property with a cup of java, I go to the office, sit down to the computer, respond to emails, and post a quip to Facebook, Twitter, and Linked-in. Usually my musings regard the literacy charity, Be the Star You Are!® or an insight about the rewards of working with and coaching teens. A few responses from fans are posed to my profile, applauding the purpose or asking for further information, yet nothing remarkable. However, on the days that my blurbs pertain to garden issues, my inbox overflows with comments. Friend requests arrive from total strangers across the globe insisting that we are colleagues because we are gardeners.

The love of gardening is our equalizer and common denominator. Our gardens become our personal playground, a sandbox of building, planting, exercising, sharing, and growing. According to the journal, Environmental Science and Technology, it only takes five minutes in the garden every day to improve both your mood and

your self-esteem. Researchers suggest that gardening is in our evolutionary genetics. When we tend a patch of earth, no matter how small, we feel more peaceful, generous, and optimistic. Prevention Magazine shared data indicating that biochemical pathways in our brains are stimulated and satisfied by our primal longings to commune with nature.

Gardening is good for our bank balances, too. The associated Landscape Contractors of America calculate that landscaping adds as much as 14% to the resale value of a building and helps it sell six weeks earlier. Planting ecologically benefits our planet by reducing soil erosion and filtering pollutants.

Statistics abound with the how and why people garden resulting in fascinating findings. With an accuracy rate of 95% (plus or minus 4.2 percentage points) representing the attitudes of over one hundred million households, the spring Technometrica Market Intelligence survey found that nearly one half of the population will be gardening in their backyards with a little more than a quarter sprucing up their front spaces this summer.

Despite the economic challenges, 51% percent of consumers favor buying plants of the highest quality, regardless of price. Only 27% chose purchases that were the least expensive.

Where are gardeners getting their ideas for styles, trends, and tips? A whopping 34% indicated that they read books, magazines, and newspaper gardening articles before planning and planting. I hope they are perusing Digging Deep!

With people more aware of the health benefits of local produce, vegetable gardening is more popular than ever. Two thirds of those surveyed grow their own food and 82% are motivated to do so because homegrown vegetables, fruits, and herbs are tastier, pack more nutrients, and are freshest from the terra to table. Although most Lamorinda gardens are larger, it was interesting to note that the majority of avid gardeners worked a plot of land smaller than ten feet by ten feet!

Gardening is the number one hobby of Americans. Aside from beautifying our surroundings and providing edible nourishment, the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional benefits shine for gardeners of all ages. Gardening in-



Orinda gardener, Harry Freis, shared his fabulous foxgloves. He wrote Cynthia, "I enjoyed two weeks of perfect flowering weather until the storm hit. Then they looked like a chorus line of long haired ladies in the shower!" A compelling image. Thank you Harry!

creases strength, flexibility, and body tone. Forty-five minutes of active gardening burns the same number of calories as thirty minutes of aerobics. Gardening is "real" exercise. One hour of weeding burns 300 calories, the same as walking or bicycling at a moderate pace.

Gardening is a stress buster, especially when you are hacking away at those menacing weeds instead of seething with business burnout. By digging in the dirt, we connect with nature, allowing us to unplug from our technological turntable. Patience is learned, as we can't rush a beet. With the long cold and rainy season experienced this year, many of the seeds I planted in May are only now sprouting. Mother Nature decides when germination occurs. We are the worker bees.

The garden is the foundation for creativity as we combine colors, textures, form, and func-

tion. No matter what style, shape, or size, our gardens are the play structures for our imaginations, a gathering place where family and friends find tranquility, enjoyment, and camaraderie.

Gardening is our hope for the future. This summer, dig in, plant a playground, and welcome the flower power paybacks.



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