

Published August 3rd, 2011

## Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian Shimmer, Shine, Sizzle, and Shoot

By Cynthia Brian



A honeybee gathers nectar from Cynthia's heirloom hollyhock.

"Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves."

James Matthew Barrie, 1860-1937, Author of Peter Pan

Ah, summer at last! Pleasant days sprinkled with orange sunsets, jasmine scented balmy nights, bushels of fresh herbs, vegetables, and fruits, and plentiful wildlife to entertain as well as antagonize friends and family. Living is easier in the sunshine as merriment is found outdoors in the fresh air.

August, the warmest month of the year, is abundant with blooms, butterflies, bees, birds, and barbecues. For me, it's always a busy thirty-one days, filled with celebrations, remembrances, photo ops, garden parties, and delightful days digging in the dirt. When it comes to plant specimens, I keep it simple. I like vegetation that is easy to grow. No fuss, no muss, plus color, fragrance, and foliage. If a plant fails, it becomes fertilizer, added to the compost bin, recycled, and re-birtherd.

A favorite, simple to cultivate, flower is my heirloom hollyhock. The old-fashioned stock with petals of pink, white, and fuchsia has been in my family for over one hundred years. Honeybees, bumblebees, and butterflies swarm the blooms offering endless viewfinder opportunities. When the flowers are spent, I gather the seed, dry, and scatter in the spring in anticipation of the twelve-foot towers

that attract the nurturing insects. At speaking engagements and book signings, I proudly give away sacks of these precious jewels. As a gardener, it is satisfying to share.

The utilitarian nasturtiums are resplendent cascading over planters and potager in hues of scarlet, blood orange, and yellow with lovely aqua leaves. They adorn my salads and float in my lemonade, their peppery personality adding pizzazz and jazz to an ordinary creation. Nasturtiums flower profusely until frost, providing edible art to my alfresco dining table.

Other August standouts in gardens in our area are Star of Bethlehem, hydrangea, zinnias, cannas, begonias, basil, and tomatoes. Ubiquitous impatiens and petunias dress up walkways, beautify beds, and provide a riot of color. Don't discount commoners. Sometimes these are the hardiest plants for our neighborhoods. My camera has been busy shooting the ordinary pleasures of living in God's country.

The wild kingdom thrives on my property as it does around rural Lamorinda this summer. Driving into my driveway late one night, I was greeted by six bucks, happily nibbling on my deer resistant plantings. (One reader deters deer with plantings of cilantro, although cilantro bolts in heat...like the antlered critters. There is no such thing as "deer proof" except strong high fencing.) These were big boys-two four pointers, two three pointers, and two forked-horn-most likely three generations of males bonding over blooms. I whipped out my camera to snap a photo of my living lawn ornaments as they pranced towards the hills perhaps in route to Santa's play station. I didn't get the photo.

The next morning a rafter of turkeys with ten poults sunbathed on that same grassy knoll. Again, I attempted to photograph the game birds. They sauntered, swayed, and swiftly took flight. My lens captured a moment.

At my front door, a baby snake coiled by my planter. Not one to shriek at serpents, I pointed and clicked. This is the fifth snake sleeping or slithering in my path in the past few days. I appreciate the Gopher, garter, and King snakes. The rattlers rattle me. As a child, I encountered one too many. Snakes are beneficial as they feed on rodents. They will eat gophers, moles, voles, rats, and mice, however, I prefer they not dine on the bunnies and birds.

I love my birds. Birds and gardens just go together. Birds provide movement, song, and color to the garden scene. In return, the garden offers safety, shelter, food, and water.

Three baby robins hatched from a nest built in a wreath on my back door. It was a delight to watch the daily ministrations of the mother as she darted between the babies and the trees, foraging for food. After many photos of the hungry babes with mouths wide open, I became an active participant in the first flying lessons of the youngsters. One day as I checked on their progress they decided to fly the coup and managed to land on my head. Darn, I missed the shot!

It's finally summer in Lamorinda. Get out your cameras and start shooting. Our gardens shimmer and the animals shine. Smile, have fun, and live on the wild side...it's up to us to sizzle!

Happy Summer!

### CYNTHIA BRIAN'S GARDENING GUIDE FOR AUGUST

"I should like to enjoy this summer flower by flower, as if it were to be the last one." Andre Gide

- CHEW fresh celery for whiter teeth. (Hint: the texture of celery has toothbrush qualities)
  - ADD pea gravel, decomposed granite or spaced stepping stones planted with the gaps planted in creeping thyme for a permeable path with a Mediterranean look.
  - STORE herbs by either drying them by hanging the stems upside down, or chop finely, add to a ice tray and pour a small amount of water over the top. Voila! Instant flavor for your winter soups and stews.
  - LIGHTEN containers by putting plastic water bottles or plastic packing pebbles at the bottom before you add the soil.
  - DIG out dandelions from your garden and lawn. Add to salads as long as you have not used insecticides or pesticides or feed to the quail. Dandelions are nutritious and a favorite food for the coveys.
  - ESTABLISH a wildlife habitat in your yard by providing food, water, shelter, and sustainability for the wandering and flying critters.
  - SPICE up your supertime with floral edibles of nasturtium, calendula, violas, roses, citrus blossoms, dianthus, pansies, chamomile, and blooming herbs. Eat the daisies, but not the tomato, potato, pepper, or eggplant flowers which contain toxins.
  - WATER, water, water. August is one of the warmest months and it's necessary to keep an eye on your containers and yard. If you see leaves drooping, it's time to sprinkle.
  - PLANT beans, carrots, radishes, and beets for a second crop to harvest in the fall.
  - COLLECT the fruit that falls to the ground. Add to your compost bin, or feed the birds, but don't allow it to sit as it will attract fungus and flies.
  - DEADHEAD roses, perennials, and straggly annuals to keep the blooms coming.
  - FLUSH birdbaths and fountains regularly to maintain fresh drinking water for our feathered friends as well as repel mosquito larvae from hatching.
  - PINCH zinnias and chrysanthemums to encourage bushier blooms.
  - WASH your car on your lawn. Your car will get clean and your lawn will benefit from the extra soak. Make sure to park your car carefully to not disturb planter beds.
  - SEND photos of your garden to me at [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com) with a description. You may be published!
  - WATCH out for errant sparks from fire pits, barbecues, candles, and tiki torches. It's fire season. Make sure the perimeter of your house is brush and weed free providing a safety zone fire break.
  - ASK your children what vegetables from the garden they want to eat as summer snacks, then make sure there are plenty for packing healthy lunches.
  - SEND your college kids off to school with a potted plant. It will bring the outdoors in and provide oxygen for their brain, too.
  - SHOOT photos of your garden and wildlife. Email your best ones to me and your landscape may be a star in one of my columns. [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com)
  - EXPERIMENT by planting seeds such as kale, spinach, broccoli for a fall harvest in containers in a spot with bright light then transfer seedlings to the garden.
  - EXPERIENCE a country fair by visiting the fruit, flower, and food pavilions.
  - EXPLORE the Summer of Slither at the California Academy of Science in Golden Gate Park this month for their special exhibition of snakes and lizards. To find out how beneficial these reptiles are for your garden. <http://www.calacademy.org/>
  - START thinking about your fall bulb purchases. Peruse catalogs for the latest varieties of tulips and daffodils in a rainbow spectrum of choices.
  - SAVE seeds from perishing annuals to plant next year. Sunflowers, zinnias, marigolds, hollyhocks, cosmos, Four O'Clocks are excellent traditional choices that thrive in our micro climate.
  - ENJOY vine-ripened tomatoes now. Pick tomatoes only when ripe and eat the same day. Do not refrigerate or you will lose taste and vitamins. Nothing says "summer" like fresh picked tomatoes!
  - GRAB hats and flats, light the tiki torches, drizzle zucchini, corn, and onions with olive oil to roast on the grill, and invite your friends to an impromptu garden gala. Say cheese!
- BE the fun and the sun. Shimmer, shine, sizzle, and shoot.

Happy Gardening to You!

©2011

Cynthia Brian

The Goddess Gardener

[Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com)

[www.GoddessGardener.com](http://www.GoddessGardener.com)

925-377-7827

My virtual door is always open. I am available as a speaker and consultant. Feel free to contact me.



Fountains, variegated cannas, and hot weather are comfortable companions. Photos Cynthia Brian



The edible nasturtium is a filler, spiller, and thriller.





A slithering visitor. Photos Cynthia Brian



The towering 12 foot spires of hollyhock climb towards the magnolia



Three hungry baby robins in a nest on a back door wreath.

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA