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## Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian Grape Expectations & Fall la la la la

By Cynthia Brian



Clusters of the 2011 crop of Pinot Noir grapes await hand picking at Captain Vineyards in Moraga

consumption. The only sweet, juicy grapes dangling from my arbor are aptly named, Sweetwaters. (I'm munching on them as I write.) The vineyards where I grew up have only recently delivered Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Chenin Blanc to the Napa Valley wineries. The Merlot, Zinfandel, and Cabernet Sauvignon await picking, with their sugar levels near perfect. Because of the odd weather conditions of the year, the yield is small.

Lamorinda boasts a rich grape growing precedent with a 125 year-old history. The Lamorinda Wine Growers Association (LWGA; [www.LamorindaWineGrowers.com](http://www.LamorindaWineGrowers.com)), dedicated to sustainable farming and community building, is re-establishing the area's love of the vine and wine along with our pleasant past. Although local grape growers are experiencing late ripening crops, Sal Captain of Captain Vineyards in Moraga who farms 3500 vines, the largest amount in Lamorinda, told me that production this year is better than when the season started. His wife, Susan Captain, is the President of LWGA. One of the missions of the organization is to increase resident membership as well as have Lamorinda designated as an American Viticultural Area (AVA). Prominent appellations add value and eminence in wine circles.

The varieties grown throughout Lafayette, Orinda, and Moraga span the French Bordeaux area with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Merlot to the Rhone regions' Syrah, Petite Sirah, Grenache, Mourvedre, and Viognier. Burgundy is represented by the Pinot Noir grape and Lamorindans also grow small amounts of Sangiovese and Chardonnay. The smallest LWGA member grower tends 20 vines. Numerous amateur gardeners dabble in viticulture and could benefit from becoming a member of a lively grass roots wine region development. Despite the small quantity of bunches, growers talk about the great expectation of a high quality wine production. Will 2011 become known as collectible vintage year?

Last year at this time, I was privileged to visit the gardens of Giverny and the vineyards of the Loire. The wisdom I have savored since growing up in a wine area and living in France as a student at the University of Bordeaux is that gardening and grapes meld cultures, break barriers, and entertain conversation and connection.

Fall is upon us as the harvest days begin. Naturally there is more to do in the autumn garden besides tend to our vineyards, even if you never met a glass of wine you didn't enjoy!

Whether Mother Nature surprises us with warm or cold weather, this is an optimal time to fertilize and augment the soil. Because temperatures will be getting cooler as days get shorter, the nutrients in fertilizers can do their job to balance growth in roots and shoots.

Tomatoes took a long time to ripen this the summer, and now gardeners are reaping bushels of ripe, juicy produce. Be vigilant in harvesting your zucchini, cucumbers, melons, eggplants, carrots, kale, and beans before a cold spell hits. If you are ready to prepare your potager or vegetable garden for the following year, stop watering which will encourage your plants to push for that final crop before withering. Cut back your tomato bushes, toss them in the compost bin, and fry those green tomatoes which will not continue ripening once frost hits. Leaves are starting to turn colors and flutter to the ground. Rake them and put them in the compost pile to amend your soil in a few months. With the dazzling, captivating, changing colors of the foliage, take photos of a tree or bush in your garden from the same angle every day to chronicle the evolution of nature.

"Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth. There I will give thee my love." - Song of Solomon 7:12

Growing up in the vineyards of Napa County, all our grapes had been hand picked and hauled to the winery crushers by this time of year. Our hands and feet were stained purple and on the warmest days, our special treat was a swim in the water filled grape tanks reeking of fermentation. October was the beginning of walnut season when my dad shook the trees with a self-fabricated arm attached to the Ford tractor while we children kneeled in the dirt clods tossing the falling nuts into five gallon buckets for sorting at the dehydrator barn. By the end of the month, we celebrated with a harvest hootenanny. Our hands were now stained green, our knees were brown, and undaunted, our feet tapped the two-step.

It's late September and my backyard grapes are just beginning to color. The Pinot Noir exhibit a blush of purple tint, but no sweetness. The berries are full, the leaves bright, yet despite recent hot days, even my table grapes, Thompson seedless, Muscat, and Rieber are not ready for

If you are installing or repairing a lawn, October is a prime month to get the job done. Are you seeking the perfect pristine lawn seed? Many of you emailed me if such a discovery existed after last month's Lawn Ranger column. Since Halloween is this month, I saved this announcement as it may be so scary that you'll be calling your mummy! The USDA approved a new genetically modified Kentucky Bluegrass from Monsanto this past July that is engineered to resist weed sprays like Roundup. Targeted for golf courses, opponents argue that this new GMO weed-free lawn may cause birth defects. Since perfection is not my plight and I am neither a golfer nor pregnant, I'll let you decide if this development is a dream come true or a hellish nightmare!

Enjoy the rustling of the autumn leaves, the wine from the vine, the changing of the color guard, and the final bounty from your garden efforts. Howl at the harvest moon as Halloween is around the corner. Start gathering willow twigs for your magic wands and bewitching herbs to brew dervish drinks. The holidays will be upon us soon, but for now, we can chant merrily, "fall la la la la."

### **Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for October**

"Autumn is a time of harvest, of gathering together, a time of sowing." Edwin Way Teale

October is not only about ghosts, ghouls, goblins, and gremlins. We harvest our dreams with fall clean-up and spring preparation. Birds pecking at your lawn are not eating it. They are dining on insects that could be harmful to your lawn. The birds, even the crows featured Hitchcock classic, *The Birds*, are your friends indicating that your lawn has an invader. Clover is a positive plant in the garden and lawn because it grabs oxygen from the air and stores it in the soil. Vegetables to plant now for winter harvest include turnips, spinach, lettuces, arugula, cress, mustard, leeks, radishes, kale, Swiss chard, beets, cauliflower, and broccoli.

DIG and divide iris rhizomes in October. Make sure to keep a few inches of the leaves on the stems and bury the roots two inches deep, eighteen to twenty inches apart.

PULL weeds before they go to seed. Do not put weeds with seedpods on the compost pile unless you want a yard filled with unwanted visitors next spring.

EXPERIMENT by planting a variety of lettuces to keep your salads fresh all season. You can even plant in a pot on a sunny windowsill and snip often.

Clip the micro greens as they sprout for delicate, delicious delights.

CONTROL black spot and powdery mildew on roses with non-toxic Serenade with the active ingredient, *Bacillus subtilis*, a soil bacterium that discourages plant fungi.

TUNE up your garden by pruning back overgrown shrubs, adding a new pathway, or enlarging a cutting area.

ENROLL in a course on edible gardening, native plants, or composting.

AMEND your hard clay soil with large amounts of compost.

INSTALL a hedge to add structure, privacy, and definition to your landscape. Decide whether you want deciduous specimens such as lilac, forsythia, or cranberry bush, or evergreens like privet, boxwood, or holly.--

PRUNE your berry bushes, including summer raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries by removing dead canes, thinning new canes, weeding around the plant, then mulching with wood chips to keep the weeds out, nutrients in.

PROPOGATE perennials for free by taking root cuttings now through December as the plants go dormant. Dig up a clump, cut several firm, healthy roots.

Trim into two or three inch sections making sure to remember which end is up. Plant either in pots or directly in the ground. Good choices include asters,

Oriental poppies, acanthus, primulas, phlox, and rudbeckias.

REPAIR birdhouses so that overwintering birds such as bluebirds, chickadees, and nuthatches will have a warm, safe, cozy place to rest during the upcoming cold nights.

INCREASE bird feeders in your yard as birds consume more food in fall and winter.

SUPPORT local viticulture by joining the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association. The monthly meetings include libations.

For information visit <http://www.lamorindawinegrowers.com/>

WALK in nature when you feel stressed to kick up your cognitive performance. A stroll through a park, a jog around the Lafayette Reservoir, or a simple skip through your back yard will do wonders for your mental fatigue.

SAVE seeds from your favorite annuals, herbs, and vegetables by gathering, drying, labeling, and storing. I love to pick the seed pods from fennel stalks, dry them

on a cookie sheet, place in an airtight jar and use for seasoning fish, fruit, salads, soups, and savories all winter.

IMPROVE your health by adding apples and squash to your diet this month.

RESCUE honeybees from water sources when they have fallen in. These workers have pollination duties to complete before the winter storms.

EXPLORE the nursery aisles to plan your purchases of your spring flowering bulbs including tulips, daffodils, muscari, narcissi, hyacinths, frittilaria, Dutch iris,

alliums, and lilies. Tulip bulbs need to be refrigerated (not frozen) for at least six weeks before planting.

ROAST seeds from squash and pumpkins by first clean



Fall colors over Monet's lily ponds at Giverny, France



Loire Valley grapes hang on a trellis.



Orange and yellow spider dahlias burst with autumn hues.



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