

CYNTHIA BRIAN'S GARDENING GUIDE FOR DECEMBER

"Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul." Henry Ward Beecher

With Thanksgiving behind us, we now move on to the season of grace, gratitude, and glory with Christmas, Hannukah, and Kwanza. As we drive through neighborhoods, gardens are illuminated, bedecked and bedazzled ushering in the most favorite time of year for children around the globe. December is a time for reflection, rest, and regrouping with loved ones. Take the time to treasure the short days and long nights by bringing a bit of nature indoors with branches of evergreens, berries, persimmons, and pomegranates. Make a pot of herbal tea, curl up by the fire with a good book, and savor the season of giving.

- **BE** green and buy a living Christmas tree that can grow in splendor. Artificial trees are non-recyclable or biodegradable.
- **KEEP** your tree fresh longer by placing a freshly cut trunk in a bucket of water before placing in a tree stand. Water daily without floral preservatives.
- **BRIGHTEN** the holidays with breathtaking blooms of amaryllis. Available in many colors, they'll bloom in 6-8 weeks after planting in any light.
- **DRESS** your plants for the holidays with red berries and glossy leaves gleaned from the garden.
- **INCREASE** concentration by placing leafing and flowering greenery around your house.
- **HARVEST** prickly pear when the skins are red. Wear gloves and use tongs to peel before adding to salads.
- **HARNESS** inner peace by exercising or meditating outdoors in your yard or a park on a sunny day. Being in nature relieves stress and the fresh air revitalizes you.
- **FORAGE** for wild watercress in creeks. Cut stems, leaving the roots, wash thoroughly and enjoy with meals.
- **LEAVE** fallen leaves on your lawn. Mow the grass without a grass catcher to help mulch your lawn over winter.
- **BUILD** a bat house for our endangered insect eaters. Visit www.batcon.org for approved bat house building instructions. Bats have received a bad reputation over the years but they are friends to humans. Next summer each bat will eat 1000 mosquitoes in an hour!
- **MIGRATING** birds, hummingbirds, and butterflies benefit from feeder feasts. Make sure to keep a few drifts of perennials such as fuchsia, honeysuckle, and asters available as landing dinner pads.
- **BUGS** bothering your plants? Click on the free on-line tool called "Putting the Detective on the Case" at www.gardeners.com. A list of plant-specific suspects will be generated with detailed images to match with more than eighty close-up, color photographs to help gardeners determine the disease or the pest.
- **REJUVENATE** your soil by planting cover crops of fava beans, vetch, alfalfa, clover, or mustard to add nutrients for next season with this special green manure.
- **SHELTER** frost tender plants by wrapping with burlap. Dog pillow covers do a great job for containers.
- **ADD** color spots of cyclamen, cinerarias, dianthus, and primroses available in quantity at your garden center to fill in the blank spots of your winter garden.
- **REUSE** large plastic buckets or cardboard boxes as composting bins. Add your table scraps for home made compostable riches.
- **INVITE** butterflies and hummingbirds to your garden by planting the bright colors of Buddleia (butterfly bush), Rose of Sharon, and Weigelas now. The butterfly magnet "Lo and Behold Blue Chip" non-invasive buddleia stays under three feet without pruning and blooms non stop from summer to winter.
- **FORCE** bulbs indoors. Use a narrow necked vase, poke a few holes in a bulb with toothpicks, fill with water to the base of the bulb, and wait for the roots to form by storing in a dark, cool place for ten to twelve weeks.
- **SAVE** rainwater with barrels. Use for indoor plants. For the more adventurous water conscious environmentalists, consider installing a cistern.
- **BRIGHTEN** your holiday walls with American botanical art. Before there were plant patents, there were plant portraits.
- **PROLONG** the freshness of trimmings indoors by keeping pots out of direct sunlight and away from heat sources.
- **MARVEL** at the wild turkeys trotting through your property. Wild turkeys are capable of instant take off and can fly as swiftly as 50 miles per hour. They don't fly for long, but they accelerate quickly. They seem to love my pistache berries.
- **DONATE** time, resources, and money to a local charity making a difference in our neighborhoods. You'll feel great while contributing to the spirit of paying it forward.
- **CELEBRATE** local viticulture with a bottle of wine from grape growers in the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association, www.lamorindawinegrowers.com
- **GIVE** gifts from the garden and watch the love grow.
- **PLANT** seeds of gratitude for the gift of life.

Reuse, refresh, recycle, rejuvenate, and rejoice. Wishing everyone a splendid home grown holiday of celebration and gratitude for all our blessings. We'll reconnect next year! Happy Gardening to You.

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

