

Starting Fresh!

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Fabulous ferns perk up a shady walkway.

Photos Cynthia Brian A cheery container of red and white cyclamen, blue pansies, and white alyssum signal the Presidential election year of 2012.

Today, kids are bombarded with so many technological gadgets, that it's hard to get them unplugged and outside. Instead of medication for hyperactivity, we exercised our excessive energy with building forts, hanging tree swings, and running through the hills pretending to be explorers. Now, more than ever, every family needs to start with a fresh page of al fresco renewal.

According to the Mayan calendar, 2012 portends the end of the world as we know it. Being a history major taught me that although it is important to learn from the past, it is up to us to forge our futures. Every January we have the opportunity to begin anew. I predict that 2012

is the beginning of an era of awakening and starting fresh. With that thought in mind, my gift to readers this year will be improved health in body, mind, and spirit with regular tips on how you and your family can discover the wonders of the natural world by getting outside with unstructured open-air activities to allow the imagination to run wild and creativity to soar.

Whether it's pruning roses or walking in the woods, by exchanging screen time for green time, your internal clock will regulate your body to be alert during the day and tired at night. Numerous studies show that gardening fights obesity as well as sleep deprivation by offering a full

body workout that builds strong muscle mass while improving cognitive skills, providing relaxation, increasing stress reduction, and developing deeper sleep patterns.

This year, let's plan and plant our meals for year-round plot to plate, potager to pot, patch to platter originality. Put in peas, kale, Swiss chard, broccoli, lettuces, and Bok Choy to reap the riches of vitamins, antioxidants, and minerals, low in calories and packed with nutrients everybody craves. When we teach kids how to grow their own dinners, we introduce them to a whimsical wonderful world of wellness and wealth through the joys of garden sowing and harvesting.



A basket of freshly picked Meyer lemons makes delicious tea rich in vitamin C to ward off colds.



Tillandsia, a genus in the Bromeliad family, is an air plant. They are wonderful specimens for terrariums.



A spider weaves its magical web while protecting the garden from intruding pests.