

# Natural Attractions

## *Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian*

By Cynthia Brian

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."* Marcel Proust



*The pink/purple blossoms of Heather brighten a winter landscape.*

*Photos Cynthia Brian*

While many people are swooshing down the slopes or basking on balmy beaches, in February, gardeners are forecasting future flowering. We peruse seed catalogues hunting for those special heirlooms and old fashioned favorites while dreaming of trips to nurseries to fill our flourishing spring grounds. Although I admit to thoroughly enjoying the surf and the snow, whenever and wherever I travel, I make it a point to wander through public gardens, as well as any private ones that offer an invitation. With camera and notebook in hand, I have an exhilarating field day as I discover unusual displays, exotic rarities, and humorous descriptions. How can you top witnessing tree bark that looks like the top of a tortoise shell or shrieking at the sight of a snake plant slithering through the tropical forest? My photo folder has more shots of flora than of people. While rambling through the green-

ery, I fantasize about borrowing ideas that will find passage into my vegetative projects.

This year I've dedicated Digging Deep to getting you up, out, and moving. When the weather is dreary, blustery, and cold, a great way to combine nature with nature is to visit a botanical garden (see list on page D10). If you are planning a winter get away, include a side trip to a flower show or regional garden as part of your itinerary. If you are staying home, delightful public gardens, conservatories, arboretums, and plant destinations await your exploration in a relaxing day trip within a couple of hours driving distance from Lamorinda's landscapes. From tropical paradises to dry oasis, I've dug up delightful display playgrounds anticipating your arrival. Participate in guided tours, educational programs, hands-on workshops, propagation classes, horticulture seminars, green living demonstrations, or just

amble at your own pace. Many have activities for children and most have gift shops or nurseries where you can purchase rare specialty species. Some venues charge a nominal fee while others are free. All will inspire and ignite your love of Mother Nature while entertaining and informing. Grab your loved ones, hat, gloves, camera, picnic, sketchbook, and enjoy the splendor of distinctive backyards with fresh eyes.

This is by no means a complete list of all the remarkable offerings available. Wineries, bed and breakfasts, historic homes, regional or city parks boast meandering brooks, enchanting paths, potagers, rose gardens and countless opportunities for botanical entertainment. I've been delighted to be a speaker and autograph my books at many of these locations and have worked as an actor in several. Work and play, play and work.

This Valentine's give yourself and your loved ones the gift of natural attractions. Even for the timid traveler, it will be love at first sight.



*The pitcher plant drinks from its cup to satisfy its water needs.*