

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for September

"I don't want to get to the end of my life and find that I lived just the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well." Diane Ackerman

From pre-school to grad school, class is back in session. Where did the summer go as we were having fun in the sun? The good news is that with all the fresh, juicy, ripe fruits and vegetables available in September, our kids can enjoy a delicious and nutritious home-packed lunch. Autumn is harvest time and everyone benefits from the length and width of life. Make sure to bring the family to the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival on Saturday, September 29 to savor pear pies, local wines, and fresh fruits. Stop by the Be the Star You Are!® charity booth where our teens will be hosting a live radio show and I'll be talking dirt with you. Until then, let's eek out the last buds and blooms of the sunshine season before we begin putting our gardens to bed for a long winter's nap.

- **TIME** to feed irises with a low-nitrogen, well-balanced fertilizer. Don't overfeed and keep the fertilizer away from the rhizomes.
- **DRESS** up your fall patio by taking advantage of plant and furniture sales at local retailers.
- **STRETCH** before using your green thumbs as all the pulling, bending, twisting, and lifting require warmed muscles.
- **GRILL** your home-grown tomatoes adding inner SPF for the hot days of September. The antioxidant plant pigment, lycopene, increases skin's resistance to harmful UV rays.
- **FEED** and water our flying friends by keeping feeders filled with high quality seeds and fresh water in the fountains and birdbaths.
- **GROW** plenty of lettuce and spinach. Not only are they tastier straight from your garden, research has found that skin cancer survivors who munch these nutritious greens are less likely to have reoccurrences.
- **PREVENT** cataracts by eating at least five to nine servings of colorful fruits and vegetables daily. Both lutein and zeaxanthin have been found to help protect against eye diseases, which can be caused by oxidative stress and solar damage to the lens of the eye.
- **SOW** individual cloves of garlic this month, allowing them to sprout into scallions. Mulch and overwinter them to develop into full garlic bulbs by spring.
- **FILTER** volatile organic compounds (VOC's), like formaldehyde and benzene, found in many homes and offices by bringing in the natural air cleaners: houseplants!
- **RECYCLE** your plastic bags at Lafayette's Whole Foods this month and donate the five cents to a local charity. It's the Nickels for Non Profits Program to clean up our environment!
- **DELIVER** stress relief to yourself by spending more time in the garden. A recent survey conducted by the Nursery and Landscape Association found that a major reason people gardened was to escape the real world and get closer to God through nature. Gardening has its blessings!
- **CHECK** out the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association to purchase locally grown grapes and wines and receive information on vineyard harvesting notices. <http://www.lamorindawinegrowers.com/>
- **FERTILIZE** in fall with nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and calcium. The first three nutrients are found in most mixed fertilizers, and calcium can be purchased separately in the form of limestone.
- **TOSS** the chopped leaves of baby carrot tops, peas, radishes, broccoli, and cauliflower into your salad or tabouli. Do not eat parsnip or potato tops as they are toxic.
- **REDUCE** inflammation from sprains and sunburn by planting comfrey. Steep fresh leaves in boiling water, strain, cool, then soak the sprained or sunburned areas in the cool tea to reduce pain, discomfort, and promote healthy skin rejuvenation.
- **ATTEND** The National Heirloom Exposition and World's Pure Food Fair in Santa Rosa, California, September 11, 12, and 13 with over 3,000 varieties of heirlooms and seeds from farms and gardens across America with proceeds benefiting school gardens.
- **SELECT** bulbs for spring blooms. Tulips need to be refrigerated six weeks before planting. Peruse your garden centers and catalogues for a kaleidoscope of narcissi, crocus, galanthus, iris, hyacinths, scilla, fritillaria, anemone, and more. Two of my favorite beauty in bulb catalogues are John Scheepers, www.johnscheepers.com and Van Engelen, www.vanengelen.com
- **VISIT** the Lamorinda Weekly booth at the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival on Sunday, September 16 between 4-6pm, enjoy a glass of wine and ask me your garden questions. Let's toast the harvest!

See you at the festivals. Celebrate the harvest homecoming and the final days of summer. Raise your glass!

Happy Gardening to You!

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