

Published December 5th, 2012

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian Hoe, Hoe, Hoe-A Berry Merry Holiday! "Families are like fudge - mostly sweet with a few nuts."

Author Unknown

By Cynthia Brian



Fuju persimmons and tangerines are December treats. Fujus can be eaten like apples. Eggplants are still growing in the garden. Photos Cynthia Brian

anything from anywhere at any price and have it delivered speedily. Yet, today more than ever, homegrown, hand-made, and personally crafted gifts are greatly appreciated for the personal attention that goes into each. Not only are from-the-heart offerings gaining celebrity status, decorating with nature in mind has gained rocket speed momentum.

As soon as the last of the Thanksgiving leftovers are devoured, most of us concentrate our attention on the December holidays. We climb into attics, scour garages, and check the back of our closets digging out ornaments and lights from last year's merriment. In the midst of our decorating fury, spending time in the garden is probably not at the top of most priority lists, yet devoting a few hours at the beginning of the month to hoe, hoe, hoe will add stockings full of joy to your ho, ho, ho.

One of your first tasks is to walk around your yard to identify what needs to be done to tuck your garden in for its long winter's nap. If you have citrus in containers, you'll want to move the pots to protection, either closer to the house, a solarium, or put them in an unheated garage. For frost tender bushes and plants in the ground, cover them with crop blankets in case of a sudden freeze. Since the rains, weeds are already sprouting. While the ground is soft but not muddy, it's a perfect time to clean out the pesky plants and cover with mulch to deter further growth and prevent erosion from the downpours. Plant the last of the spring bulbs (many are on sale now), and then take inventory of the natural decor your garden offers to jazz up the holiday festivities.

If you grow persimmons, pomegranates, nuts, tangerines, and other citrus, consider boxing them up as gifts for friends or family who aren't gardeners. Bouquets of fragrant narcissus or a bunch of fresh herbs such as rosemary, sage, chives, oregano, and mint tied with a festive ribbon make useful hostess gifts. Cut branches from pines, firs, juniper, and other conifers to swag staircases and doors with fresh garlands. Whether you have hot cider on the stove, gingerbread cookies baking in the oven, chestnuts roasting over the fire, or dried orange slices hanging on the tree, the aromas of the holiday are heaven scents.

Be a style setter by bringing in the berries-cotoneaster, pyracantha, pistache, and holly. If you have not been deadheading your rosebushes, cut the rose hips to add to your mantel arrangement along with your collection of old, vintage, or handmade ornaments, magnolia cones, and leaves.

No matter how pretty your front entrance is year round, December is the month to spice it up with lush interruptions of seasonal greens and sparkle. If you have gourds or pumpkins left over from the fall, spray paint them silver, gold, or bronze. Embellish your winter wonderland with decorative birds, nests, angels, or jewels. Layer baskets with earthy moss and real mushrooms to create a mini woodland scene. Welcome visitors with trees glittering with lights and unbreakable ornaments that exhibit your personality.

Celebrate the season of wonder and magic with botanical themes that echo your love of nature. Bake a batch of fudge with nuts as well as a couple of fruitcakes using produce from your garden. Be thankful for the love and charm of family, nuts, and all.

Season's Greenings!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December

"Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful." Norman Vincent Peale

Every December my entire family looks forward to gathering on our ranch where my mom, brother, and nephew decorate over an acre of land with thousands of twinkling lights, and every imaginable Christmas scene. Since I was a little girl, this was the wonder my parents weaved to ensure that Santa and his reindeer would find their way to our remote wilderness hideaway. The holidays are special because of family traditions and imagination on overload. It's been a year of exploring, experimenting, and experiencing. According to the Mayan calendar, the world as we know it is going to end on Dec. 21. Are we prepared? Let's pamper ourselves, our families, and our guests with a dazzling, sparkling season of light, love, and laughter by greening our spirit. This is your passport to outdoor pleasure, purpose, and passion.

- RAKE leaves from lawns to keep them from matting. Keep mower at a higher cutting level.
- WINTERIZE your shrubs and bushes with a dormant feeding, the last one of the season.
- DEADHEAD roses for a final flush of blooms throughout the holidays. Next month will be the heavy pruning.
- REPAIR damaged cells by eating berries. Berries are nature's brain food. Polyphenols give berries their deep colors-red, blue, black, activating proteins that break down and recycle the toxic chemicals. Blueberries are high in antioxidants, acai berries contain high levels of omega -6 and omega -9 fatty acids to help the heart, and strawberries are loaded with vitamin C.
- FASHION wreaths from boughs of redwood, pine, fir, and grapevines.
- FORAGE for fresh watercress to add to winter salads in nearby creeks or wetlands. Make sure to thoroughly wash the greens before eating.
- PROTECT tender plants from frost and freeze by moving potted plants inside or close to the house.
- WATER plants when dry as they will suffer less damage from the cold when they are well watered.
- BUY camellias now in the colors to suit your landscape decor while they are stocked as blooming specimens in nurseries.
- BAKE a personalized garden fruitcake this holiday using real fruits-fresh, frozen, or dried from your own earth. Grapes, peaches, apricots, figs, and pears are magnificent choices for a different type of holiday treat.
- DON'T eat mushrooms from your garden unless you are 100 percent certain that they are edible. Numerous look-alike champignons are toxic and even deadly.
- CUT back chrysanthemums to six inches.
- REMOVE dead foliage from shrubs and bushes and add to compost bin.
- PLANT peony, calendula, oriental poppy, and lily of the valley for spring blooms. Bare root offerings to plant now include asparagus, artichoke, rhubarb, grapes, and berries.
- USE no more than three strands of lights plugged into one cord or outlet to prevent fire.
- DECORATE with bromeliads and antheriums for a hint of the tropics.
- BE original in customizing your holiday decorating with non-traditional items from succulents to roses with lantern accents.
- ADD luster to potted noble firs by adding sprigs of amaryllis and hydrangeas to the arrangement.
- SAVOR families and friends this holiday season and every moment of the year. Growing people is the greatest gift of all.

Happy Holidays from my noble garden to yours! Ring in the New Year with a gardener's glee.

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I am available as a speaker, designer, and consultant.



From my Farm Family to yours, Happy Holidays



Bromeliads bring a bit of the tropics to the holiday season.

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