

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Hoe, Hoe, Hoe-A Berry Merry Holiday!

By Cynthia Brian

"Families are like fudge - mostly sweet with a few nuts." Author Unknown



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

Coming from a large Italian family and having harvested walnuts for most of my life, I know a thing or two about nuts. At Christmas one of the annual homemade packages we gave to friends and relatives included a beautiful display of candied and savory walnuts. Conveyor belts would take the nuts up to the top of the dehydrator barn in November and by early December, our personal supply became the focus of my mother's culinary expertise. We'd cook up batches of rocky road fudge, persimmon pudding, and Italian fruitcakes, all boasting the ubiquitous walnuts, plus apricots, peaches, and pears we had dried during the summer. Perhaps because I had spent one too many summers in the boiling hot cutting fruit shed, or culled one too many green-hulled walnuts, for years I could never eat any of our creations. In fact, I often wondered why everyone raved about our labor intensive, nature-born gifts. "Why don't we just buy people presents from the Sears & Roebuck catalogue like everyone does?" was my constant lament. (The Sears & Roebuck catalogue was the haute retail source in our rural environment.)

In today's cyber speed world, the travails of a farmer seem far removed from living in the big city buzz. It's so easy to go online and with the click of a button, order 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. ... continued on page D6

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