

Published January 30th, 2013

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Love Potions for the Garden

By Cynthia Brian



Claw foot tub becomes a container garden. Photo Cynthia Brian

Thank goodness Valentine's Day is celebrated in February otherwise these could be considered the most miserable 28 days of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. Statistically in our area, the month of February is cold, wet, grey, damp, and dreary, sporadically warmed by welcome surprise eruptions of fragrant narcissus and cautious crocus. Of course if we had no winter, spring would not be so delicious. With optimism as our guide this annum, I've mixed a love potion of ideas to inspire and fan the flames of your February fatigue.

Planning a landscape demands patience yet the wait is worth the struggle. With a cup of hot cocoa in hand, push your pencil from your project, unplug the tech toys, and let your dreams design. Create flowerbeds with a diverse cast of edibles, fragrance, bouquets, creepers, and climbers. Cast offs become playful art, trash turns into treasure, and simple embellishments develop into eye candy for the garden. If you are ready for a romp with romance and an infusion of fab from drab, adopt or adapt any of the Baker's dozen-plus one of Cupid potions.

1. Have your kids flown the coop yet the swing set sways rusting in the side yard? Turn it into a hanging basket

arbor with your favorite fragrant flowers.

2. Is that claw foot tub you pulled out of the remodel taking up space in the garage? Paint it a vibrant hue and fill with your favorite annuals or perennials for a splash of color.

3. Do you only have a patio or balcony and want to plant edibles? A decorative container or even a wine box is enough to get you started. When it comes to food gardening, national trends indicate a growing public interest up from 58 percent in 2011 to 61 percent in 2012. People want to know what they are eating and are finding that fresh is feasible and family friendly.

4. Are your water bills sky high yet your lawn looks dry and brown? Maybe it's time to pull out the grass, spread the gravel, plant succulents, and install eye-catching wine barrels as rain gutter saving devices! Raise your glass to ingenuity!

5. Frigidaire will be happy to know that there is life after oven demise. That 1950s Leave it to Beaver stove/oven combo is reborn as a plant tool shed and potting stand. If only the washtub could talk!

6. Time has run out on the meter and a quarter isn't enough to get the wine press working again. These unique items add a charm and conversation starter to any home exterior. The raccoon hiding behind the spider plants agree.

7. Instead of installing a gate to enter into another garden room, what about using an old door? The creeping ivy adds to the mystery behind the portals.

8. Gazing balls evoke images of magic, séances, and the supernatural. Reflecting the wardrobe of blooming azaleas, the garden sparkles in the dappled sunshine. He loves me, he loves me not ... he loves me.

9. When someone special has died, creating a memory garden to commemorate the life of your loved one helps with the healing. When my beloved Daddy died, I planted a garden with seedlings from the farm he had so carefully tended and added statuary that reflected his journey on this earth.

10. Looking for architecture that serves flying architects? Birdhouses beckon new life to our sanctuaries. Search for unique perches to provide our feathered friends with a love nest worth inhabiting. Our gardens will reap the benefits many times over from their nesting.

11. Small spaces come alive with fun, fanciful furniture. A vintage iron monkey chair shares the stage in an apartment yard with the screen lovers, Gnomeo and Juliet, mooning under a birdbath.

12. What is a garden without a water feature? The sound of a babbling brook or gurgling fountain relaxes and soothes souls overdosed on technology.

13. Put a smile on the faces of your visitors when they encounter your happy tree!

14. If you want to play it safe with fresh Valentine colors that will ignite bright light in your February, pick up a flat of heart-shaped ruby red cyclamen at your favorite nursery or garden center. Pair the red plants with white and you'll have a vibrant display with staying power.

A dull lackluster winter garden turns into second chances and new romances with a little imagination, ingenuity, and a shovel of soil. Lift your spirits and steep your landscape with love potion frivolity. Happy Valentine's

Day!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for February

"Should you shield the canyons from the windstorms, you would not see the beauty of their carvings."
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

January blessed us with several days of sunny weather that piqued our garden instincts reminding us that we must endure the rain if we want to witness the rainbow. My readers in Norway and Alaska write me that they envy our mild Lamorinda winters and wonder why we whine so much over so little. Yes, we are spoiled and I am grateful to live amidst our rolling hills in an area where just about everything grows and the sun shines often. As dreary as February may seem, there is work-a-plenty in the garden. Grab a warm hat, put on your gloves and mud boots, and get outside for energizing exercise. Look on the bright side ... at least we are not shoveling snow!

- DAYDREAM about spring by perusing seed catalogues circling your favorite edibles and ornamentals.
- PLAN your garden by pinning on Pinterest. Find the newest gerbera, begonia, or celosia to share with friends.
- ENROLL in a gardening class at our local community centers.
- ADD passion to your parlor with a bouquet of radiant roses from your local florist.
- PLANT mophead hydrangeas in moist, well-drained soil in a shady location. Add soil sulfur to make soil more acidic to produce blue flowers, add lime (alkaline) if you want pink flowers.
- BUY amaryllis bulbs on sale now. Arrange three in a large container for a spectacular display next year.
- KEEP Valentine bouquets fresher longer by removing all lower leaves from stems and adding a drop of bleach to the water.
- SPARK your children's interest in gardening by giving them seed packets of radishes, peas, and beans to start indoors. Get your school on board too!
- LAST chance to prune roses, crepe myrtle, butterfly bush, wisteria, and fruit trees before buds break.
- GET your blueberry bushes planted in February for bushels of antioxidant fruit next year.
- WASH the leaves of your houseplants with a damp cloth. For fuzzy leaves like African violets, stroke the top with a soft hairbrush to remove dust and grime.
- SOW hardy color spots of pansies, cyclamen, and primroses to liven up the scene. Contrary to popular belief, these plants are perennials in our area so do not pull them out after blooming. Cut back and plant around them to be rewarded with blooms next winter.
- START sweet peas indoors to get a head start on fragrance and beauty.
- ORGANIZE your garden shed, shelf, or garage this month in anticipation of a busy season to come.
- SHARPEN and clean your tools now. Make any repairs or replacements before spring springs.
- DIVIDE bulbs such as snowdrops and plant in other desired areas.
- CUT back deciduous grasses.
- FILL your bird feeders and bird baths weekly to keep our feathered friends in your garden during the cold season.
- READ your garden journal from last February and make note of any changes. Make sure to continue taking photographs.
- COVER birds of paradise and other frost tender plants with sheets or blankets.
- COOK a hearty winter soup with your harvest of cabbage, kale, Swiss chard, and spinach.
- PERFUME your outdoor spaces by including the skyrocketing popularity of fragrant specimens such as dianthus, gardenia, nicotiana, phlox, hyacinth, lilac, iris, and of course, roses.

Be optimistic. There is no failure in the garden. Everything is fertilizer. Love is in the air. Spring is around the bend. Enjoy a warm, heartfelt Valentine's Day.

Happy gardening to you!

(c)2013

Cynthia Brian

The Goddess Gardener

Cynthia@goddessgardener.com

www.goddessgardener.com

925-377-7827

Cynthia is available as a speaker and consultant.



A flat of red cyclamen sparks a flame in every garden.



Smile and the world smiles with you...even trees.



Wine barrel is converted to save rain run off. Photos Cynthia Brian



Add a splash of white to brighten the night skies.



Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA