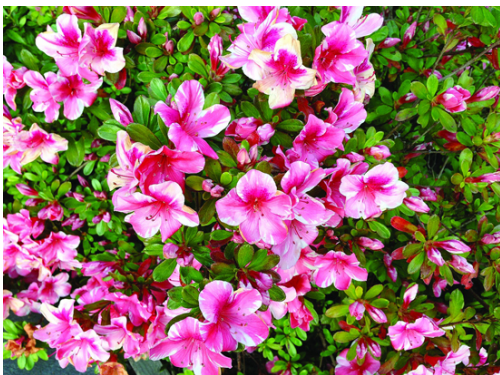


Published May 8th, 2013

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian Mother, May I?

By Cynthia Brian



Pink striped azalea looks like a spring candy cane.
Photos Cynthia Brian

The robin darted from her nest the moment I walked outside. She's been laying four blue eggs either on the wreath on the door or in the vertical hanging basket for the past several years. Today her babies hatched arching their little beaks to receive their first meal.

A few feet away, a doe and her new born fawn leapt over the hedge headed for the hills. The momma has been resting daily under the Meyer lemon tree and may have given birth right here at our house.

All this momma and baby interaction encourages me to drive to our Napa ranch to visit my own nurturing mother. Every time I call she is working in the garden, pulling hoses, planting, weeding, pruning, or feeding her multitude of birds. And every time we speak she fills me in on the baubles blooming beautifully. We compare notes. "You really need to see my garden!" she exclaims. She's right. I do.

Since my computer is in for a hard drive wipe (yikes, worst scenario for a writer/media personality), I jump in the car and head to the ranch. The long winding road to our country abode is filled with potholes, yet I relax instantly as I view our meandering creek, the one we used to swim in, catch pollywogs, and sail homemade rafts when we were kids. The masses of lupines and poppies dotting the hillsides and the mooing cattle whisk me back to my youth. I'm home and home is comforting.

Before I even reach the garden, I smell it. Fragrant purple wisteria and ruby red roses wind through the fences. The vineyards are leafing out, and everything looks so green. Mom's vegetable garden is already planted with a multitude of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, eggplant, and the perennial leeks. A new drip system, installed by my brother, will make it easier for her to keep up with the watering.

"What do you think?" Mom asks as I grab my camera. "Glorious, gorgeous, OMG!" is all I can say as I scan her carefully curated masterpiece of colorful hydrangeas, azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons, clematis, roses, African daisies, tulips, and a multitude of coveted specimens. "Here's a box, a trowel, and a clipper! Let's walk," she says. Mom knows me so well. I can't keep my hands off her plants as I snip, pinch, dig, and admire. What's wonderful about "shopping" in Mom's garden is that, with the exception of the magnificent bougainvillea that dominates one entire side of the 1890s farmhouse, everything will flourish in my Moraga landscape. A garden is to share and my mom is the poster woman of generosity.

"What's that elephant-eared plant with the pink florets called again?" she asks me as we promenade around the property. "Bergenia," I respond, delighted that I can add something to her amazing horticultural repertoire. The bergenia in my garden came from her plantings as did my bearded iris, loquats, magnolias, plums, peaches, grapes, narcissus, pelargonium, Jacobinia, acanthus, and numerous other contributions. She presents me with a few pots of my favorite spring perennial - the "Felix Crousse" peony boasting fragrant large carmine-red double flowers gracing glossy green leaves. They will look magnificent flanking my front door. I am grateful.

We sit on the patio with a glass of wine admiring her cymbidiums with their multiple spires as the finches and hummingbirds flock the feeders. The intoxicating perfume of her jasmine vines and lilac trees permeate the evening air. After plowing the fields, my brother stops by, soon joined by my sister, nieces, and nephews. It's family time in step with nature. We are all green thumbs.

Last year on Mother's Day I presented my mom (whom the grandkids call "Nonie") with "her best gift ever." It was a book of photographs that I had taken of her garden over several years in every season embellished with favorite quotes. She still carries it everywhere with her to show friends and strangers her piece of paradise.

Arriving back in my own Lamorinda heaven, the doe and her fawn greet me without moving from their comfy bedding. The baby robins are asleep in their cozy nest as their momma proudly chirps a lullaby perched on the magnolia branch.

Robert Fulghum may have learned everything in kindergarten, but since I didn't attend kindergarten, I learned everything I needed to know about life in a real garden...my mom's garden. And all I had to do was utter, "Mother, may I?" Thank you, Mom!



Nonie, Cynthia's gardening Mom, sitting in the patio with her containers of cymbidiums and cyclamen.



The jasmine wafting from Nonie's bird tree is intoxicating.



Ceanothus, known as California lilac, French lilac, and wine-hued weigela flank the boxwoods and the brick-lined pool.



Ice blue clematis is a vertical climber. Photos Cynthia Brian



Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for May

*Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand. Mother Teresa

The early April showers did indeed bring May flowers. Gardens are rich in birdsong, new growth, and blooms that are bigger, brighter, and more boisterous than years past. With the record highs of warm weather this May, we need to be diligent in watering, fertilizing, and protecting our homes. Fire season has arrived early. Make sure to walk your perimeters to determine what debris must be discarded. On Mother's Day, give a gift from the garden to the magnificent mom in your life. The sunshine is invigorating so get up, get out, and get going. Put a spring in your step and a song on your lips. It's merry May and time to play. Get thee into the garden to enjoy the new birth of the season.

- HARDEN off the seedlings that you have started indoors by putting them outdoors in a sheltered location for a few hours each day after your Frost-Free Date, before bringing them in at night.

Do this for a week to 10 days, gradually lengthening the time outdoors. This will help your seedlings avoid transplant shock.

- FOLLOW up ground fertilizing of flowers, perennials, vegetables, and fruits with foliar and micro-nutrients at appropriate times during the growing season.

- DOWNLOAD a free Beginner's Guide to Gardening from Google. It's basic yet filled with helpful data. Works on Android devices. For iPhones try the \$2, Garden Tracker.

- EAT the flowers from nasturtiums, roses, arugula, cilantro, thyme, roses, basil, and sage. They add flavor and beauty to many dishes.

- CELEBRATE National Public Gardens Day on May 10 by visiting a public garden, arboretum, or botanical garden. Many are offering free passes for admission.

- ELEVATE any small outdoor space to an attractive natural art form with vertical plantings. Make your own or buy a pre-designed wall planter.

- IMPROVE the biodiversity of your soil ecosystem through mulching and composting. Spring and fall are the ideal times to increase organic matter and the humus content. Adding compost

to your garden reduces the need for chemical fertilizers, allows the soil to hold water well which means less watering.

- PICK up the last of the spent camellia blossoms from your garden to protect your plant for next season.

- PULL out the leaves of your spring bulbs only when they have completely dried and are crackly. When you tug on them, the leaves will come off easily without disturbing the bulb. Remember,

if you pull or cut them while they are still green, necessary nutrients are not sent to the bulb for the next season's bloom.

- QUARANTINE any new plant for a few days before planting to make sure it is pest free.

- CONTROL ant colonies by creating a perimeter of boric acid powder around the garden.

- HAND PICK and destroy all caterpillars. The larvae of moths are voracious eaters and will defoliate a plant in a few days.

- WAIT until soil has been dry for at least a week before watering succulents.

- HARVEST multi-branched stalks of bearded iris in the cool of the morning for longer lasting blooms. Cut stems on an angle and plunge into cool water.

- RAISE herbs such as basil, cilantro, parsley, and sage in pots close to the kitchen for quick snips of flavor.

- TEACH patience and responsibility to children by providing them with their own

private plot or pot to plant something they want to eat or enjoy.

- EXCHANGE seeds of your favorite flowers with a friend or neighbor.

- SWEEP debris from driveways, walkways, steps, and porches to freshen up for spring.

- BRIGHTEN your curb appeal with colorful annuals and perennials including petunias, zinnias, cleome, salvia, dahlias, snapdragons, impatiens, bachelor buttons, and gaura.

- PERFUME the air by planting jasmine, sweet pea, lilac, and citrus trees.

- STOP by the Be the Star You Are!(r) booth at the Moraga Faire to say hello to me on May 11, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. and take home a FREE bag of aromatic homegrown potpourri!

- INCREASE your green intake by planting antioxidant and vitamin rich dinosaur kale, arugula, and purslane. Delicious cooked or in salads.

- SHOWER your Mother, Mother-in-Law, or any cherished woman in your life with extra love on Mother's Day, May 12. She deserves flowers.

Wishing all you marvelous moms a memorable Mother's Day. You are the gardener's of life.

Happy gardening and happy growing to you!

(c)2013

Cynthia Brian

The Goddess Gardener

Cynthia@goddessgardener.com

www.goddessgardener.com

Fragrant purple wisteria winds around the gurgling fountain.



Bearded iris amidst forget-me-nots and woodland hyacinths.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA