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## Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian Garden Gala

By Cynthia Brian



The tall spires of foxglove (*digitalis*) thrive in shade or sun. Plant is toxic, yet beautiful.

enjoy their spoils sitting on my pickets with a red ball in each beak. I had carefully watched the flowers turn to buds, then turn to fruit for the past few months and wasn't about to relinquish my claim to my cherry treasure. Leaning the ladder against the trunk and bending the branches to almost breaking point, I filled my basket with the sweetest as well the greenest cherries, leaving only the top branches for the birds. A garden is to share, after all. The squirrels attacked my two loquat trees, but not before I was able to pluck enough of this luscious Mediterranean delicacy for our own personal pleasure. (FYI: loquats have large pits that will sprout into trees when spit into the garden. That's why I have two trees instead of the one I actually planted!) The deer noticed that the gladioli had sprouted and began their dine-around, therefore I uprooted the corms to replant in my fenced back yard. My bucket was filled to the brim with hundreds of gladioli cormels. Six hours later, I had free sword lilies in all the right places. Picnicking on the patio, we watched two bucks stand on their haunches stretching for the Asian pears. "There is plenty for all," I declared, while everyone at the table enjoyed their acrobatic antics.

Feeling smug that I had outsmarted the gopher, blue jays, crows, squirrels, and deer, I ventured to see what was ripe and ready in my vegetable garden. Before arriving, I snapped a photo of two dragonflies "in flagrante" in my crepe myrtle bush, a sight I had never witnessed. They didn't budge the entire time I was inspecting the herbs. The pilgrimage to my potager revealed an absence of culinary poverty. Artichokes, arugula, sorrel, lettuces, potatoes, radishes, carrots, beets, Swiss Chard, mustard, mints, parsley, cilantro, dandelions, onions, fennel, nasturtiums, kale, thyme, basil, guava blossoms, and many greens were the beginnings of the fresh summer flavors awaiting my table. Dust the dirt off a just dug carrot and you'll understand Cezanne's words about a revolution. There is nothing more tasty than eating what you grow straight from the soil. It's superfood packed with all the vitamins, taste, and heart-health nutrients we all crave and need. Soon I'll be harvesting tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cucumbers, squash, beans, peas, tomatillos, melons, and whatever other seeds I planted or the birds brought in.

Now that summer is upon us, any day or evening is worth celebrating. Arrange a pretty table with bouquets of fuchsia hued carpet roses, get out the croquet mallets and horseshoes, set out the votives, fill the tiki torches with oil, light the fire pit, let the birds sing the tunes and the wildlife provide the entertainment for a stellar summer

"The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution." - Paul Cezanne, French artist, 1839-1906

Entertaining in the summer garden is my favorite manner to gather friends and family for al fresco dining, conversation, and laughter. There is always so much to celebrate in June - end of school, graduations, Father's Day, birthdays, showers, and weddings that sprucing up the end of my springtime yard in anticipation of the summer to come is stimulating and pleasurable. (In truth, the 37 green bins of dried daffodil, tulip, and freesia leaves that I pulled and collected to add to my compost pile was not exactly fun, but it was necessary.)

After power washing and sealing the brick and stone patio, washing all the outdoor furniture, sweeping the cobwebs from crevices, cleaning the barbecue, repairing the nightscaping, filling the fountains and pond, I took an inventory of what's hot and what's not.

My beautiful peonies, camellias, and rhododendrons finished just as my foxgloves, hollyhocks, geraniums, abelia, and pelargoniums exploded into bloom. As the weather warms, the calla lilies are nearing the finish line for the year while the Four O'Clocks and Stargazers are setting blooms. Since the spring bulbs had completed their beauty routine, the garden was in need of perky colorful annuals. I planted dianthus, dahlias, zinnias, lobelia, and salvia to enliven the palette. The isotoma blue star creeper was expanding exponentially on my lawn, much to my delight, although a greedy gopher had moved in. That problem was quickly remedied by putting garlic in the holes. Next it was on to the orchard as I prepped for my nature revelry.

The birds, squirrels, and deer had obviously also decided it was party time. A flock of jays and crows swarmed my Queen Anne cherry tree, each flying off to

supper. Throw some burgers, salmon, or halibut on the grill along with greens, fruit, and veggies, open a bottle of local vino, and invite your loved ones over for a garden fresh feast. Let's get this party started!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for June

To the dull mind all nature is leaden. To the enlightened mind the whole world sparkles and burns. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

The summer season sensually speaks to us of water, fragrance, flowers, fireworks, deck lounging, hammock swinging, sleepovers, swim meets, barbecues, celebrations, camping, concerts, traveling, and eating fresh, fresh, fresh direct from your garden. Whatever you do this June, decide to plant something edible-herbs, vegetables, fruits, or berries. Make iced tea from black currant leaves mixed with fennel, create your unique designer waters with cucumbers, limes, and peaches; delight your guests with a refreshing cold soup of blended melon, mint, and ginger. There is a plethora of abundant varieties to choose from and space is not an issue. Plant, grow, care, harvest, eat, and be healthy. Your enlightened body, mind, and spirit will be grateful to your inner gardener and your world will sparkle and shine.

- MAKE your own potting mix by combining equal parts of compost, good soil, and sand. Add leaf mold plus a small amount of liquid fertilizer.

- GROW Swiss chard, kale, lettuce, cilantro, parsley, and basil in containers with rollers to provide a quick snip for your supper.

- WEED a final time before the hot weather arrives. Weeds suck the moisture from nearby plants.

- BRING butterflies to your landscape with lantana, butterfly bush, and sunflowers. Butterflies have sensory receptors on their feet to help them land on their tasty treats rapidly.

Go a step further and provide a butterfly dwelling on a perch.

- POUR leftover beer in saucers to trap slugs and snails.

- WATER lawns and flowerbeds deeply to encourage strong root growth.

- HARVEST seeds of perennials like pentstemon, calendula, and poppies to spread in other areas where color is needed.

- SUCCESSION planting is the key to a plentiful supply of summer greens including lettuces, arugula, beets, carrots, and radishes. Sow your favorite seeds every three weeks as you consume.

- PREVENT fires by removing debris, dead branches, and refuse from around your home and yard.

- DAZZLE your summer garden by planting dahlias in full sun with good drainage. You'll enjoy blooms until the first frost.

- PROVIDE food, cover, water, and nesting places for birds, butterflies, and bees with nectar-rich plants, host plants, and seed-bearing plants. Your garden can become a popular

wildlife destination ensuring a long blooming season. Plant asters, cosmos, amaranth, echinacea, peppers, eggplant, squash, lavatera, bee balm, zinnia.

- PLANT day lilies (hemerocallis), the main stay of summer gardens for prodigious numbers of flowering stems, heavily loaded with buds, from June to September.

- GIVE your children sunflower seeds to plant. The seeds are large and pop out of the ground quickly, delighting the child within us all. Sunflowers are the essence of summer fun.

- TRIGGER delightful memories with the seductive powers of afternoon/evening fragrant blooms including Angel trumpets, Nicotiana, four o'clocks, evening stock, summer phlox, and evening primrose. To strengthen the scents, water your garden before sunset.

- CUT back leggy perennials and deadhead roses as blooms wither. Save the rose petals to make rose water.

- PACK your garden with summer blooming bulbs including gladioli, lilies, and allium.

- SPREAD seeds of calendula in your potager or vegetable garden to harvest the flavor of "poor man's saffron." Calendula don't transplant well, thus seeding is best.

- EAT organic fruits and vegetables from your garden or farmers' market for a variety of reasons - your own health, the health of the planet, and generally heightened environmental awareness.

- SHORT on space? Plant a container garden of fruits and vegetables. Seed companies have developed plants that are compact in size, yield more, taste great, and feature unique colors and shapes.

- SAVE the monarchs. Plant milkweed, the butterfly's favorite nectar. P.S. A spectacular 3-D movie about the monarchs' odyssey, *The Flight of the Butterflies*, is now showing in 40 IMAX theaters at museums across the country.

- SHAKE the dead leaves from magnolia trees using a sweeping motion with a broom or tall pole. Within days, the large creamy white blossoms explode with pollen attracting the buzzing bees needed for garden pollination.

- ADD a taste of the tropics to your landscape with the pineapple guava shrub. It boasts edible pretty magenta and white striped petals topped with fireworks of cranberry feathered pom poms plus later in the year delicious green fruit great for juice or jam.

- FIRE up the tiki torches, votives, and fire pits to illuminate the summer gatherings.

- WATCH for your plums and apricots to ripen soon. The birds will be the first to your trees so either pick early or net the branches you want to keep.

- EXPLORE the world of bee pollinators and create a garden filled with nectar-rich flowers.

- CONGRATULATIONS to all our graduates. Encourage them to become green thumbs by gifting a peace lily to keep their dorm room air fresh. (These spathiphyllum are resilient indoor plants that are hard to kill!)



- THANKS to all the great men who are shaping the lives of our children with their love and dedication. Happy Father's Day! We lift our rakes to you.

Happy gardening and happy growing to you!

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Queen Anne cherries are coveted by both birds and Cynthia Brian. Photos Cynthia Brian



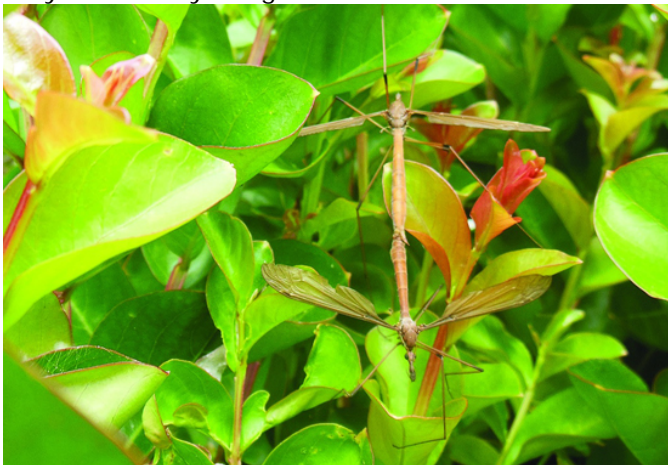
Invite butterflies to your garden by adding a butterfly abode to your landscape.



A basket of pelargoniums hangs from a pole to create a ball of fiery sparkle.



Lacy oak leaf hydrangeas thrive in the mottled shade.



Nature calls - a rare sight - dragon flies mating on a crepe myrtle.





Carpet roses, cypress trees, and grasses make great cut bouquets for any gala gathering.



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