

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for July

"Nature exists to be enjoyed, not controlled." – Alan Cohen

We are all witness to the bizarre weather patterns that our planet has experienced in the past few months. As much as we want to be kings of the world, the reality is that Mother Nature is always in charge. While we can do our part to be eco-friendly and sustainable, we also need to prepare our homes, gardens, families, and pets for the unexpected. July is a wonderful time to get up, get out, and get going on a local level whether it be a short jaunt around the neighborhood or a pool party in the backyard. Get in touch with what we have. Be a tourist in your own town. Whatever you do, spend as much time as possible soaking up the nurture of nature. As of a friend of mine exclaimed, "Be it ever so brief, a time in the garden soothes your soul as a sensual experience, and a summer gift."

- **UNPLUG** from electronic devices for at least 20 minutes per day five days a week and walk in nature. A study of hikers found that they scored 50 percent better on creativity test after spending four days in nature disconnected.
- **CURSED** with a black thumb, check out the Bluetooth-enabled, low-energy, smart sensor that is placed in the soil of a potted plant to beam real-time data of fertilizer, PH levels, sunlight, humidity, and temperatures to an app on your smartphone. Visit www.parrot.com.
- **SHADE** your hydrangeas or other shade-loving plants by adding concrete into a partially buried terracotta pot to create an umbrella holder. (Submitted by reader Candy Kattenburg)
- **PICNIC** with produce from your garden or farmer's market after a hike at the Lafayette Reservoir or other local trails.
- **ADD** drama to a drab arrangement with the dangling seed heads of amaranths. In a vase the blooms last 10-14 days. Hang bunches upside down to dry.
- **PREPARE** for fall color by planting the shrubs of barberry, cotoneaster, nandina, and pyracantha or add a dwarf Japanese maple to a container.
- **START** thinking about what bulbs you want for next spring. Catalogues are already filled with the newest attractions and will be in nurseries by September. My favorites are the easy-to-grow perennial bulbs like narcissus, wood hyacinth, and freesia, which spread and return year after year in our mild climate.
- **KEEP** a bottle of hydrogen peroxide in your gardening kit. When you get pricked by a bramble or cut by a branch, a quick clean up is in order. And don't forget to have your tetanus shot every 10 years.
- **STAKE** tomatoes and tall perennials before they tumble.
- **REDUCE** your mosquito population by emptying any vessel with even a few drops of water. If you have a pond, call Vector Control for free mosquito fish, (925) 685-9301. Ask for Felipe.
- **CLEAR** dry grasses, brush, wood, and other flammable materials as far from your home as possible. Fire season is raging this year.
- **CONTINUE** the cornucopia of fresh produce through succession planting. Plant pole beans where you had broccoli, peppers where kale grew, replace spinach with eggplant. In addition, every three weeks, sow more seeds of arugula, beets, lettuce, carrots, radishes, edamame, and whatever you consume the most.
- **RAISE** the red, white, and blue not only on the Fourth of July. Everyday is Independence Day for those of us fortunate to live in America. Plant a patch of red begonias, white candytuft, and blue salvia in honor of our freedom.
- **ENSURE** a flush of bloom past Labor Day by planting colorful annuals of cosmos, zinnia, nasturtiums, marigold, and sunflower.
- **PINCH** the tops of herbs to keep them from bolting or going to seed. The flowers are edible, flavorful, and filled with vitamins.
- **MOW** your lawns properly by raising the blades as the weather warms to encourage deeper roots and green grass.
- **MULCH** around your shrubs and bushes with a layer of wood chips or shredded bark to conserve water and keep the soil cooler. In your veggie garden, use straw or decomposed leaves as they decompose faster.
- **WASH** clothes and shower after working in the yard or hiking in the hills. Check yourself for ticks and fleas.
- **KEEP** your houseplants content and flourishing by watering deeply when the soil is 20 percent dry to the touch. Make sure they have plenty of light, but not direct scorching sunlight. Scan for bugs and if found, spray outside with organic insecticide.
- **MUDDLE** mint and whip up a refreshing summer cocktail or infuse basil in your favorite beverage.
- **WAVE** at your favorite writers and publishers from the Lamorinda Weekly as they march in the Orinda Fourth of July Parade.

Have a blast of a day on the Fourth of July and may the entire month be filled with fireworks, fun, family, friends, and frivolity. Salute the summer season.

Happy gardening and happy growing to you!

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The Goddess Gardener

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