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## Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian Naked Ladies Save the Day!

By Cynthia Brian



Close up of the Magic Lily Photo Cynthia Brian

"To see you naked is to recall the Earth." Federico Lorca Garcia, Spanish Poet

To say that I was depressed belied my true emotions. I was despondent, discouraged, and utterly forlorn. Only 10 days remained until the tropical honeymoon party I was throwing for my daughter and her fiance and thanks to the rampaging deer destroyers, my backyard was trampled, pillaged, and plundered. In less than 18 days, the battalion of bucks bounding over backyard boundaries had ransacked several moons of careful tending to my cornucopia of curated color. Anything that bloomed or boasted greenery had been snapped, crackled, and popped. Those virulent males had used their antlers as battering rams, ripping off limbs, bark, and breaking in half heirloom bushes of roses two decades old.

Despair set in, despite the numerous suggestions offered by dedicated readers (see next page). My final solution was to erect higher fences. Finally, the fracas was finished, yet my landscape hardly invited a garden gathering.

Then I saw them.

Tiny grey bonnets reached for the sunlight. One by one the resplendent Naked Ladies emerged with bare legs and beautiful pink throats until hundreds danced in the breeze awaiting my approval. "Art can never exist without naked beauty," wrote William Blake, and nature was painting. It was as if their appearance signaled other plants to follow suit: the crepe myrtles burst into bloom, purple beans climbed the trellis, zucchini blossoms erupted, and light lavender fluff florets developed on the spearmint. I was so overjoyed to welcome this renaissance that I danced a jig. Because the bulbs had no foliage for months, I had completely overlooked their turtlebacks and had forgotten that this was the month that favored their presence.

As native South Africans, Naked Ladies go by many names-Magic Lilies, Amaryllis Belladonna, Belladonna Lily, Pink Ladies, even, Madonna lily. Whatever their name, they are certainly mystical with green spiky foliage that resembles agapanthus emerging in late winter, dying back by June, followed by long elegant leafless stalks highlighted by pure pink flower heads in late summer. Plant them anywhere you have deer invaders as deer won't eat them. Part of the Amaryllis family, they are toxic if ingested. Obviously warn children and keep pets from nibbling. They love full sun, tolerate a multitude of soil types, and don't drink much water. A single bulb multiplies quickly into many. Plant bulbs about three to four inches deep with their necks above ground and at least a foot apart. When they bloom, their two to three foot naked stems sway in the wind. Their sexy name derives from the fact that when they do bloom, not a trace of foliage is on the plant. Naked Ladies make terrific cut flowers and I used them throughout my decor to great advantage. As an added bonus, the hummingbirds flock to their fragrant funnels.

Thanks to the boisterous and beautiful Naked Ladies, my garden party was a splendid success. After guests departed I sat on my deck gazing at the hillside. Sometimes I believe I live inside a Disney movie, the forest of Bambi, to be precise. Two mother deer with their fawns grazed on the remaining fallen plums, a young buck stood on his haunches reaching for the still green persimmons, cotton-tails joined the group foraging for leftovers as squirrels scampered to and from the apple trees. A flock of turkey hens flew into my Asian pear tree and began knocking the fruit down to their young poults. That was the end. I yelled: "Enough - the party is over!" The wild bunch stayed behind the newly erected higher fence line and no one bothered my precious Madonnas. As soon as they are finished parading their pretties, I will be dividing the clumps to fill my barren orchards. Perhaps I have discovered the ultimate plant predator proof product.

You can never underestimate the power of a woman, especially a Naked Lady.

Comments from last month's "What We'll Do for a Buck!"

Thank you to the numerous readers who took the time to email me suggestions to arrest the plant plundering by the marauding bucks. From the number of emails I received, it's obvious that the wildlife is wreaking havoc on many of our landscapes and gardeners are trying everything possible. Below is a smattering of fun and funny notes that I received:

"Someday, we'll have to revert to buck shot guns!" - Marcia

"Those varmints are mowing my plants. My dog has managed to exit. I am considering a higher fence. This might make an eagerly awaited Ph.D. thesis at some university school of forestry...?" - Bob

"Deer don't confront whirlygigs. The WGs move with the wind during the daytime or in the middle of the night and catch them unprepared. Scares them." - Lynn

"My buddies and I attempted to mark our territory along all our fence lines. Wish I could tell you it worked, but the bucks just added their more powerful piss." - Mark

"I found 'mountain lion urine' online at [www.predatorpee.com](http://www.predatorpee.com). It hasn't deterred deer yet, but I sure would like to know how they gather that stuff!" - Irene

### Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for September

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." Chinese Proverb

The kids are back in school, we are packing lunches, and our vegetable gardens are overflowing with nutrient rich edibles. It's fall harvest and a great time to get the entire family involved in picking and planting fresh fruits and vegetables for meal preparation. Kids adopt the patterns of parents, thus, we need to be great examples of healthy dining. In the coming weeks, crops, like cabbages, broccoli, brussels sprouts, carrots, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, peas, radishes, salad greens, scallions, spinach, and Swiss chard can be planted. They actually prefer the growing conditions that late summer and early fall offer and taste better when grown in cooler temperatures. Autumn is filled with gardening chores. What better way to enjoy the dog days of sunshine and color!

- PLANT trees and shrubs throughout the next two months. For colorful fall foliage, visit your nursery to examine the trees that would look best in your landscape. Ask for growing advice.
- CUT peonies stalks to within two inches above the ground level and discard all felled cuttings (they are not good for compost).
- SHEAR back leggy petunias, lobelia, and other annuals to keep them blooming until frost.
- ORDER new varieties of spring bulbs (tulips, hyacinths, narcissus, scilla, crocus) from your favorite catalogues that you won't find in local nurseries.
- FERTILIZE budding plants.
- PRUNE berry bushes once the harvest is complete.
- PROTECT your home from wildfires by creating defensible space around your property. Fire season extends through November. Make sure to clear brush, weeds, flammable landscaping under eaves, leaves from gutters, and tree limbs near the house.
- CLEAN UP is essential around the yard as leaves begin to fall and perennials die back. Get out the rake and broom for a good work out.
- CHECK out new favorite fall planting perennials (Echinacea, ornamental grasses, peonies, hydrangeas).
- TRANSPLANT Naked Lady bulbs in fall right after blooms fade. Divide with a spade and plant bulbs at the surface. It could take two years before they sprout their pretty heads, but you will get the deep green strap-like foliage in late winter/early spring.
- HARVEST beans, tomatoes, beets, peppers, zucchini, cucumbers, pears, apples, corn, leeks, and other edibles.
- TOP cilantro to keep it from bolting, or gather the seeds of coriander if your plant has already dried as well as those from fennel plants.
- RAKE any fallen fruit from trees to keep disease and deer at bay.
- PAY close attention to soil fertility when planting year round else your garden won't flourish. Always supply new beds with fresh nutrients of compost and other organic soil amendments.
- WATER regularly until winter arrives. September and October can be the hottest and driest months of the year in our region.
- COOK elderberries before eating. They do make a wonderful syrup or jelly.
- THINK ahead to winter gardening. If you plan on growing lettuces or delicate crops, consider floating row covers, cold frames, or covered hoop tunnels to protect your plants from frost. Rapid temperature changes are damaging.
- VISIT the Be the Star You Are!(r) booth sponsored by Lamorinda Weekly at the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival on Saturday, Sept. 28 from 10 to 4 p.m. to meet me, our Teen Scene writers, and pick up a packet of FREE potpourri. My autographed books will be available for sale benefiting charity. [http://www.btsya.com/events\\_calendar.html](http://www.btsya.com/events_calendar.html)
- CALCULATE fall planting with this easy guide: [http://www.johnnyseeds.com/t-Summer\\_Plant\\_Fall\\_Harvest.aspx?source=Home\\_Slide2\\_082013](http://www.johnnyseeds.com/t-Summer_Plant_Fall_Harvest.aspx?source=Home_Slide2_082013) - vegetables
- PHOTOGRAPH your September garden to remember for next season. My Naked Ladies surprised and delighted me and I now have lots of photographs of their graceful legs.

See you at the Pear and Wine Festival. Enjoy the final days of summer and the advent of autumn. Life is precious, school is in session, driving carefully!

Happy Gardening and Growing to you!

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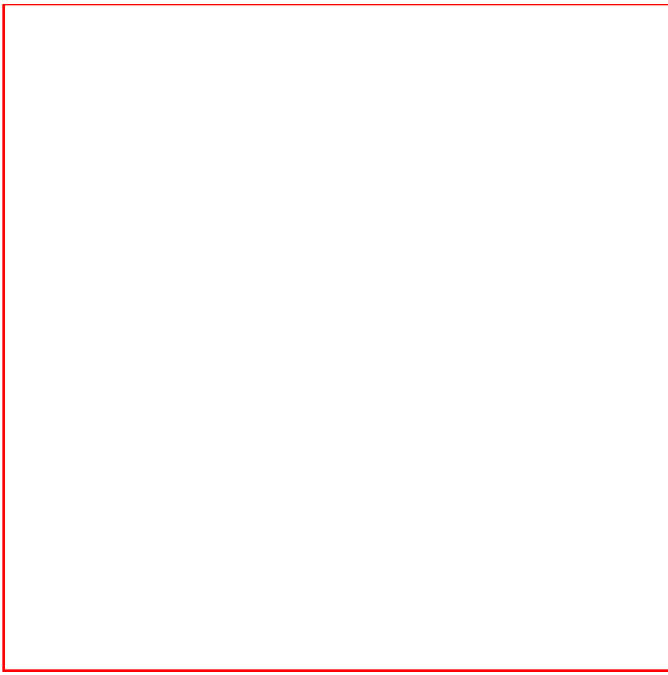


Hurray for the parade of leggy Naked Ladies dancing in the beds of violet spearmint flanked by the lavender crepe myrtles.



Grapes, missed by the deer, are beginning to show color on the arbor. Photos Cynthia Brian

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