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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian The Wild Bunch

By Cynthia Brian



Big leafed plants such as philodendron add drama to an urn when combined with roses, palm fronds, feathery plumes, and splashes of color. Photos Cynthia Brian

under water as tap water sources may contain fluoride, which is injurious to a variety of cut flowers such as gerbera and freesia.

- Cut stems on the diagonal to provide the bloom with the greatest amount of surface area exposed to water. Relatively little water is absorbed through the walls of the stems.

- Add a drop of bleach to cold water to deter bacteria.
- Remove all thorns from roses with a knife clipper, or thorn remover.
- Remove all leaves below water level to prevent rot.
- For soft-stemmed flowers like calla lilies or Star of Bethlehem, submerge stems only in a small amount of water.

- For woody stems such as Protea, fill the vase to 8 inches or more.

- Pull or cut the stamen out of lilies. The bloom will last longer and you won't have to worry about the yellow stamen staining clothing or furnishings.

- All flowers release ethylene gas. Ripening fruit and damaged flowers result in a significant increase of the concentration of the gas, causing arrangements to deteriorate more quickly. Remove dead or aging petals, keep flowers away from fruit, and ventilate the room. Don't store bouquets in a refrigerator with apples or other fruit.

- The waxier the leaf, the longer the plant will live in or out of water. Magnolia leaves are a great choice for long

lasting shiny green foliage.

- Line clear vases with grasses or big leaves to mask murky water and messy stems. Razor, lemon, or bear grass don't decompose rapidly and look exotic. For big leaf lining, use magnolia, birds of paradise, tea, or banana.

- Opaque containers compliment without competing.

- Mimic nature with an asymmetrical composition. Vary the height, depth, and length of your elements.

- Think seasonal and use texture, fragrance, and shapes to keep it interesting. Mix and match delicate purple sweet pea tendrils with celery hued sculptural reeds, or carrot colored Japanese lantern pods with large sunset dahlias.

"Life is the flower for which love is the honey." - Victor Hugo

Have you ever looked upon a glorious floral arrangement or loosely arranged bouquet and wished that you could enjoy similar beauty without the hefty price tag? In this era of celebrating the "Do It Yourself" creativity that resides within us all, I want to encourage you to step outside with a pair of shears and tap into your inner florist. If you don't have a garden, buy bunches of greens and flowers at the flower market to create your personalized design. Don't be tempted to buy a bouquet and plop it in a vase. Be original, add flair, go wild. The plethora of fall leaves, berries, seedpods, feathery plumes, vines, and wild grasses lend themselves to designing dazzling garlands, holiday themed topiaries, romantic wreaths, and exquisite floral centerpieces. All that is required is a bit of imagination and plenty of chutzpah.

To be successful, use innovative combinations of foliage, flowers, and wispy elements. Fruit, vegetables, herbs, succulents, and even weeds add appeal to displays. Urns, bottles, flutes, boots, pitchers, or any vessel that holds water can become an attractive base vase. Choose a color scheme. Do you want a boisterous mix or monochromatic spray? Depending on the occasion and the final location placement, the arrangement can be tall, low, rambling, cascading, lush, simple, or fancy. For best results, allow flower stems to soak for 24 hours in 8 to 10 inches of water after cutting before creating your masterpiece.

Trade Tricks and Tips

- Pick flowers early in the morning as water content is highest while the temperatures are cooler.

- Choose buds that are tight to ensure longer post harvest life.

- If you bought your flowers and greens, wash the stems under running water before cutting. Do not trim

- Build a foundation with foliage, add flowers, wisps and welcome whimsy. Mint, feathery fountain grass, ferns, and climbing vines can spill while organic treasures like acorns, shells, pinecones, feathers, or sliced limes will thrill. Keep turning your vase to view the arrangement on all sides.

- For wide mouth containers, use florist foam as a base, make a grid with clear tape or use curly willow to anchor your flowers.

- Design a dramatic low centerpiece by cutting large flowers very short and arranging in unexpected ways. Combine the heads of roses with succulents or place just the sunny face of big sunflower in a small vase.

- Change water daily or refill water as needed.

- When making bridal bouquets or posies, hold the flowers in one hand and start with the greenery. Thread in new specimens creating a spiral. Keep twisting until the desired look is achieved. Use tape or a rubber band to hold in place and cover with ribbon or fabric.

Mechanics of Keeping Bouquets and Posies Fresh

- As soon as bouquet or posie is complete, put the ends of the bouquet stems in water without allowing any ribbon or trim to get wet.

- Spray the blooms with a light spritz of water.

- Keep bouquet upright in a cool place and if overnight storage is necessary, refrigerate. Make sure to remove fruit from the fridge before placing bouquet inside and warn your friends and family, "Do Not Disturb!"

Start with simple projects to boost confidence. In a clean, empty wine or olive oil bottle, combine three stems of purple sage, razor grass, and native birdseed plumes with a single rose. For certain creations, a container isn't necessary. Mingle dried flowers with living ones, such as purple artichokes with red pyracantha berries and golden liquid amber branches, no water necessary! Pile gourds and pumpkins on a bale of hay for an entryway greeting, or twigs of autumn painted pistache with the aqua and pink fruit attached for a fanciful arch design.

Whether you favor designs that are edgy, opulent, minimalistic, country, urban, or traditional, marry Mother Nature's bounty with your human ability to craft original elegance utilizing her organic elements. Show your love by walking on the wild side to save money, highlight your home with floral focal points, and reserve the bragging rights to "I did this myself!"



A beautiful bridesmaid bouquet of loosely arranged and hand-tied magenta lilies, stargazer lilies, fuchsia colored roses, Russian sage, narcissus, freesia, and bear grass are adorned with a grape cluster.



A lovely loose mixture of the best of fall flowers including dahlia, zinnia, hydrangea, allium, eucalyptus leaves, and agastache.



A country feel using well worn cowboy boots filled with pistachio berries, roses, baby pomegranates, and amber crepe myrtles.



Don't be afraid of color. Orange protea complements the neon pink dahlias, peach roses, and pink stock with wisps of asparagus ferns.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for November

"I don't feel like spring. I feel like a warm red autumn." - Marilyn Monroe

Are you falling for fall? For a few weeks the leaves on the trees are ablaze with their fiery finery in crimson, gold, burnt umber, and copper. The air is crisp and clean. The squirrels are busy storing acorns and nuts, the turkeys parading across our landscapes are plump, and, as we wrap a cozy scarf around our necks, we harvest the last of our year's produce. Narcissi have begun to pop their fragrant heads allowing us to perfume our interior spaces. The holiday season is on the horizon where we'll gather around the hearth with dear friends and family. But before the festivities begin, we have much to do to prepare our gardens for a long winter's sleep.

- STORE potatoes for winter consumption by culling any damaged tubers, then nestling the good spuds in ventilated bins, bushel baskets, or root storage boxes. Cover with newspaper to eliminate all light and keep the temperature at 35-45 degrees. Toss out green potatoes as they are inedible.
- WASH and cover or store patio furniture, especially pads and hammocks.
- RAKE fallen leaves and clean areas that could be hiding places for snails and slugs.
- ADD ornamental grasses as late season plantings with pretty spikes that add interest through winter. Suggestions are fountain grass, maiden grass, and switch grass.
- MULCH hillsides to prevent erosion and runoff as well as protect plants from frost.
- RECYCLE plastic pots by bringing them back to your local nursery or donating the containers to schools, Master Gardener groups, or horticultural societies to be used for plant sales.
- GATHER guavas that drop. It's best to put a tarp on the ground to collect the fallen fruit. Ripen indoors until skin is yellow, then refrigerate. Eat. Dehydrate to make fruit leather.
- NATURALIZE narcissi as soon as the ground temperature chills to around 60 degrees. Plant early, mid, and late bulbs for months of spring blooms in a variety of colors.
- PLANT other bulbs November through January including ranuncula, Dutch iris, anemone, crocus, and scilla. By staggering the planting dates, you'll enjoy a longer display of blooms.
- REMOVE and destroy any garden debris that could bring overwintering insects and diseases that cause rot.
- SOW seeds for early spring bloomers such as larkspur, sweet peas, lupines, and California poppies.
- CUT back stalks of iris to six inches from the ground which tidies the garden and reduces the surface space where the fungus leaf spot may develop with the rains.
- PROTECT container frost tender plants such as Birds of Paradise by moving close to house or covering with blankets or plastic.
- CREATE a wildlife habitat sheltered from the elements with plants that provide nourishment for birds, butterflies, and bees.
- FILL birdfeeders and sanitize birdhouses.
- SET out transplants of Iceland poppies, pansies, sweet alyssum, and kale while soil is still warm.
- HARVEST gourds and pumpkins to decorate your Thanksgiving table. The flesh from fresh pumpkins makes delicious pies, soups, sauces, and cookies.
- SEED your winter vegetable garden with radishes, cabbage, arugula, lettuces, bok choy, beets, garlic, onions, and mache.
- ADD structure, seasonal interest, and fragrance to your property with shrubs such as spicy viburnum, miniature lilac, long-blooming hydrangea, and the fruiting holly, winterberry.
- SHOW your four-legged friends some love with a shallow water garden or a ground-level fountain that bubbles fresh, running water.
- BRING color into your flowerbeds with edible multi-hued kale and lacy Italian parsley.
- MARVEL at the wild turkeys running at up to 25 miles per hour and reaching speeds of 55 miles per hour in flight. No wonder these garden visitors are not the main course on our Thanksgiving tables!

Wishing you a month of grace and gratitude. Enjoy a glorious Thanksgiving.
Happy Gardening and happy growing to you!

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