



# Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for February

*"To me every hour of the day and night is an unspeakably perfect miracle." – Walt Whitman*

By Cynthia Brian

Despite Valentine's Day, familial birthdays, and President Day holidays, the second month of the year is notoriously my least favorite on the calendar because of wintery weather. This year, however, sunshine has been the mainstay for weeks and now I find myself preoccupied with the looming drought.

A few days ago on the morning of my mother's birthday, minutes before she left to celebrate her big day at a luncheon, we were on the phone lamenting the lack of water and the dire forecast for our newly planted vineyards. Two miles from our farm, a laborer's truck slammed into her at full speed. Her car flipped, hit a tree, and rolled into a ditch. Both vehicles were totaled. It was a miracle that everyone survived the collision with only minor cuts and bruises.

At that moment, we rejoiced for the lack of rain else that creek might have been rushing and the outcome of the accident may have differed. Although sore, my mom was back digging in her garden the next day, despite stitches in her arm and wearing a sling. Life is precious and it's important to appreciate every second. Rain, shine, freeze, or drought, we are all in the circle of life together. February is our reminder of the importance of uttering "I love you" often.

- **RE-THINK** your garden for the year by planning for drought and fire resistant plants. Sage, lavender, ice plant, bulbs, natives, and succulents will add beauty, fragrance, and form with little water.
- **REFRAIN** from pruning any freeze damaged plants. Wait until all danger has passed, usually the end of March.
- **SPRAY** fruit trees and roses with a final dose of horticultural oil mixed with water. The oil kills most mites, insect eggs, scale, and insects.
- **REMOVE** up to 87 percent of household pollutants by adding houseplants to your interior spaces as air filters. Plants pump life giving oxygen and moisture through their breathing. Consider fuss free Chinese evergreen, sansevieria (aka snake plant), or a desktop sago palm, all tolerant of low light and dry conditions.
- **EMBRACE** the tangy flavor of kumquats by planting a small tree in a large container by your kitchen. Bright shiny leaves with a citrus fragrance and tiny fruit that taste like a cross between sour limes and tangerines await. Kumquats are an exotic addition to mixed drinks and pies.
- **ADMIRE** the structure and architecture of your trees, both deciduous and evergreen, surrounding your property. When you get up close and personal, you'll find beauty in their winter wardrobes.
- **VISIT** the UC Botanical Gardens in Berkeley, the third largest botanical garden in the United States with its well-labeled collection of over 12,000 taxa covering 30 acres, including many endangered species. Check out <http://botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu/> for information on special events.
- **CONSERVE** water by using gray water to irrigate potted plants. Unless we get rainfall soon, California will initiate mandatory rationing as opposed to the 20 percent voluntary savings.
- **BRIGHTEN** the garden with bergenia. Even after a freeze, bergenia shoots up pretty pink blossoms.

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*To add zest to drinks and color to your patio, plant a pot of kumquats.*

*Photos Cynthia Brian*



*Cut a few branches of budding flowering quince and enjoy the unfurling.*