

Published August 27th, 2014

## Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for September

By Cynthia Brian



Fill a vase with orange and yellow gerbera, grape leaves, and asparagus ferns to brighten your autumn kitchen. Photos Cynthia Brian

"Count the garden by the flowers, never by the leaves that fall." ~ Source unknown

Summer is winding down and autumn is fast approaching. For gardeners, it's a time for deadheading our perennials to keep them flowering until the first frost. September is the time to determine if you want to plant a fall vegetable garden to provide fresh vegetables throughout the colder season without the headaches of weeds, pests, and water conservation. This month is also the time to plant a cover crop to enrich tired soils with vital organic matter, adding nitrogen while protecting the bare ground from erosion. Cover crops suppress weeds and improve the overall structure and water retention capacity of soil. Water conservation is an ongoing challenge.

Scientists have now changed their prediction of an El Niño this winter from an 80 percent chance to less than 60 percent. Even if we do get substantial precipitation, drought conditions will continue to prevail. Keep water awareness in mind when

planting this fall and choose drought resistant species whenever possible. Ornamental grasses take center stage as they sway in the wind with their feathery fronds offering texture and beauty with minimal water requirements.

**PLANT** a cover crop of fava beans. This giant vetch can easily reach 4 feet tall. It is grown both for its edible beans and as a soil-building cover crop planted in late summer, then overwintered and tilled under in spring before planting.

**VISIT** the National Heirloom Exposition with hundreds of farmers, "The World's Largest Pure Food Fair," Sept. 9-11 in Santa Rosa. [www.theheirloomexpo.com](http://www.theheirloomexpo.com)

**SHOP** for produce in season. If you don't grow your own, buy locally grown at farmers' markets.

**FREEZE**, pickle, or dry the extra produce from your garden, including herbs. Whip up a pesto paste with cilantro, basil, fennel, sage, and thyme, put into ice cube trays, save in freezer bags for whenever you want a quick and delicious sauce. Presto pesto!

**GREEN** up your lawns by adding sugar chelated liquid iron during the hot weather. It absorbs quickly while building chlorophyll without promoting excessive growth or the need for extra water.

**DIG** up your potato crop. Spread on newspaper to dry for three hours before storing in a dark, cool place. Make sure to store only undamaged, disease free tubers, or your whole crop will spoil.

**RAISE** pumpkins and squash off the ground by placing a piece of wood underneath to prevent rotting.

**PLANT** garlic bulbs, onions, parsley, snap peas, and arugula while soil is warm and sunshine is still abundant.

**TIDY** the garden by cleaning up crops that have finished their cycle.

**RAKE** falling leaves to add to your compost pile.

**DEADHEAD** annuals and perennials to extend their autumn color.

**CUT** fall blooming gerberas for indoor arrangements. Mix with grape leaves and asparagus ferns for a natural look.

**ENJOY** the bright blooms of the crepe myrtle in shades of florescent pink, purple, violet, and

white. Their leaves will bring fall color next month.

FIX leaks! Buy new hoses and check your irrigation system monthly.

DIVIDE perennials. Move to other places in your garden and share with friends.

PRE-COOL your body before working in the garden by drinking a big glass of water with ice to ward off heat-induced fatigue.

CLEAR pond weeds if you have a pond and keep leaves out of the water.

DIRECT SOW lettuce, mache, arugula, and other greens to enjoy fresh salads through the autumn.

START kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage. Did you know that these brassicas originated from heritage seeds of wild mustard?

ATTEND the Vermicomposting and Bin Building Workshop from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Sept. 6 at the Civic Park Community Center in downtown Walnut Creek. All instruction, bin materials, and worms included; \$20 per household, 25 household max capacity. CCCSWA service area residents only. [www.wastediversion.org](http://www.wastediversion.org).

EXPAND your shade garden by planting one of the new varieties of hydrangeas. Bloom colors range from lime green, to blue, fuchsia, pink, white, multi-hued, and aging to red. Sizes vary from a few feet in height and width to 8 feet or more.

PICK up free seeds, potpourri, and garden book marks at the Be the Star You Are!(r) booth at the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival between 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 27. Participate in the story game and say hello to yours truly. Sponsored by Lamorinda Weekly and Napa Valley Wealth Management.

BUY spring bulbs. Tulips need to be refrigerated for a month before planting.

FILL gaps in your landscape with autumn flowering plants including colorful chrysanthemums, pansies, and asters.

ADD clover to lawns to supply nutrients to the soil, help with water retention, resist damage from pet urine, and fix the nitrogen needs. Clover remains green even when grass turns brown. As an added bonus, pretty pinkish white flowers poke through the drought tolerant foliage.

School is back in session. Drive carefully. Enjoy the final days of exuberant blooming flowers as summer fades into autumn and the trees begin their wardrobe change.

Happy gardening and happy growing!  
Cynthia Brian

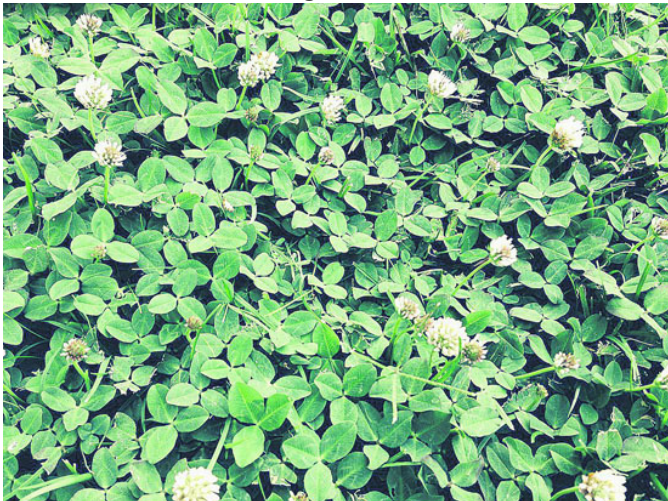
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Cynthia Brian  
The Goddess Gardener  
Starstyle(r) Productions, llc  
[Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com)  
[www.GoddessGardener.com](http://www.GoddessGardener.com)  
925-377-STAR

I am available as a speaker, designer, and consultant.





Kangaroo paw is available in a variety colors. It's drought and deer tolerant with long lasting conversation inducing flowers.



Throw clover seeds in the lawn to enrich the soil.



Bees are still working hard at pollinating. This bee feeds on a colorful zinnia.





Add lantana to cascade over a retaining wall to soften the pathway.



There is nothing tastier than tomatoes straight off the vine.



Cynthia Brian

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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