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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Bare-root roses are now available in nurseries and garden centers.

Part 1

Memories

Since I grew up on a 360-acre farm where we grew a great variety of organic fruits, vegetables, and herbs as well as a couple of acres of flowers, my fondest memories all have something to do with being in the dirt. I'll never forget the winter when my mom caught me picking her prized camellias. As she shouted and scolded, my devoted dog jumped between us growling at her. I learned the lesson that it was not okay to pluck flowers in any garden without permission, even if the bouquet I was picking was for my mother. She learned that our dog protected the kids first, even from our parents. Raising my own children, I wanted to give them opportunities that would trigger remembrances, whether it was harvesting the first beans, or burying a beloved pet. I still think about collecting blackberries for summer breakfasts at my grandparents' horse barn, learning to drive the jalopy in the orchard, and saving hollyhock seeds at Nonie's. A lifetime of fond memories grows in the garden.

Food

Growing your own food is the healthiest way to live. There is nothing better than eating a fresh, ripe tomato right off the vine. Oranges, grapes, apples, tangerines, cherries ... everything is sweeter and tastier when you grow it yourself. We amend our soil so we know our harvests provide nutrients and health benefits from ground to table. By learning what grows well in each season, a gardener has a yearlong produce department right outside the door.

Exercise

Extended sitting has become the killer disease du jour. Gardeners get off the couch, unplug from the computer, and move outside in the fresh air. Digging, raking, hauling, lifting, planting, mowing, and hoeing burns calories. In fact, one hour of weeding burns approximately 300 calories for women and 400 for men, which is the same amount as moderate walking or cycling. Forty-five minutes of gardening equals 30 minutes of aerobics. Carrying buckets of stones, bricks, or water strengthens our muscles. We are cross training at every age.

Beauty

Gardeners are artists. Plants are the paint and our grounds are the canvas. Our unique

In the blustery cold of post holiday days, I found myself wandering my landscape bundled against the chill in a warm down jacket, faux fur hood, and two pairs of gloves. The winds were intense. Tree limbs littered the driveway as entire branches arched toward the ground. The gale reddened my eyes, and although nothing in the garden demanded my immediate attention, I was determined to work outside.

In the midst of the storm, I asked myself, "Why do I love gardening so much?" As I raked the rubble, and pulled the errant weeds, a river of answers flooded my brain. After asking friends, family, and strangers the same question, it became obvious that although we all have our individual reasons, gardening gets into our blood and contributes to our unique personalities, passions, and preferences.

Here are reasons we choose to be gardeners:

creative styles offer solace to the senses. There is wonder and magic in the natural world and gardeners express themselves to surprise and delight. Many Lamorindans own second homes in the Sierras. The beauty of their snow-laden winter wonderland rivals the burst of May flora after the melt. The first signs of crocus and daffodils in January lift spirits while the perfume of roses and bright hues of summer perennials remind us that the outdoors are for entertaining.

Pride

How exciting it is to grow a spectacular peach or a beautiful dinner plate dahlia! We feel a sense of accomplishment, of a job well done, something tangible that we manifested through our personalized manual labor. Being in the age of technology and big business, many of us don't use the motor skills in our work life that we use in the garden. We are proud of our calloused hands and muddy boots.

Connections

Not only do we feel a soulful connection with our Mother Earth, but we gain a better understanding of ourselves and of others. No matter what level we are in our gardening adventure, we connect and communicate with one another about our trials, triumphs, and hurdles. Many join garden clubs or become members of a community garden. Our social circles expand over the latest recipe we cooked with ingredients from our potagers.

Sharing

A garden is to share. It is such a joy to bring a basket of extra corn, Swiss chard, or plums to a neighbor or friend. Gardeners distribute rose canes after January pruning, bouquets of flowers as hostess gifts, and volunteer plants that have been pulled for transplanting. We share our knowledge of what works and what doesn't work, short cuts we have found, and specimens that flourish in our area. We collect and dry seeds to give to those who could benefit. Without all of the slips, pinches, cuttings, and rootings from my mother's garden, I wouldn't have my heritage showcase. If you've ever attended one of my garden presentations or seminars, you have benefited from the plethora of seeds, herbs, fruits, and other goodies I give away. Sharing is integral to a gardener's life.

There are so many reasons that we love to garden - rain, sleet, snow, or sunshine - that we'll continue this conversation in next month's Digging Deep. I'd love you to email me your main motives for being a gardener. Email me at Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com. I'll do my best to incorporate the many ways we make this world a more beautiful place by doing what we love. Make a New Year's resolution to find the marvelous in nature.

Happy Gardening and Happy Growing!

Cynthia Brian's

Mid-Month Reminders

ADD better drainage to any potted plants you received as holiday gifts by removing the wrapping paper. Trim the spent blossoms, water deeply, and fertilize.

BRING budding cymbidium orchids indoors to display.

PRUNE all roses, crepe myrtles, and deciduous fruit trees by the end of the month.

BUY bare-root rose bushes. Soak in water for a day before planting. Cut off any damaged or broken

roots. Plant the bud union three inches above the ground.

TREAT houseplants to a warm shower and shake. Indoor heat dries the roots, leaves, and fronds,

especially those of ferns.

PICK ripe and tangy naval oranges, Meyer lemons, tangelos and use the rest of your persimmons.

PERUSE seed catalogues that are available now to determine what you want to plant in spring.

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



A fern gets a shower and shake in the sink.



Fresh picked carrots sprinkled with basil are ready to roast.



The final crop of persimmons sits on the chopping block with fresh greens and Meyer lemons.



Cynthia Brian wears a hood for gardening in the cold.

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