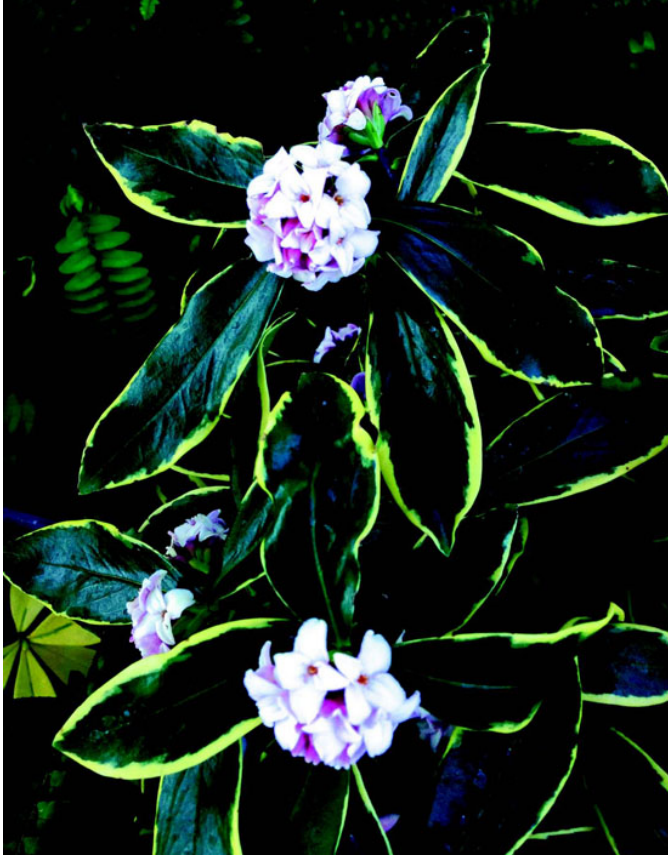


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Digging Deep - Gardening with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Fragrant Daphne adds color to the shade garden. Photos Cynthia Brian
making love and passion is in the garden air.

How many of us chose a beautiful garden for our wedding nuptials or as the setting for birthdays, showers, graduations and other celebrations? Since I was a child, our family gatherings were always held in a garden, weather permitting. My husband and I, as well as all of my siblings, held our wedding receptions in the spectacular gardens of our ranch. My mother planted for months creating an artistic palette using the colors each of us had chosen for our special day. Now that is love!

Responsibility

After several decades of marriage, whenever I am asked how to maintain a relationship, my advice has always been to become a gardener. It takes responsibility to be a gardener. We have to be attentive to the needs of each individual specimen. We need to know when to water, when to prune, when to fertilize, when to transplant. This is responsibility. If you want to grow a relationship, start with a plant. For first timers, I recommend a spider plant. They don't demand much, and they prosper with neglect. Or, if you prefer a colorful connection, orchids are not fussy prima donnas, yet they are radiantly beautiful.

Patience

A tomato can't be rushed. Nor can a carrot, or a rose, or a petunia. We could stand on top of the vine all day long shouting, prodding, encouraging, but our efforts will not yield a faster growth. Every plant is going to grow in the time it takes to do so. Patience is the keystone of a gardener's life. Gardening is an especially good way to teach children the value of patience. For every time, every season, there is a purpose and it is worth waiting for.

"In the depth of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer." ~ Albert Camus

After zero precipitation in January, we reveled in the rains of early February. Soon thereafter, the sun shone brightly again and spring appears to be arriving a month early. My flowering peach, plum, and pear trees have all completed their burst of color and my landscape is alive with blooming daffodils, tulips, iris, freesia, magnolia stellata and periwinkle. Somehow we've managed to skip the normal dreariness of February and jump right into Camus' invincible summer. A reader in Norway was shocked to read that bergenia blooms here in California in January while it doesn't show its pretty petals in Northern Europe until May. Which brings me to more reasons why I love to garden ...

Surprises

As gardeners we know that we are not in charge. No matter how much we attempt to control the outside forces, Mother Nature rules. We can no longer say that daffodils bloom in March or gladioli in summer. Our climate is changing, and we are constantly surprised at what pops up - and when. Gardeners are stewards of the earth and we must adapt to her unpredictability.

Love

Gardens evoke love. The birds and bees are

Spontaneity

Seeds fly through the air and grow where they fall. Vegetables, weeds and flowers are bedmates. No matter how carefully we curate our creations, the birds, bees, butterflies and wildlife always have something else in store for us. Just today I found holly growing under my camellia tree. I didn't put it there, and it will need to be transplanted, but I was so excited I kicked up my heels and wanted to fly a kite!

Curiosity

The garden is a world of wonder and exploration. Discovering the tiny salamander or croaking frog by the pond, or the odd color in the parsnip is exciting. Get down on your knees to investigate the insects or take a closer look at the stamen in the calla lily. Stick your nose in a Daphne bloom and inhale the perfume. Be curious. There is so much to learn.

Spirituality

We don't have to be religious to be spiritual. The greatest cathedral in the world cannot match the temple of Mother Nature. I am forever in awe and wonder at the miracle of our natural world. When I am in the garden I feel as one with all living creatures. I understand that we are all connected - the rocks, the water, the plants, the sky, the animals. We are all living, breathing, magical creations united in a giant prayer of glory.

Mistakes

Perhaps one of the most important lessons from the garden is that there are no mistakes. Failure is fertilizer. We heap our failures on the compost pile to grow a new garden. Gardens give us permission to be human, to make mistakes and to grow stronger and smarter from our errors. Life is never quiet or dull, and everything is a blessing and a lesson in the garden.

May you discover love in the garden and appreciate the spontaneity and generosity that nature offers.

Happy gardening, happy growing.

Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Reminders

PURCHASE summer bulbs of your choice, but don't be tempted to plant until the ground warms.

AERATE lawns while the ground is wet to allow for moisture to sink to the roots.

FERTILIZE citrus (specifically our beloved Meyer lemons) by the end of the month.

PLANT bare root roses and bare root fruit trees through the end of February. Many are now on sale so make sure to check the plant carefully for damage or dryness before purchasing. Prune back any damaged or dry roots. Soak in water for at least a day before planting.

SHARPEN tools in preparation for spring.

CONTINUE to pick up or rake fallen camellia blooms to keep your bush healthy.

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



Orchids are beautiful and easy to grow.



A bed of Italian kale.



Cynthia Brian in the February vegetable garden.

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