

Digging Deep - Gardening with Cynthia Brian

Paradise Found

"God has given us a world that nothing but our own folly keeps from being a paradise." – George Bernard Shaw



Plant a few bird of paradise to enjoy the feeling of the tropics.
Photos Cynthia Brian

For many people, including myself, sometime between February and March, I have an insatiable urge to experience the exotic romance of a tropical island. I want to feel the sand between my toes, listen to the waves pounding against the shore, smell the seaweed-tainted salt air and soak up the sun. I yearn to snorkel with turtles, swim with sharks and perfume my

hair with plumeria. As winter wanes and spring sprouts, hammocks beckon. In paradise, the landscape is lush with flowers, trees, and vines that we normally only experience in botanical gardens. But what if we can't take a trip to a fantasy island? How can we plant a piece of paradise in our personal places to release that fabulous feeling of leisure?

Here is a smattering of simple ways that you can plant the aloha spirit into your spring swing.

Palms

Nothing says "tropical" more than palm trees! When I built my home in Lamorinda, the first two trees I planted in containers were palms. Now planted at the top of my driveway, the two lovers are well over 30 feet, their fronds swaying in the wind to welcome me home. There are numerous varieties of palms to choose from including lady, queen, date, coconut, bamboo, sago and many more, depending on what you desire in height, hardiness, leaf structure and upkeep.

Bird of Paradise

When my daughter and I went on "the college tour," what enamored her most about San Diego were sunshine, surf, palm trees and birds of paradise – four ingredients of kick back island living. Hardy in zones 9-12, bird of paradise are remarkably easy to grow in our area as long as the plants get four or more hours of direct sunlight with good drainage. They prefer temperatures of 50 degrees and above, but I've had no problem growing them even when the thermometer dips below freezing. If planted from seed, they will take seven or more years to bloom, otherwise, expect to wait three or four years. They afford exquisite, long lasting cut flowers.

Hibiscus



Tuck a pink hibiscus in your hair.

When you are looking for high impact tropical flair with low maintenance, you can't beat the show-stopping hibiscus. Easy to grow and available in a kaleidoscope of colors, hibiscus enjoys temperatures up to the 90s but doesn't do so well under 30 degrees. Hibiscus can be trimmed into gorgeous hedges or used as a moveable container plant.

Ferns

When we think of ferns, we often are reminded of redwood forests or Victorian parlors. In the rain forests, many varieties of ferns grow wild in filtered light where they thrive on humidity and moisture. Propagated by spores, I grow maidenhair, walking, sword and other hardy ferns in my outdoor landscape, using them often in my floral arrangements. ... continued on page D14

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