Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for July

By Cynthia Brian

"To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle. Every cubic inch of space is a miracle." ~ Walt Whitman

Set a pretty Fourth of July table with red, white and blue flowers from your garden.
Photo Cynthia Brian

Yeah! It's summer. Time for vacations, swim meets, barbecues, swinging in hammocks, and … conserving water resources. Our weather patterns have certainly been weird. My car thermostat registered 107 degrees on a Monday in June and two days later I was gathering buckets to catch the downpour. The 13 hours of welcome rain was not enough to quench the thirst of our landscapes. Brown may be the new green, but I prefer to call our gardens California gold. My lawn crunches when I walk on it and the only green is the slowly spreading, striking clover with its tiny pink flowers. Yet, have hope, because as long as we maintain vigilante, come winter, lawns and gardens will revitalize.

Is your garden sunny or shady? When evaluating what to plant where, remember that an area is considered sunny when it gets at least six hours of direct sunlight daily. When an area receives four to five hours of sunshine, it is considered only partly sunny. A shade garden is an area that receives less than three hours a day of sunshine.

This week I received a few new releases of hibiscus from JBerry Nursery (www.jberrynursery.com). These stunning specimens are called Patio Party with colors that are bursting with flair and frivolity. Although they are advertised as being deer resistant, as soon as I planted mine, our sweet deer devoured the flowers and leaves.

I made wire cages to protect the plants and am now considering installing a deer fence. As much as I enjoy observing these munching marauders, with our severe drought, they are hungrier than usual and are eating plants that they'd normally avoid.

Did you read the recent insert of your East Bay Municipal Utility District water bill? With our busy schedules most people toss the extras but this issue of Pipeline discussed the critical water shortage and the mandatory outdoor watering rules. Because these new regulations affect all landscapes, I am including the rules now in effect with a few of my personal recommendations.

1.   Strict limits on frequency of watering: no more that two non-consecutive days per week with no runoff. I recommend choosing a Monday and Thursday or Tuesday and Friday or Wednesday and Saturday to water. Sundays are a day to rest.

2.   Strict limits on times: only before 9 a. m. or after 6 p.m. Depending on how long your watering schedule takes, I recommend watering lawns in the mornings beginning anytime after 6 a.m. By doing this, you give your grass time to absorb the moisture and enjoy the sun. When you water your lawn in the evening, you may be inviting lawn moths as the grass doesn't have enough time to dry. For your flowerbeds, evening is a better time to water as the moisture has 12 to 15 hours to saturate and quench the earth.

3.   No watering allowed within 48 hours of measurable rainfall.

4.   No watering of ornamental turf on public street medians allowed.

5.   No washing of driveways and sidewalks, except as needed for health and safety. I recommend that you use a broom to sweep or a blower to keep driveways and sidewalks clean.

6.   Use only hoses with shutoff nozzles to wash vehicles. If you have an area of grass or lawn that is accessible to your vehicle, drive on the lawn and wash your car, using biodegradable soap. Your car gets clean and your lawn gets a drink.

7.   Turn off fountains or decorative water features unless the water is re-circulated. Remember if you have uncirculated standing water, you are inviting mosquito larvae to hatch. Buy Dunks or add a bit of bleach to keep the water mosquito-free.

Conservation is essential and EBMUD will be adopting excessive use ordinances that will penalize households. We may not be able to keep our landscapes beautiful, but we can keep our gardens alive. Just remember they aren't brown, they are California golden.