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April Gardening Guide

By Cynthia Brian



A well-organized spring garden of rhododendron, breath of heaven, bearded iris, alyssum, calla lily, and pelargonium. Photos Cynthia Brian

"April hath put a spirit of youth in everything." - William Shakespeare

The siren song of spring calls my soul to the outdoors as swiftly as the mermaid lures the sailor to the depths of the sea. The fragrance of the blossoms, the colors of blooms, the chirping of the birds, the croaking of the frogs, and the scent of green grasses speak to my deepest being. Our precious earth is in the process of rebirth and no matter how many years I've witnessed this evolution, I am always in awe.

My camera captures thousands of photos, most of which looked so much better with the naked eye, yet I want to record the beauty. I am obsessed with the lilacs, wisteria, iris, freesia, fruit trees, wildflowers and, especially, the soothing sounds of the cascading creeks.

Spring-How I love thee!

As wild turkeys gobble-gobble along the hillsides and into our streets - unaware that turkey season is open for those who seek to bag a bird for a barbecue - and as the deer begin to nibble our budding roses, it's wise to consider protecting our delicate plants from our indigenous predators. Wire, netting and fences are our most effective armor. El Nino has been a blessing in quenching our thirsty gardens, especially our lawns, yet the prodigious weeds, if left unattended, will compete with our flowers for moisture in summer. Now is the time to take action.

Every morning as I walk my property, I tell myself I'll spend only an hour in the garden after work. However, the hour quietly melts into three or four and soon I'm weeding by flashlight. This is love. It's springtime in our gardens and fun is pending. Go out and dig.

ADD edible flowers to your dining experience. Plant seeds of hyssop, nasturtium, violet, leaf fennel, daisy and calendula.

SCATTER seeds of zinnia, cosmos, and marigold seeds for summer blooms.

WEED, weed, weed. Don't let seed heads develop or you'll have more invasive plants next season.

SOW onions not only for eating but also as a natural pest control in your garden, especially for brassicas including cabbage, broccoli, collards and kale.

MIX flowers with edibles to attract pollinators to your spring garden. Make sure to plant in groups so that the birds, bees and butterflies see the dinner you are serving.

BUILD hugels while the soil is moist. You will find them invaluable this summer when water is scarce. (See October 7, 2015 issue for instructions: <https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0916/Digging-Deep-Gardening-with-Cynthia-Brian-Water-Wise-Dreams.html>)

CHECK trees for damage. Many trees are suffering or have died during the drought. Ivy growing up the trunks, mushrooms at the base, and mistletoe are signs of trouble. Call a certified arborist.

PLANT purple. Compounds called anthocyanins in purple produce have anti-inflammatory effects would could help lower the risk of cancer and heart disease. Think purple kale, purple potatoes, purple carrots, purple cauliflower ... purple anything.

NATURALIZE aquilegia, commonly called columbine. These delicate star-shaped petals will self-sow if planted by others to cross-pollinate. They come a range of bold colors including blues, rose, yellow, white, pink, crimson, fuchsia, and many bicolors.

SHADE gardens lend themselves to the lush green to bronze foliage of astilbe. Spires of pink, red, scarlet and white add summer grace.

CUT bouquets of Oriental poppies mixed with lilacs for a stunning indoor offering with a heady scent.

PHOTOGRAPH your garden. If you have a stellar masterpiece, send me a jpeg with a description. Who knows, we may publish it. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com.

WELCOME home the migrating birds with fresh water in the fountain and new seed in the feeder.

REPLACE woody lavender bushes. After six years or so, lavender is ready for the compost pile.

BE friendly to native bees by incorporating native wildflowers into your landscape. (See March 23, 2015 Digging Deep-Cultivate a Wildflower Meadow: <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1002/Digging-Deep-How-to-Cultivate-a-Wildflower-Meadow.html>)

CARE for your lawns. The continued rains provide an opportunity to re-seed. I am sowing Pearl's Premium on rainy days then making sure the seed is watered daily until it sprouts. To protect the germinating seeds from hungry birds, our publisher, Andy Scheck suggests putting old screen doors on the patches. I've used old window screens. By summer the roots will be 14-to-20 inches deep and drought resistant. I'll keep you posted on my success or failure.

RAISE your mower to a higher setting and forget the bag this month allowing the grass clippings to add nitrogen back into the lawn.

CLEAN the patio. Sweep and wash furniture. Enjoy the sunny days.

START tomatoes if your soil is warm. You may get a jumpstart on summer juiciness.

PICK tangerines, Meyer lemons and tangelos as they ripen.

COMPOST, compost, compost. The more nutrients you put into your garden, the more spectacular your scenery.

MARK your calendars for wine and books event benefiting Be the Star You Are!(r) charity from 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, April 9, at Dawn's Dream Winery Tasting room, on the northwest corner of Seventh and San Carlos, Carmel-by-the-Sea. www.bethestaryouare.org/#!events/kgh2e.

PROGRAM your DVRs to record "Wheel of Fortune" at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, April 11 on ABC for a fun local experience. Make sure to watch to the final wave goodbye. A PostScript

Have you followed my December 15, 2015 advice about making hard copies of your garden photos as well as other collectibles? My Digging Digitally article hit a chord with so many people, including those in other countries. This note arrived from Ireland:

"As regards your article about Digging Digitally and making hard copies of precious visual

memories, and I so agree with everything you write. Last night I spent an agreeable evening perusing 100-year -old photo albums from my husband Per's family, and it was so lovely to see the photos and read the handwritten comments. Those long-dead grandparents, aunts and uncles and their lives and interests came to life again.

I am obsessive about making paper copies of everything that comes my way digitally - photos, even interesting emails. (And before emails, I have saved almost every letter I ever got!) Technology changes rapidly, and the visual records are so much more readily accessible--no waiting for your computer to boot itself up and install a million updates, while all you wanted was a quick look at a particular photo. So keep on preaching the message to the younger generation." - N. Daly

It's never too late to start a garden journal or actually print out our photographs. (If you missed the article, find it here: <https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0921/Digging-Deep-Gardening-With-Cynthia-Brian.html>)

Pictures of your most beautiful specimens make terrific art pieces when framed appropriately.

Let's pray for April showers to bring more May flowers. Put a bounce in your step, sing, dance and be young.

Happy gardening and happy growing!

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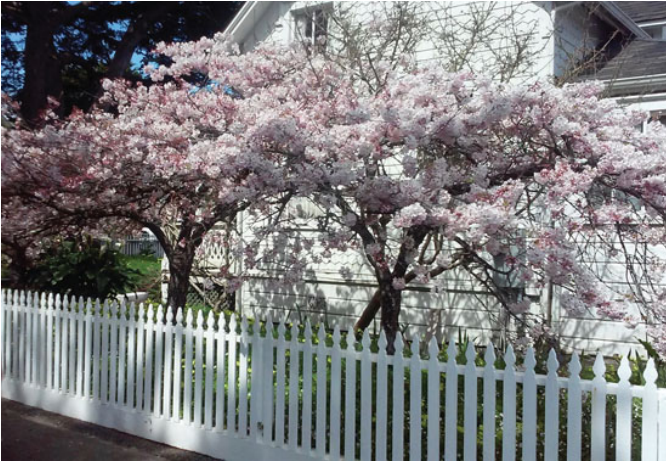
Roses ready to bud



A close up of violet hued wisteria as it encircles a drainpipe.



Santa Barbara daisies, Dutch iris, freesia, and asparagus fern share a plot.



Apple blossoms enhance the white picket fence.

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[back](#)

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