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## Digging Deep

By Cynthia Brian



Sweet jasmine climbs a palm tree filling the air with perfume. Photos Cynthia Brian

"Harmony makes small things grow. Lack of it makes big things decay." - Sallust

By mid-May Mother Nature has waved her magical wand sprinkling glitter and glory among her growing children. No matter where you look, shrubs, trees and landscapes showcase a beauty and harmony that set this month apart from the remaining 11.

Herbaceous peonies are budding and will bloom for weeks offering outstanding companionship to mixed perennial gardens. Glorious bouquets of roses decorate pathways and arbors. Fields of bearded iris brighten the most mundane areas with their multitude of colors, gentle fragrance and graceful arches. Horse chestnut, buckeye and locust trees are overflowing with grape-like bunches of blooms. Get up close to examine the intricacies of their flowers.

The warmer weather has sped up the blooming season while only a month earlier the cooler weather slowed it down. My waves of bright blue forget-me-nots have settled into a sea of seeds that attach to any clothing that ventures near, easily spreading the flowers to places unplanned. Along the creek beds, even the poisonous hemlock weeds sprouted several feet taller than in previous years with attractive clusters of flowers

resembling Queen Anne's lace. Tiny Alpine strawberries are red, ripe, and delicious as snacks or in salads. Better to eat these than any store-bought strawberry. Thanks to the unparalleled Pearl's Premium grass seeds, my lawn has never looked so lush and lovely. If you want turf that is tough, drought resistant, low maintenance and beautiful, start thinking now about preparing your ground for an autumn seeding of Pearl's Premium ([www.PearlsPremium.com](http://www.PearlsPremium.com)).

The Old Farmer's Almanac recently contacted a colleague garden writer asking about what tools, products, and plants gardeners sought most this year. She posted a request for suggestions on our member community site and I reveled in the answers that I believe resonate with you, my garden guide readers. Here's my abbreviated version of what we gardeners want.

1. We crave information that we can use on a daily basis.
2. We want to grow our own food for better nutrition and first-rate freshness.
3. We want to save money.
4. We want to bring pollinators into our gardens for an organically friendly habitat. We are putting out the welcome mat for birds, bees, butterflies and bats.
5. We want to reduce waste by composting more.
6. We want tools that are sturdy, long lasting, yet not exorbitantly expensive.
7. We want to explore simpler to use, more environmentally friendly power tools that are battery powered and strong.
8. We want space saving ideas including container and vertical gardening techniques.
9. We want to learn to prune properly.
10. We want low-maintenance, native alternatives, and drought resistant plants.
11. We want to ENJOY our garden rooms!

The wants of the national garden community echo locally as well. My promise to you is to continue to bring you the latest tools, tips, and tricks that will make your garden experience extraordinary. ... continued on page D18

### CLEAN and DIRTY PRODUCE

In my opinion, one of the main reasons to grow your own fruits, vegetables, and herbs is to know what is in your soil and on your plants. The USDA discovered 178 different pesticides on sample produce this year with the residue persisting even after the produce was thoroughly washed. Strawberries topped the list with over 20 different pesticides, one of the main reasons I grow my own strawberries and Alpine berries.

The cleanest and therefore the healthiest produce included:

1. Corn
2. Avocados
3. Pineapples
4. Cabbage
5. Onions
6. Peas
7. Papaya

8. Asparagus
9. Mangoes
10. Eggplant
11. Honeydew Melons
12. Kiwis
13. Cantaloupe
14. Cauliflower
15. Grapefruit

Pesticide residues are extremely rare on "The Clean 15" so these are items that we can buy and serve without worry.

Known as "the Dirty Dozen" here's a list of the worst produce culprits you can purchase:

1. Strawberries
2. Spinach
3. Nectarines
4. Apples
5. Peaches
6. Celery
7. Grapes
8. Pears
9. Cherries
10. Tomatoes
11. Bell Peppers
12. Potatoes

Sadly, all of these fruits and vegetables are family favorites and generally considered to be healthy. Luckily we can easily grow all of these and if you don't want to grow your own, make sure to buy organic.

Cynthia Brian's Mid-month Gardening Tips

TUNE UP your irrigation system. Check for sprinklers that aren't working, bushes or fences that are blocking sprinkler heads, broken pipes, clogged nozzles, leaky hoses and valves, and sprinklers that are spraying driveways and walkways.

MULCH for water retention and weed prevention. Three inches is recommended. Your soil will improve over time as well.

TAKE breaks while gardening to protect your back and knees.

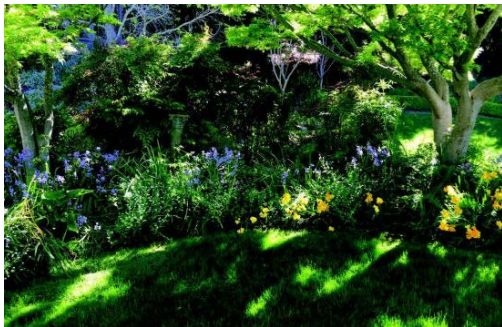
PLANT summer blooming bulbs and seeds. There are over 100 different choices of bulbs and 200 perennials.

IMPROVE memory, lower cancer risk, and promote your heart health by planting a container of blueberries. Easy to grow as a patio plant, one serving provides 25 percent of your daily Vitamin C requirement.

WIN \$50,000 for your Garden: As a judge in America's Best Gardener Contest. I encourage you to enter your best garden photo. The top prize is \$50,000. [www.americasbestgardener.com](http://www.americasbestgardener.com).

Avoid decay and continue the harmony every day. Enjoy the magic of May. Have a magnificent Memorial Day weekend, too!

Happy Gardening and Happy Growing!



Green, lush Pearl's Premium grass and colorful landscaping is a tribute to May magic.



A close-up of the horse chestnut blossoms. Photos Cynthia Brian



Alpine strawberries are a tangy snack.



Hemlock is growing to twelve feet with beautiful white blooms that are toxic.



The fluorescent pink cornflags (*gladiolus communis*) are a favorite deer dinner.



Cynthia Brian loves gardening in May.

Cynthia Brian, *The Goddess Gardener*, is a New York Times best selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of *Be the Star You Are* 1(r) 501 c3.

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