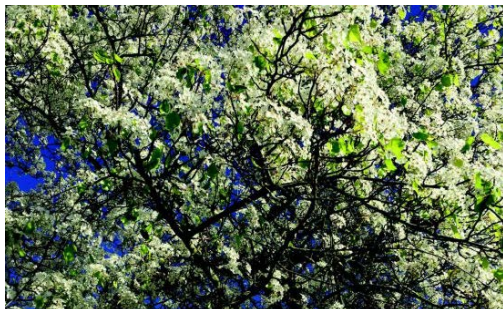


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Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for March

By Cynthia Brian



Pear blossoms fall from the trees like snowflakes.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Truth is rarely written in ink. It lives in nature." - Martin H. Fischer

It all started with a box of toothpicks.

My siblings and I finally had the heart and the stamina to begin cleaning out our mother's farmhouse that was built before 1900. We made the mandatory four piles-garbage, donation, share, and keep as we meticulously emptied and cleaned each drawer and cabinet. When we came upon several brand new boxes of toothpicks, we kept a few and shared the rest.

When I returned home, I opened my drawer where I kept my toothpicks to discover that I already had six boxes of 500 picks. Horrified, I emptied that drawer; created four piles, and what began as a simple task of putting away a small box of toothpicks resulted in a full day of purging and organizing.

Which gets me to our garden marching orders for the month. It is time to clean out the potting shack, clear the storage sheds, organize the garage, and tidy up

our cluttered gardens. Prune the hedges, edge the lawn, sharpen tools, wash the lawn mower blades, and pull the sprouting weeds.

Spring forward by cleaning our houses and removing the debris from our gardens.

There is something about the pre-spring season that revs up our systems and begs us to dust off the old to make way for the new. We yearn to get rid of the mess that has been gathering. My storage area was filled with odd pieces of wire, broken light fixtures, string lights, patio pads, tiki torches, oil, glass, lawn seed, fertilizer, soil mixes, Christmas tree stands, old toys from kids long gone, punctured hoses, and a multitude of under utilized machines and gadgets geared to make gardening simpler but in reality were just too burdensome. It took me a full seven days to bring order to the chaos.

As overwhelming as this project sounds, the best way to start is to just start!

Don't be paralyzed by the enormity of the task. Do it bit by bit but take everything out of the spaces you are going to clean. Don't try to "wipe" around anything. Everything out! Once the space is empty, sweep it, mop it, brush out the cobwebs, and disinfect it. Next, designate four areas for decluttering: Keep, Donate, Trash, Recycle/Sell. You will be amazed at how much junk you have. Anything you are keeping, donating, giving away, or selling must be cleaned. Dump the trash unless you have chemicals, insecticides, pesticides, paints or contaminates. Take those items to a special facility for disposal. Contact your garbage collection agency for drop off locations. Box your donations and donate immediately lest you be tempted to reclaim items. Do the same with your recyclables or sale items. Organize what's left to store in a manner that is easily and safely accessible.

Walk around your garden and really look at your landscape. What needs a tune up? Are the hinges on your gate squeaking? Do you have broken fence slats? Do your hedges need a haircut? When was the last time you painted or stained your deck? Is it time for a patio power wash?

Pick up the dog bones, clean out the litter boxes, and get a storage container for all of the unused children's or pet toys. Check your irrigation system. Turn on the sprinklers to determine if you have any broken heads or pipes. What about your nightscaping? Do you have bulbs that are burned out? Are the batteries run down on your solar lights?

Your front entrance and sidewalk are the first greeting areas for yourself and guests. Give your porch a thorough cleaning and sweeping. Add a blooming plant in a pretty container. Buy a new welcome mat. Polish the hardware on your door.

After weeding your flowerbeds, add a fresh layer of mulch not only to beautify your landscape, but also to retain moisture and keep the soil temperatures constant while deterring erosion. Turn the compost pile.

As you march around your yard you'll discover a plethora of chores that are begging for your attention. Make a list, check it twice or three times, and get to the most important items first.

Garden Happenings

The bare branches of the trees tell us that it is still winter, but the buzzing of the bees coupled with the sweet melodies of songbirds indicate that spring is right around the corner. My garden seems to have awakened from its slumber a full month early. Until the last few days of the month, February had been bone dry and exceptionally sunny forcing numerous plants to bloom early. Daffodils, and narcissi have been blooming for two months and will continue for another two. The Italian white peach that normally forecasts a St. Patrick's Day celebration burst into full bloom on Valentine's Day. My shamrocks, also known as oxalis, are in their cheery yellow glory. Colorful freesias, tulips, Dutch iris, calla lilies, and hyacinths announce the stirrings of spring.

The precipitation was welcome news, but the cold front that accompanied the rain dropping temperatures into the 20s caused tender plants to freeze. The morning after the first frigid night, the shriveled shapes of lamium, sage, and nasturtium greeted me on my daily meditation walk. Part of tidying

the garden is to understand what to prune back and what to leave until all danger of frost has past. The sage and lamium are best cut immediately, while the pruning of the nasturtium will wait until later in the month. Viburnum, with its tiny white flowers, does well in cold weather and accentuates the beauty of a four-season garden.

If you properly pruned your roses toward the end of January or beginning of February, you will see that they are now sprouting leaves. Within a month, buds will open. A few of my David Austen roses are already blooming. I am still planting bare root roses. World renowned rosarian Michael Marriott will join me on my radio broadcast from 4 to 5 p.m. on March 7. Get more information at <https://www.starstyle.com/starstyle-radio>. Michael will discuss the latest trends and techniques in cultivating a beautiful rose garden.

My mother used to instruct us with the words "cleanliness is next to Godliness." That truth wasn't written in ink, but it did help me toss that extra box of toothpicks. I know for certain that everything looks so much better and more attractive when it's clean and clutter-free.

Live in truth. Live in nature.

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BRING branches of forsythia or quince inside to allow the blooms to open in a vase.

PICK up fallen camellias.

FERTILIZE the entire garden, if possible right before it rains.

BUY discounted tickets to the A's versus Angels baseball game for June 15 with proceeds benefitting local charity, Be the Star You Are!(r). www.BetheStarYouAre.org/events

HARVEST wild mustard for salads and soups. Delicious and nutritious.

DIG up beets and make sure to eat the tops.

COME to LaGaelrinda event at St. Mary's College between 9 to 1 p.m. March 17 to visit the Be the Star You Are!(r) booth where I'll be selling and autographing my newest book, "Growing with the Goddess Gardener."

WANT an instant privacy screen in your yard? For immediate large hedges, a new product will ship this spring from a company called Instant Hedge offering 13 varieties of ready-to-plant hedges that have been growing for five years with heights up to six feet. Inspired by plantscapes in Holland, the panel of four trees with dense foliage will ship in a biodegradable cardboard box. Visit <http://instantheedge.com>.

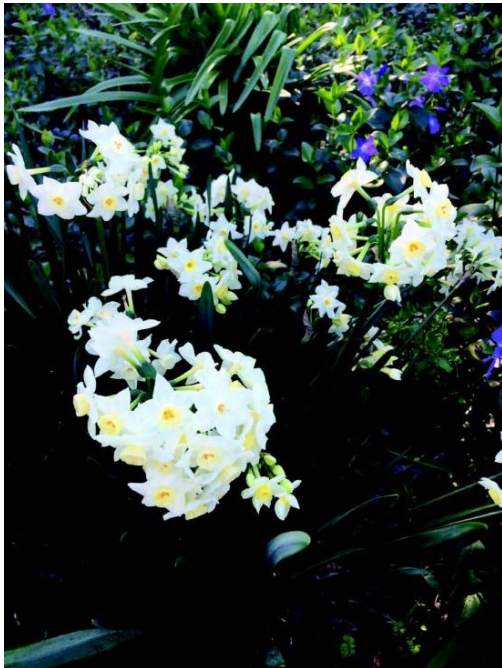
POT a clump of oxalis shamrocks for your St Patrick's Day dinner.

Wishing you the luck of the Irish and the wind at your back. March on and spring forward!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



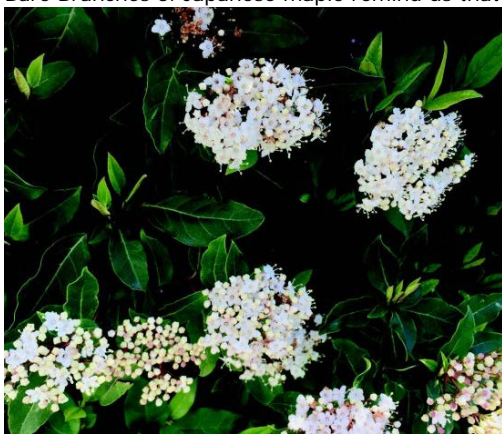
Hyacinths are pushing through the soil to announce the arrival of spring.



White narcissi and blue vinca minor are excellent bedmates.



Bare Branches of Japanese maple remind us that spring has not sprung yet!



Viburnum shines in any landscape during winter or spring.



Cynthia Brian gets ready for St. Patrick's Day in a field of shamrocks.

Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, raised in the vineyards of Napa County, 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!® 501 c3.

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