

## Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for July Independence Daze

By Cynthia Brian

*"Independence now and forever." – Daniel Webster*



*Pelargonium citrosium, also known as the mosquito plant, doesn't keep the mosquitoes away.*

*Photos Cynthia Brian*

Anticipating the celebration of the Fourth of July was a huge deal when I was a kid. Those were the days when three weeks before the big day, stands selling fireworks, rockets, sparklers, fountains and more would line country roads and highways. Our station wagon filled with kids would pull up to these pop-up booths as we begged our parents for our favorite explosive entertainment. Our dad and uncles would buy boxes of various items to ignite on my grandparent's ranch to the thrilling ooh's and ah's of our large Italian family. Safety was always a major concern as we often read in the newspaper about people who lost a hand or started a fire while being less cautious. My dad was a captain in our county's volunteer fire department and he made sure that our Independence Day fun was safely executed.

Our morning would begin with us marching with our farm animals decorated in ribbons of red, white and blue in

a local parade, where there were always more participants than spectators. A delicious picnic with produce harvested fresh that morning followed. A bounty of salads of tender greens, juicy tomatoes, crunchy beans, and tangy cucumbers flavored with garlic, olive oil and wine vinegar remain in my memory. But it was the first bite of roasted white sweet corn slathered with butter and basil for the pre-fireworks barbecue that still to this day makes my mouth water.

The sound of weed whackers, lawn mowers, chain saws, blowers, and giggling children indicates that summer has arrived. In the heat of the day, swimming pools become our refuge while our patios are the place to kick back after a long day at work. Our gardens are resplendent with the colors of the rainbow as nature's annuals and perennials burst into bloom. Hydrangeas, Oriental lilies, daylilies, roses, gladioli, kalanchoe, clematis – and my favorite for this sea-

son, godetia. Godetia is not only brilliantly beautiful but also deer resistant. Swallowtails are fluttering throughout the landscape and finches have taken up residence in my favorite birdhouse perch. My garden is a living, breathing firecracker!

We must temper this marvelous warm weather excitement with our distressing recollections of the recent destructive wildfires. Heed the checklist from our local fire departments to create a defensible space around your home. To reiterate fire district recommendations:

- Prevent embers from igniting your home by clearing leaves, needles, and debris from gutters, eaves, porches and decks.
- Trim grasses and weeds.
- Prune tree limbs to keep the lowest branches 6-10 feet from the ground.
- Reduce "fire fuel laddering" by not allowing bushes or trees to touch one another.
- Keep combustible materials 15 feet away from structures.
- Maintain your property and be alert for any fire danger.

For further safety tips visit <http://www.mofd.org/fire-prevention/abatement>.

Whether you march in a parade, hike, bike, eat pancakes, picnic, barbecue or dance to your favorite beats, may you make your own memories this Independence Day while watching fireworks sponsored by our localities. Let freedom ring!



*A delicate swallowtail butterfly feeds on a pink geranium.*