

Published March 6th, 2019

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for March

By Cynthia Brian



Rosemary in bloom cascades from a border.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Blossom by blossom the spring begins." - AC Shinnburne
By Cynthia Brian

Even on the darkest, dreariest, rainiest day, looking out my dining room window to my ever-blooming hillside garden gives me great joy. For the past two months, the daffodils and cyclamen have been in full bloom, now joined by the radiant pink blossoms of the Italian white peach tree, the purple fronds of lavender, and the delicate periwinkle flowers of vinca minor. My Meyer lemon tree is bursting with bright yellow fruit complementing the happy throats of the narcissi. Shamrocks are preparing their performance for St. Patrick's Day while the crocus and hyacinths are already popping. The petals are powered!

Spring is just around the corner, making this a great time to start thinking about sprucing up your garden. With just a little effort, you can make your entire property bloom! Even if you think you don't have a green

thumb, try these quick and affordable gardening tips with easy ideas to suit every budget.

Continue to pull weeds as they sprout. If you have a steep hillside, it is probably best to leave the weeds in place until the rains have halted to prevent erosion and mudslides.

Clean up existing plant beds by removing overgrown plants. Rake the leaves, adding them to your compost pile. This will make everything look neat and organized, and will allow your beautiful bushes and colorful petals to bask in all of their glory.

Prune shrubs. Keep to a natural shape, avoiding turning them into a ball or square shape. Overgrown shrubs can invade walkways and patios as my boxwoods were doing. When pruned and tamed they look classic and sophisticated, making a simple dressing for your yard and garden.

Trim tree branches that hang too low and create hazards. A low tree branch not only gets in the way of walkways, it also poses the risk of falling, hitting or scratching someone. Low tree branches also serve as fire ladders helping to flame a blaze.

Create a welcoming entrance with a couple of large containers filled with multihued plants. One of my peach trees is in a pot and it is blooming now. Bright colors are fun and inviting, and having them placed at the entrance makes guests feel welcome. Containers filled with living greens create the statement that your home is well kept and cared for.

Herbs cascading from a raised bed or a pot located outside your kitchen are utilitarian. My rosemary spills over a nearby wall and I have parsley, sage, and chervil ready for snipping to add to my culinary concoctions.

If you plan to stay in your home for at least five years, consider adding a tree or two for significant impact. Bright saffron colored Acacia trees are blooming now and when their blooms are finished, the gray leaves offer intense interest. Trees keep homes cooler in the summer and offer you a place to rest in the shade. Before you purchase a tree, do your homework. Know how large the tree will get at maturity. Ask about its growing habits, root system, water consumption, flowers and/or fruits. You don't want to block views or have too much shadow for you or your neighbors. If you like to grow your own fruit, you can create a personal orchard with all of your favorites. With fruiting trees, you'll enjoy both flowers in spring and a crop to harvest. Plums and peach bloom this month. Cherry trees are filled with swollen buds.

Check out seed packets at your local nursery. Do you want to have a wildflower garden? Attract pollinators like butterflies and bees? Plant a cutting garden? Seeds are relatively inexpensive and by scattering you'll breathe excitement into your landscape. Make sure to read the instructions carefully as some seeds must soak overnight or be scratched before planting, a step you can't afford to miss.

On steep slopes, planting Pride of Madeira is a smart choice. It likes full sun, needs minimal water, if any, grows tall and wide, and produces beautiful clusters of purple-blue spikes inviting pollinators to visit. This Mediterranean favorite is deer resistant and does reseed. Plant at the back of your garden and make sure you have enough space for it as it matures into a very large specimen. Wear gloves when handling as the leaves can irritate skin.

Install mulch to prevent weeds, retain moisture, and regulate temperature. A cool product that is worth investigating is called Landscape Rubber Mulch.

Dress your landscape with ornamental grasses, bulbs and colorful annuals for a designer's touch. Primroses and pansies mixed into a border are especially pretty. I tuck bulbs into my beds all year long in anticipation of a stellar surprise every month of the year.

Add a bench, table, and loungers to key areas. As the sun rises and crosses the horizon, I like knowing that I can relax in different areas of my garden or enjoy a picnic outside in nature. Sitting spots make a garden more inviting and friendly.

Birdbaths and fountains are essential elements to a balanced landscape offering a place to drink and splash for our feathered friends. If you have room, a pond with a recirculating pump adds an atmosphere of

Zen.

For additional elegance and privacy, install a trellis, gazebo, gate, or pergola and plant climbers such as the trumpet vine, clematis or a fragrant climbing rose.

Last chance to prune grapevines and fall bearing fruit trees such as apple and pears.

With rain showers still on the horizon, be prepared for blossoms and petals to be knocked to the ground. I collect the stalks and blooms that have been pummeled to create fashionable and pretty indoor arrangements.

Continue to pick up the fallen camellia blossoms until there are no camellias left on your shrub or tree.

Get ready for St. Patrick's Day on March 17 by going green and buying a pot of shamrocks (Oxalis) for the table.

Gardens are set to explode with color as petals open to engage us in the forthcoming season of rebirth. The final days of winter have arrived and soon the warm breath of spring will empower us to start digging deeper.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing,



Purple spires of Pride of Madeira.



A simple birdbath accents a winter garden.



Although some people are allergic, Acacia trees explode with color.



Oxalis or shamrocks grow between the rows of vines.



Last chance to prune your grapes.



Close up of wild plum tree blossoms in a winter landscape.



Cynthia Brian continues to pick up fallen camellia blossoms.

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