

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

The next best thing

“Do what you can for as long as you can and when you can’t, do the next best thing.”—Chuck Yeager



Photos Cynthia Brian

The glorious restful rose garden of Orinda gardener, Steve Giacomi By Cynthia Brian

Back in 1999 when I was co-authoring what became a New York Times bestseller, "Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul" with Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and my new writer colleagues, besides the chapters that we penned, over 5,000 submissions were mailed to us from around the world as possible story inclusions. Five of us diligently read every contribution judging the contents on a 1-10 basis, then, after editing and revising the submissions that received an 8, 9, or 10, we sent them to 25 readers from all over the United States for their judgments. It was a long, slow, tedious task that took over two more years because only the very best and most appropriate 101 stories to sow seeds of love, hope, and laughter were destined for publishing.

I remember one very short story that made the final cut that at the time I didn't especially feel was deserving of this carefully curated book. It was titled, "The Next Best Thing," by Washington gardener and horticultural teacher, Ann Pehl Thomson. She wrote that when her parents reached their 70s, they had difficulties doing the things that they had previously done with ease. Their motto became a quote from test pilot Chuck Yeager, who in 1947 was the first person to break the sound barrier: "Do what you can for as long as you can and when you can't, do the next best thing."

One morning Ann's mom spied her dad lying flat on his stomach under an apple tree. Alarmed, she scurried out to help. When she got closer she saw that he had a trowel in his hand and was weeding. Exasperated, she asked, "What are you doing?" He replied, "The next best thing."

Fast-forward 20 years, and although I am not in my 70s, and still have

plenty of spring in my step, I am no spring chicken. I now appreciate fully doing the next best thing. As much as I adore gardening and laboring in the landscape, I have to be more careful and diligent to avoid injuries, aches, pains, bruises, falls and insect bites. The season has barely begun and I've already endured two tick bites, numerous cuts, and a splattering of slips down the slopes. Every rose bush and tree branch reaches out to hug me. Have you experienced similar mishaps in your garden?

How can we stay safe and work in our gardens at every age? Naturally, I have a few tips:

1. Avoid bending, twisting, and stooping by either sitting on the ground or using a stool or chair to pull weeds and do light tilling. I use a pad to sit on the ground, then, scoot around to do my chores. It saves my back from BLT (bending, lifting, twisting).
2. Wear long sleeve shirts and long trousers. This one is hard for me because I come from a long line of bikini gardeners. My preferred clothing when it's warm is to wear my bathing suit or tank top and shorts. Unfortunately, the scratches and bites multiply in this attire.

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If space is an issue, shelves of succulents are attractive.