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## Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Delicious Queen Anne cherries are crunchy and sweet. Photos Cynthia Brian

"Trees are giving fruit  
Earth is giving grain  
Sun is giving warmth  
Moon and stars are giving light." - Chitrabhanu

The doves and I are in a battle to consume the mulberries. The deer have already munched on the lower branches, and now the sound of happy cooing surrounds me as the birds feast on the black berries. Not many people have delighted in mulberries. I can't describe the flavors, but I grew up singing "All around the mulberry bush" as my siblings and I chased one another, pulling handfuls of this delicious fruit from the tree. My gigantic trees are shoots from that original mulberry bush that were offspring of grandparents' and great grandparents' mulberry trees. Unfortunately, the birds leave me only the red, unripe fruit, which will not get sweeter if picked before maturity.

Yet, all is not lost. Both my Queen Anne and Bing cherry trees are brimming with luscious ripe cherries. While the birds gorge on the mulberries, they are leaving my precious cherries alone. In years past, I was lucky to harvest a handful of cherries before the birds arrived, but this year, probably because of the copious amounts of rain, my orchard is overflowing with fruit. As we farmers like to say, we have a bumper crop this season.

May was the month that ushered in the season of fruit picking for farm families when I was growing up in Napa County. It began with cherries, proceeding to plums, prunes, apricots, peaches, pears, figs, grapes, apples, and walnuts with blackberries, citrus, kiwi, and all varieties of vegetables ripening through November that would be sold directly from the farm or at local fruit stands and co-ops. I was probably about 4 when my first job outside of our farm occurred, helping neighbors harvest their cherries. That neighbor's farm was a bit less than a mile away and the first day of cherry picking was highly anticipated. My parents, siblings, and I drove over at dawn in our World War II Willy jeep, hauling our tallest ladders accompanied by our biggest buckets. The ladders would be set up in the orchard with a pail dangling from a hook. Up we'd climb to begin our haul, with a paycheck determined by the crates of cherries picked, not the hours it took. My siblings and I craved cherries and, I shamefully admit, that for the first thirty minutes we ate more cherries than we put in the buckets. At dusk, we'd clamor back into the Willy to return home to make dinner. Around 9 p.m., the stomachaches began and our one tiny bathroom became the communal vomitorium. Although my parents commiserated with our suffering, secretly they were happy that we learned a valuable lesson on the first day of harvest. Don't eat the profits!

For years I couldn't eat cherries remembering that awful night. As farmers, during the fruit season, we would set up roadside stands selling freshly picked fruits and vegetables at a fraction of the cost posted at the local supermarkets. When we had an overabundance of produce, especially grapes, we'd make "U-Pick" signs offering people the opportunity to go into the orchards and fields to pick their own at even lower prices. We'd have a chuckle about the "city slickers" who'd arrive from San Francisco or the Peninsula with men in suits and women in high-heeled shoes with a desire to go picking. They, too, would eat as much of the fruit as possible in the vineyards and arrive back at our paying station covered in dirt with only a small amount of grapes and a visage green with nausea. When they asked where the restroom was, we'd point to the decrepit old outhouse or the tree behind a barn. There is a price to pay for eating the profits!

Until I was 18, I was a farm laborer, working on our own farm as well as many others picking, cutting, drying, sorting and selling fruit. All of we kids drove tractors, cut wood, branded cattle, pulled fences, planted vegetables, tilled the earth, and helped in any way requested. Since I had my own business raising chickens, I also sold fresh eggs. This fortunate upbringing was the foundation for my work ethic and love of nature that I have nurtured until this day.

As the fruit frenzy continues in the mulberry tree, I have blissfully plucked a basket of luscious ripe cherries that my family will eat fresh. Perhaps if the birds remain focused on the mulberries, or almost ripe plums, I'll be able to pick another bushel to become the ingredients for a Fourth of July pie.

Welcome to the summer bounty of local and fresh.

History repeats itself. I am eating the profits!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for July

TRIM dead leaves, stems, or flowers from indoor plants. Cut back to the stalk. By trimming, re-growth is stimulated.

WEAR gloves when working with okra, jalapenos and chilies to avoid itchy painful rashes. If you do get a reaction, make a paste of oatmeal mixed with water. Spread on the rash and let it dry. It won't be pretty but you'll get relief. This works well with poison oak as well.

CUT hydrangeas for a beautiful, long-lasting dried arrangement. My preferences are the deep pink or magenta blooms that dry to a bluish purple.

STOCK up on 2019 seed packets from Renee's Garden at a 50 percent discount now.

<http://ow.ly/eYZE50uBDE5>

**MAKE** your own compost with food scraps (no meat products). Keep a covered plastic container in your refrigerator where you can toss egg shells, coffee grinds including paper filters, corks, tea bags, vegetable scraps, cut flowers, etc. Once a week, empty your container into a bin or pile in your garden and mix with leaves, shredded newspaper, and lawn clippings. Keep damp and turn with a pitchfork or shovel as often as possible. Within three months, you'll have rich compost to return to your garden beds.

**APPLY** sunscreen every two or three hours. Of the numerous ingredients in all sunscreens, the one that protects the most is zinc oxide.

**SOOTH** sunburns and heal wounds with the antibacterial property plant, aloe vera. Its gel-like substance contains vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and antioxidants that will suppress inflammation and relieve pain. Make sure to have a pot of aloe vera on your patio for emergencies.

**WARM** a chilly afternoon barbecue with a tabletop gas heater to eat al fresco.

**SHOW** your patriotism with homemade USA steppingstones.

**HARVEST** plums, cherries, mulberries, apricots, and whatever other fruit is ripening in your yard. If you don't grow your own, take a trip to a farm area back road to purchase fresh produce that is packed with nutrients. Wear practical clothing and shoes.

**LOOK** up into the night sky and count the stars!

**CAUTION:** Fire season has arrived. Always be careful and heed red flag warnings. In my last article, "Sip into Summer," I suggested you bring in the summer solstice with a traditionally controlled and safe bonfire. I did not intend to imply building a fire with open flames, but in a fire pit with a spark arrester. Gas fire pits are the norm. Building a bonfire is allowed on some beaches where starting a wildfire is not an issue. ([www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1308/Digging-Deep-with-Goddess-Gardener-Cynthia-Brian-Sip-into-summer.html](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1308/Digging-Deep-with-Goddess-Gardener-Cynthia-Brian-Sip-into-summer.html)) For more information on planting for firescaping for survival, visit <https://blog.voiceamerica.com/2019/05/21/firescaping-for-survival/>

**CELEBRATE** a safe Fourth of July by enjoying an evening picnic while watching the local firework productions.

**Happy Gardening. Happy Growing! Happy Independence Day!**



Branches of red mulberries are devoured by the birds and deer.



Bing cherries make great pies, jams, and brandied cherry desserts.



Pink geranium and purple Nelly Moses clematis are excellent bed partners.

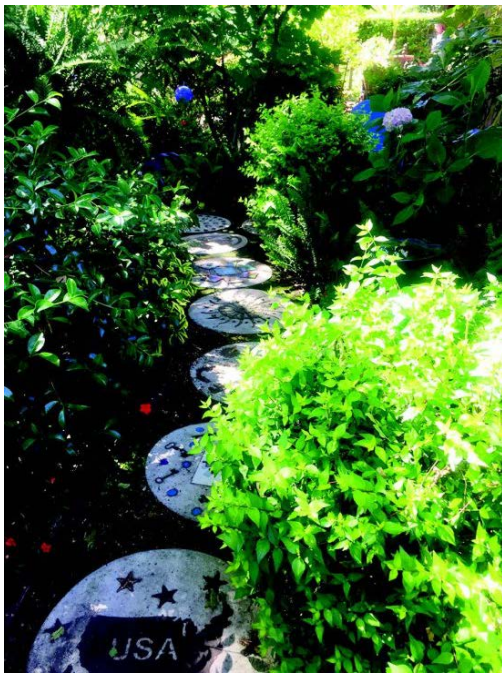


Eggplant blossoms forecast a bountiful crop.



A purple trumpet vine attracts hummingbirds.





Show your love for America the Beautiful with USA stepping-stones.



Three tiny eggs in a sparrows nest in Cynthia Brian's door wreath.



Set a pretty table outdoors for al fresco dining and add a gas heater for warmth.



Cynthia welcomes you to summer gardening.

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.

Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at [www.StarStyleRadio.com](http://www.StarStyleRadio.com).

Buy a copy of her new books, Growing with the Goddess Gardener and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at [www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store](http://www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store).

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