

Published July 24th, 2019

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



A tray with colorful plastic glasses, cool sunglasses, and the cocktail recipe are ready for the pool party. Photos Cynthia Brian

the moment will star in the meal. If I didn't grow it, I'll purchase what's in season from a local fruit stand or farmers' market. Tomatoes, beets, arugula, carrots, peppers, eggplant, corn, cucumbers, watermelon, peaches, nectarines, tangerines, apricots, cherries, apples and eggs are a few of my normal staples that will inspire not only the carte du jour, but my tablecloths, floral arrangements, and tableware.

If it's a pool party, sturdy yet pretty shimmery plastic ware is essential as bringing glass near a swimming area is a major no-no. Making sure the lounge chairs have fluffy beach towels, the fountains are spouting or gurgling, and the planters are filled with colorful combinations of annuals are part of designing an inviting setting that encourages the guests to grab a drink, relax, and inhale the fresh air.

For a picnic on the lawn, experiment with an edible arrangement of herbs that can flavor the picnic fare served on paper plates. Basil, thyme, rosemary, mint, sage, lovage, calendula and nasturtium are starters. Setting up a game of croquet offers a sense of play and recreation. For a more formal party, covering chairs with a gauzy material and fashioning a more extravagant centerpiece with roses or peonies adds elegance to the occasion. Besides serving wine, beer or other beverages, consider crafting an original cocktail to get the festivities rolling.

Here's a refreshing summer garden cocktail that I concocted for a girlfriend's birthday that is both luscious and appealing. Measure according to your liking.

Summer Garden Cocktail (or Mocktail)

- ? Muddle together watermelon (including the melon juice) and mint leaves.
- ? Add the juice of Meyer lemons and limes.
- ? Stir in a spoonful of honey.
- ? Pour into a pitcher with equal parts sparkling water and ginger ale.
- ? Add tequila or your favorite alcohol. (Eliminate the alcohol for a mocktail)
- ? Stir and pour over crushed ice into glasses rimmed with salt.
- ? Garnish with a spring of mint and piece of melon on a tiny toothpick umbrella.

Don't forget the kids!

Make mocktails. When the three or four generations of our extended family gather, the little ones get excited shouting, "picnic party, picnic party." We'll paint faces, run around blowing bubbles, climb through nylon tunnels, splash in the pool, and dance to silly songs. A big mat or cloth is spread on the grass or the deck with platters of finger foods. The kids happily dive in for the feast.

String lights, candles in jars, patio heaters, and your favorite tunes all add to the comfort and contentment. Nothing is ever perfect. There will be spills, breaks, trampled flowers, bug bites, and burnt barbecue. But that's the splendor and unpredictability of partying in the garden. As Erasmus said, "No party is any fun unless seasoned with folly."

Enjoy the dazzling days and easy evenings of summer with a picnic or pool party. Kick off your shoes, slather on the sunscreen, don your sunglasses, and chill out. Summer is a time to slow down to appreciate

"There are few things so pleasant as a picnic eaten in perfect comfort." - W. Somerset Maugham

Perhaps because I practiced interior design as a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers for 25 years, or perhaps because my gardener mother always created gorgeous, casual and delicious summer gatherings, my style of summer outdoor entertaining has always included color, surprises and fun. With the lovely warm weather, whether it's throwing a blanket on the deck for an impromptu picnic or setting a stunning table for a themed get-together, dining alfresco is my preferred approach to feeding my guests.

My cues arrive in collaboration between my interior and exterior spaces. Since I designed my garden to be an extension of my home, the outdoor eating areas complement the kitchen creating an inviting flow from my interior décor to the garden rooms. Creating this sense of serenity and continuity is as significant to the outside of the home as it is to the inside. Before I plan my menu or my decorations, I meander around my garden spaces, investigating what flowers will be blooming during the fete and what fruits and vegetables will be ready for harvesting. I want to know what scents, textures, lighting, and colors will be on display on that particular day or evening. Once I've taken a few photos and made notes, the party planning begins.

The goal is to always serve a menu filled with fresh, homegrown ingredients that honor the colors of the rainbow. Whatever is ripe in my garden at the

being outside surrounded by nature.

STAY hydrated. Drink lots of water, don't do garden chores in the extreme heat, and keep sports drinks on hand.

BE fire safe. Read how to landscape your garden to be more fire-resistant.

<https://blog.voiceamerica.com/2019/05/21/firescaping-for-survival/>

STAKE gladiolus as they tend to be top-heavy and fall over.

DEADHEAD roses and other perennials to keep the blooms coming.

CLEAN pruning shears with alcohol after each use.

CONTINUE weeding. Make sure to cut any dry, tall grass.

HARVEST fruit and vegetables in the morning for best flavor and nutrition. A few of the fruits and vegetables that are currently ripe are plums, peaches, apples, melons, tomatoes, cucumbers, beets, beans, corn, carrots and zucchini.

PICK up any fruit that has fallen on the ground to prevent rodents, raccoons, turkeys, and other critters from invading your garden.

ENCOURAGE herb growth by pinching the tips. Use the cuttings in your recipes.

MULCH your garden to retain moisture and keep roots cool. Do not use gorilla hair as it is highly flammable. Keep all mulches moist.

SOW seeds of brassicas including cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, and kohlrabi for an autumn harvest.

PLAN now for autumn planting.

WATER plantings in containers daily, if needed. The heat dries out pots quickly.

ORDER spring-flowering bulbs from catalogs including tulips, Dutch iris, daffodils, woodland hyacinths, and whatever else grabs your attention.

PLAN a picnic party. Re-live your summer camp frolics. Casual or upscale, the fun begins outdoors.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing!



Make your pool resort-like with fountains, urns filled with flowers, and comfy chaises.



Paella cooking on the outdoor grill is a crowd pleaser.



Comfortable lounge chairs under umbrellas for shade in the loggia.



Stake gladiolus when they get top heavy.



Turn outdoor dining into an elegant affair with gauzy fabrics and formal floral displays.



Kids enjoy a picnic party on the deck with a patio heater for warmth, face painting, and finger foods.



Cynthia Brian preparing the meal including roasted nectarines for a casual picnic pool party. 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 Are1r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's Radio show and order her books at 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. Hire Cynthia for projects, consults, and lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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