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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



A bumble bee buzzes in a geranium. Photo
Cynthia Brian

"... many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth." - Charles Darwin

Twenty-three honeybees, 10 lady beetles, five lizards, three frogs, and several spiders.

Within two hours on a very hot day this past week, the rescue count from the swimming pool kept mounting. I was afraid to leave the water lest more of my garden friends would drown. It's summer and the flying insects, creepy crawlies, and slithering creatures are in abundance. The ones I want to save are the ones that are our garden guardians.

The Good Guys

Bees

We've all heard about the Colony Collapse Disorder affecting honey bees worldwide and the importance of

protecting our bees. Don't confuse honey bees with carnivorous yellowjackets. Bees, bumble bees, and yellowjackets are all pollinators yet honey bees and bumble bees don't attack humans unless they are stepped on, slapped, swatted, or threatened. They are gathering pollen and the honey bees are making honey while keeping our fruit, flowers and vegetables reproducing.

Lady Beetles

There are over 450 species of ladybugs in the United States and they are voracious consumers of aphids, caterpillars, lace bugs, mealybugs, scale, whiteflies, and mites. Lady beetles are perhaps the most beloved of all insects and even though you can purchase them for your garden, they will fly away when their food level declines. An adult will eat over 5,000 aphids in her lifetime.

Lizards

Don't be afraid of these garden helpers. Lizards are carnivores, not plant-eaters. You are fortunate if you have lizards in your yard. They eat beetles, ants, wasps, aphids and grasshoppers. They like to bask in the sun and also shelter under rocks or in the mulch. Predators to lizards include cats, snakes and birds.

Frogs

Both frogs and toads are amphibians living on both land and in water. They need moisture to survive and prey upon snails, slugs, and other insects. However, if they fall into a swimming pool without a way to escape, they will drown. In one summer, a single toad may devour over 10,000 pests. Some species will eat mosquito larvae. Like our lizard friends, pets, birds and snakes enjoy them as a meal. Enjoy their choral music at dusk.

Spiders

Fear of spiders is one of the most common phobias even though most spiders do not bite humans. The two biting spiders with venom that can be fatal to humans are the black widow and the brown recluse. Spiders are not insects. Spiders are arthropods as they have eight legs. As happy hunters, they are excellent garden pest control managers, actually considered to be the most beneficial and efficient insect eradicator in our landscapes. When you see a spider web, admire its delicate intricacy. Don't destroy it. Inside your home, spiders are helping eradicate more invasive bugs. Spiders don't carry diseases as mosquitoes or ticks do.

To keep the good guys attracted to our landscapes, eliminate pesticides, insecticides and chemicals. Companion planting with a diversity of species will provide a variety of stalking and dining options. Offer shelters of mulch, rocks, small branches, and a water source.

The Bad Guys

Mosquitoes

Mosquito bites cause puffy red bumps that can itch for a week. Worse, mosquitoes are vectors for West Nile Virus that they transmit to humans. Empty any standing water around your garden and punch drainage holes in containers. Change birdbaths daily or add a recirculating pump. If you have a pool or hot tub, keep it effectively chlorinated. Check for leaky faucets. It only takes a few days for larvae to mature. Vector Control is available at no charge to add mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) to your pond water.

Yellowjackets

Although yellowjackets do help with pollination, they are scavengers for meat and sugary food, disrupting picnics, summer outdoor activities and barbecues. Never squash a yellowjacket. When crushed they emit a chemical that calls to other yellowjackets to attack. They build nests in abandoned burrows, in eaves and bushes. Because their sting is so potent and painful, if you find a nest, call Vector Control for eradication.

Ticks

Lyme disease is one of the fastest-growing epidemics with over 300,000 diagnoses occurring annually

in the United States. Summer is the most likely time to be bitten by a tiny deer tick. Ticks are parasites that feed on blood. They live in brush piles, leaf litter, lawns, tree stumps, ground cover, and stone or brick walls. They even have been found on picnic tables and benches. It's important to wear tick repellent clothing when outside and after being outdoors, conduct a full body check, take a shower, and put your clothes in a hot dryer for 30 minutes to kill any ticks, then wash your clothes. (I know, it seems weird to dry first, then wash, but the heat of the dryer kills the ticks) Check your pets. Ticks can be hard to find and can linger in your hair, clothing, or pet fur. If you find a tick, don't twist it or turn it. Use sanitized pointed tweezers to grab the tick and pull it straight out. Wash the bite, apply antiseptic, save the tick for identification, and seek medical attention. The "bad guys" are on my "danger watch out" list. I've had three trips already to either urgent care or the emergency room with ticks lodged in my neck that required surgery to remove. Mosquitoes are my nemesis inflicting gigantic, itching bites with bumps that last for two weeks or more. In the last year, I've stumbled upon three yellowjacket nests, suffering multiple stings on my hand and arms with swelling that abated after a week.

The "good guys" I'll continue to rescue as they are my garden "watchdogs." Fortunately, my numerous song birds and hummingbirds aren't nose-diving!

What's bugging you?

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for August

CONTACT Vector Control for Contra Costa County at (925) 685-9301 for assistance with mosquitoes, rats, skunks and yellowjackets.

PROTECT yourself with permethrin-treated clothing and bug repellents. I have found relief with Insect Shield. www.insectshield.com.

PLAN a trip to a national park. Upcoming days for free admittance are Aug. 25 and Sept. 28. <https://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm>. Seniors can buy a lifetime entry pass for \$80.

TAKE advantage of a 20% discount on new introductions from Renee's Garden Seeds through Aug. 18 with checkout code NEW20. <http://ow.ly/eYZE5OuBDE5>.

MARK your calendar for The National Heirloom Exposition happening at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds Sept. 10-12. <http://www.TheHeirloomExpo.com>.

FILL a saucer with water to set in your garden for the butterflies, bees, lizards and other small creatures. In the hot weather, they need to hydrate and a shallow saucer will allow them to drink without drowning.

PRUNE low hanging branches on redwoods, pines, cedars, and other trees as fire protection maintenance.

CUT a branch with a magnolia bloom for a vase. The huge white blossoms are spectacular and last several days while the leaves stay green for two weeks.

CAUTION when walking or playing on lawns planted with clover. Honeybees may be feeding.

CELEBRATE the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival with Be the Star You Are! nonprofit and Lamorinda Weekly on Saturday, Sept. 28. Details at <https://www.BetheStarYouAre.org/events>

CONTINUE deadheading spent blossoms on roses and other perennials.

EAT fresh fruit as it ripens and pick up any fruit that falls on the ground to discourage a scourge of rodents.

RELAX on your patio to savor the summer sky.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing. Happy Summer!



Relax on a patio with comfortable seating to savor the summer sky.



A lush swath of oleanders, hydrangeas, and agapanthus.



A colander filled with delicious mulberries.



Soak your tired feet a bath of marigolds and chrysanthemums.



Cynthia Brian prancing through the garden. 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!r 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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