

Published December 11th, 2019

## Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



As the temperatures drop, the colors become more intense with a grand finale of fall foliage on the Japanese maples. Photo Cynthia Brian

soon as there was a break in the weather, I cleaned patio furniture, moved lounge pads to storage and wrapped the furniture in plastic to endure the winter under a patio cover. Large containers of birds of paradise and palms that are frost tender were transported to protected areas.

After three days of continual downfall, it was time to plant my bulbs and transplant perennials. The bulbs had begun to sprout and as I dug holes, I realized that about 5 inches down, the earth was still very hard and dry. Rain . we will need so much more.

On day four, I was raking the piles of colorful liquid amber leaves when I felt a sting in my leg. Then another shot of pain whisked through my jacket to my arm, followed by my neck feeling on fire. Before I knew what had transpired, I was attacked by a swarm of yellowjackets. What? Yellowjackets in December? After tending to the painful and swollen sites with ice, a paste of baking soda and water, vinegar, and imbibing antihistamines, I called Vector Control. The rain needed to stop to effectively treat and destroy the nest. What I learned is that yellowjackets are the most aggressive at this time of year because the queen is laying eggs that will become more queens in the spring (see story on Page D1). Be cautious when raking, digging or pruning.

When day five arrived, I was ready to start my Christmas decorating. I cut branches from my redwood trees, clipped Chinese pistache, cotoneaster and pyracantha berries, sprayed painted my autumn gourds, and started creating holiday arrangements.

We had a morning of sunshine on day six so I pruned the deadwood from my fence perimeter oleanders. Don't let the pretty flowers fool you. Although these Mediterranean specimens are easy to grow in almost any climate, every part of the oleander is poisonous to both animals and humans. Wear leather gloves when working with oleanders as the sap can cause severe allergic reactions and clean shears with bleach. Do not add the flowers, leaves, or branches to compost piles. Dispose of them to your trash secured in a plastic bag.

Day seven dawned dark, dreary, cold and wet. It was time to bring in my weathered wood, make a cup of hot cocoa, light a fire and read a book. Growing up on the farm without central heat, our only source of warmth in winter was a roaring fire. `Tis the season to be jolly and cozy!

The rain continues to wash the spiders out!

Happy Holidays! Happy gardening! Happy Growing!

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for December SAVOR the final days of fall foliage on your deciduous trees. As the temperatures drop, the colors become more intense, especially on maples, crape myrtles, liquid ambers and pistache.

STOMP mole runs to encourage those burrowers to move on.

PRUNE euphorbia to the ground or if it has become invasive, dig out the roots.

BE ALERT for yellowjacket nests in the ground. Call Vector Control for eradication. (925) 685-9301.?

REPURPOSE Thanksgiving gourds by spray painting them in metallic colors of gold silver, bronze, copper, red, green or blue. Use in your holiday décor.

MAKE your own Christmas wreaths and garlands with boughs from your redwood, cedar, pine, or other conifer trees. Add berries of holly, cotoneaster, Chinese pistache or pyracantha for a homemade creation.

DON'T mow your lawns when it is raining. Wet grass bends over and you'll end up with uneven cuts. Also, mowing when your lawn is soaked will cause ruts, compaction, and even uproot the grass.

SEASON wood for at least a year before burning in fireplaces or wood-burning stoves. Green wood is heavy and smokes, doesn't provide heat, and can build up large quantities of creosote which can cause a fire in your chimney. Have your fireplace and chimney inspected and swept at least once per year. Enjoy a fire only on safe days, never on spare-the-air notifications.

NEVER burn oleander wood. The smoke is toxic and poisonous. Never use oleander as skewers for

"Down came the rain and washed the spider out!" - Toddler song

Halleluiah! It is raining . and raining, and raining. It was indeed a blessed Thanksgiving weekend as the heavens finally opened and lifegiving tears spilled from the sky. Our grounds have been so parched that even the amended clay soil is as hard as cement. The start of the rainy season means it is time to get garden work completed.

On the first day of rain, I donned my rain gear to fertilize the lawn and reseed the grass with my homemade "lawn patch." The recipe is simple: In a wheelbarrow or 5-gallon bucket, mix potting soil with lawn seed. Sprinkle the combination in areas where your lawn is bare, making sure that there are at least 20 seeds per handful. Since the patch needs to remain moist to stimulate growth, doing this chore when it is raining is optimum.

On the second day of rain, I realized that this was not a light shower, but the beginning of a deluge. As

meat as this practice can be deadly. Place cut oleander branches in a plastic bag and put it in your trash bin. Remember that all parts of the oleander can be fatal to humans and animals.

ADD a whimsical statue to your garden to bring a smile to your guests during inclement weather.

PLANT bulbs for spring.

CLEAN rain gutters. Add the debris to your compost pile.

SCATTER poppy and lupine seeds.

COME to 5A Rent-A-Space in Moraga on Saturday, Dec. 14 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. with your children for a Visit with Santa. Be the Star You Are!r volunteers will be on hand to help kids write a letter, and take their photo with St. Nick. Crafts and treats included at this free event. For more information visit:

<https://www.bethestaryouare.org/events>

PICK Meyer lemons to add zest to your celebratory menus.

COMBINE containers of Christmas cactus and cyclamen for a pretty holiday display.



Let firewood and kindling dry for several months before burning.



Christmas cactus and cyclamen make festive holiday bedfellows.



As beautiful as the flowers of oleanders are, the entire plant is poisonous.



Freshly picked Meyer lemons will add zest to holiday menus.



Decorate with cuttings of cotoneaster, magnolia, and redwood leaves.



Santa Cynthia is ready to celebrate the season. 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 StarStyler Radio Broadcast at [www.StarStyleRadio.com](http://www.StarStyleRadio.com). Buy a copy of her 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). Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. [Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com](mailto:Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com) [www.GoddessGardener.com](http://www.GoddessGardener.com)

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