

Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Have yourself a very merry Christmas!



Photos Cynthia Brian

The naked branches from a red-branched Japanese maple are gorgeous in winter.

By Cynthia Brian

“Nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own.”

– Charles Dickens

It’s the most wonderful time of the year!

Every December I utter these same words and each Christmas seems to come earlier than the previous year. Where do the seconds, minutes, hours, days and years go? When I was a child doing my best to be nice instead of naughty, Christmas took forever to arrive. Today, Rudolph and his sleigh are on fast forward.

We have officially entered the season of winter. The deciduous trees are bare, the sky

is gray, and gardens have gone to bed for a long nap. Poinsettias, cyclamen, narcissi, bottlebrush and red branches of Japanese maples offer hints of bright color amidst the dreary daylight landscapes.

Come nightfall, magic happens. Houses and fountains are illuminated with twinkling lights, cuddly teddy bears line windowsills, and treetops glisten with dangling ornaments. Oh, what fun it is to ride around to admire the festive luminosities.

Nature has a way of healing itself. With the rainfall, the formerly charred hills of Moraga and Lafayette are turning a verdant green. In the spring poppies will be flourishing as the ground revitalizes from the frightening October fires. Hurray for Mother

Nature!

Did you ever see the 1947 movie, “The Ghost and Mrs. Muir” starring Gene Tierney and Rex Harrison? It’s a classic film and imminently watchable even by today’s standards. What stood out for me in revisiting that movie recently was the mention of a Monkey Puzzle Tree. Although I had traveled to both Argentina and Chile from whence the tree originates, I had never paid it much attention until I visited Butchart Gardens in Canada. I thought it looked like a naturally decorated Christmas tree with its very unique “pine” cones, although it is not related to a pine tree. The proper name is Araucaria Araucana and what makes it so unique are its cones. The male cones look like hanging cucumbers and the female cones resemble



The endangered Monkey Puzzle tree looks like a Christmas tree.