

Published March 18th, 2020

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian Spring ahead!

By Cynthia Brian



Chinese fringe is a fun-frilled foundation shrub.
Photos Cynthia Brian

"Spring drew on . and a greenness grew over those brown beds, which freshening daily, suggested the thought that Hope traversed them at night, and left each morning brighter traces of her steps." - from "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Bronte

With the World Health Organization declaring the coronavirus a pandemic, daily living as well as travel is interrupted. While we need to be alert and prepared, we cannot panic. My method of staying healthy while diminishing anxiety during these very troubling times is to avoid crowds by going into my garden.

The vernal equinox is only three days away, yet we have been experiencing spring since the first days of February. The cows are munching on the green grass in the hills, the frogs are croaking their mating calls, and gardens are bursting with color. Other than the copious dancing daffodils, nothing spells spring more than abundant camellia blooms, the eye-catching Chinese fringe shrub, and the fragrance of both freesia and

hyacinth. Garden chores performed in the fall is paying dividends now.

In the South, camellias are known as the "belles" of the plant world. There are over 30,000 cultivars with blooms in many shades of red, pink, purple and white. Some feature double petals, others look like roses or peonies. Most species prefer shade to semi-shade thriving in well-drained acidic soil. They are drought-tolerant and best of all, depending on the species, blooms can begin in the fall continuing through the beginning of summer. Float blooms in a shallow bowl for a pretty centerpiece. Make sure to pick up fallen blossoms.

A fabulous foundation plant for any garden is the Chinese fringe flower, a fast-growing shrub that provides evergreen foliage and a strong structure to the garden. In spring, showy, frilly fringes of pink cover the plant. Prune the plant to keep it the size you desire knowing that it can grow to 20 feet. A great perk is that you can propagate with stem cuttings and even make a border or a wall of fringe. Did I mention the flowers boast a sweet aroma as well?

Freesias are bulbs that are grown for their beautiful scent as well as their gorgeous variety of colors. I happen to adore the upward-facing bells of the blue or purple freesia but the yellow, white, pink and red produce gorgeous presentations as well. These bulbs multiply and come up just as spring springs forward year after year. They are deer and rabbit resistant and very easy to grow. Cut a handful for a long-lasting indoor arrangement that provides beauty and perfume.

Hyacinths are dramatic with rich, deep blooms in many colors. Like freesia, they make excellent cut flowers, can be grown in containers, are deer resistant and bee magnets. Their heady scent exudes from both their flowers and their leaves. Plant them along pathways, stairs, and in the front part of your garden to savor their elegance and aromatic character. They, too, will surprise you each year, sprouting as the sunshine warms the earth to delight the senses.

Consider adding any of these favorite garden specimens to your environs for perennial spring enchantment. New fire code on the horizon that affects landscapes

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker has proposed a plan to declare all areas in our district as Wildland Urban Interface in the fire code to prevent insurance companies from canceling policies since Lamorinda is designated a fire zone. When it comes to landscaping, the proposed code would require a 2-foot area away from current structures and 3 feet on new construction to be cleared without any combustible materials. These materials include wood bark, mulch, and plants that are growing taller than two feet. Ground coverings that would be allowed would be green grass, river rock, gravel, crushed granite, or even bare earth. Some trees will need to be removed, especially eucalyptus, pine, bamboo, and junipers if they are within six feet of the structure. This new code is not yet in effect, but with spring on the horizon, this is a great time to start cleaning up your landscape to make it more fireproof.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for March

START seeds as soon as the soil is warm enough. If you are anxious, start your crops indoors near a south-facing window or use a fluorescent light for 12 or more hours per day.

CLEAN out perennial beds now and prepare the soil for replanting.

WELCOME home the migrating birds with fresh water in the fountain and seed in the feeder.

PLANT edibles amongst your ornamentals. Lettuces, parsley, dill, and basil are pretty as well as delicious.

DIG out and replace older woody lavender bushes. Lavender thrives for about 5 or 6 years then is ready for the compost pile.

ADJUST your lawnmower to a higher setting and allow the clippings to nourish the soil.

PLANT host plants for the butterflies such as milkweed and dogwood. Leave a patch of dense

vegetation for protection from inclement weather and a small mud puddle to quench their thirst.

INVEST in a well-made wheelbarrow or hand truck to haul heavy bags of soil, rocks or pots of plants.

RESEED lawns with the people, pet, and planet-friendly Pearl's Premium lawn seed available in 5 or 25-pound bags of a sunny mix, shade mix, or sun/shade seed blend. The roots go to 4 feet needing 50-75% water, making for a better drought-tolerant lawn. To order, visit www.PearlsPremium.com. Use discount code STAR20.

EMPTY all vessels that contain water as mosquito larvae is already hatching.

PICK up fallen camellias and dispose of them. Camellia blooms are abundant this year and they drop daily. Do not allow the decayed petals to stay on the ground to avoid damage to the mother plant. If you notice dark brown veins in the petals, your camellia may be suffering from petal blight. Treat weekly with a foliar fungicide.

PRUNE the new wood on your woodland or panicle hydrangeas down to 18-24 inches now to encourage fuller blooms later.

STAY informed about Covid-19 only via reliable information. Visit Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov> or The World Health Organization at <https://www.who.int> for updates.

May hope traverse our nights and bring us all a brighter morning free of woes. Take a breath and inhale spring.

Stay healthy, be well, and be safe.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing. Happy Spring.



A single petal deep pink camellia with a yellow center. Photos Cynthia Brian



Close up of a delicate and fragrant purple freesia. Photos Cynthia Brian



Fallen camellias blooms must be gathered regularly to protect the plant. Photos Cynthia Brian



Late-blooming daffodils sing with joy. Note the early bloomers behind are finished. Photos Cynthia Brian



Cynthia Brian outdoors on a cooler February day. Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your spring garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia 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. Buy copies of her best-selling books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! Millennials to Boomers at www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA