

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Prune, plan, and peruse



Nemesia and ferns are excellent bedmates.

By Cynthia Brian

“A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.” ~ George Moore

Like most of us who have been sheltering at home for the past 11 months, traveling to foreign lands has not been part of my normal activities. At first, I was immensely disappointed to cancel my 2020 exotic trips, especially the one that would have reunited me with my European pen pal with whom I've been corresponding regularly since I was 9 years old. That's a long time to have maintained a close relationship across thousands of miles.

But, like so many, this past year has found me digging even deeper into communion with nature. I have been inspired by its majesty and motivated to respect our alliance with a stronger devotion by spending many hours outdoors in contemplation as well as work-mode.

A week ago, the hills were still golden brown but with the recent heavy rains, a lushness and verdancy have finally appeared. February nights bring increased frost and freezing temperatures. We must cover our tender plants with burlap or cloth as protection.

The most necessary garden chore this month is pruning our fruit trees. It is essential to prune your peaches, pears, prunes, plums, apples and apricots while the trees are dormant in winter. Sweet cherries are pruned in summer as they are susceptible to fungal and



An old Asian pear tree is pruned in winter.

bacterial diseases. All other fruiting trees need to be pruned to allow for increased sunlight to penetrate the branches which will in turn yield higher quality fruit. Pruning helps battle diseases while developing a better form for a healthier tree.

The tools you'll need are a lopper, hand pruner, pruning saw, and long-handled pruning shear. You may need a ladder if your tree is especially tall but be very careful when using any ladder. Make sure to have a second person with you to hold the ladder since the ground may not be level. Sterilize your tools with alcohol or bleach mixed with water to avoid spreading any disease from plant to plant.

By removing unnecessary limbs, you will be able to shape the tree while providing better access for any necessary spraying. The increased sunlight promotes a larger size of fruit with a uniform ripening time. Insect infestation and other diseases are reduced through pruning because after a rain shower, the limbs will dry more quickly. Pruning appropriately will provide a more beautiful canopy without topping the tree. The sugar content of the crop is increased with the airflow and sun. Harvesting is easier. Pick up a book on pruning to read about the best methods for your various trees or watch online tutorials. If you feel out of your league, hire a professional arborist. Always gather the trimmings from the ground. When dry, use as kindling, shred for mulch, or add to your green bin.

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