

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Garden party hacks



Azaleas do well in shady areas and will bloom profusely.

Photos Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

"I was reared in the garden, you know." ~ Emily Dickenson

If you are like most people who have been hibernating and following CDC social distancing protocols during the pandemic, you are probably itching for a gathering of friends and family. If you have been vaccinated (and, I hope you have), small outdoor get-togethers without masks are considered relatively safe.

Is your garden and patio area ready for a party? While many people have baked bread, learned to crochet, or tackled puzzles, I have been busy helping clients prepare their landscapes for small garden shindigs as well as creating quiet spaces as a peaceful, restorative sanctuary.

You don't have to do an entire expensive makeover to make your place look pretty and presentable. There are several ways to get a

streamlined look on a budget that you can afford.

I call these "garden hacks" and I'll share suggestions with you.

Walk around your exterior perimeter and take notes. What areas need more TLC? Do you have debris anywhere or everywhere? What about weeds, broken or dead branches, or an overabundance of fallen leaves? The first thing you want to do is clean. Remove whatever is broken and not fixable, recycle or re-purpose other items. Rake the leaves and put them in the compost pile or green bin. With pruning shears, cut any dead branches on shrubs or trees and remove dead or dry foliage.

Next, tackle the weeds. If weeds are growing in beds, it is best to pull them by hand. If they are on a hillside or area without many other plants, you might be able to use a weed-eater. My preference is always hand-pulling to get the roots. Pulling out the roots ensures that

they won't sprout again this season.

Once your garden is free of weeds, check the soil. If it is hard and compacted, it behooves you to bring in bags of enriched compost before planting. Soil is the foundation of verdant growth. With our glorious spring weather, blooming flowers, trees, and shrubs are in abundance at nurseries and garden centers. Before it gets too hot, you'll want to add any shrubs or color spots. Until plantings are established, you will need to water deeply and often. I prefer to plant colorful perennials, biennials, and bulbs that will return in future seasons. Some of my favorites are azaleas, foxgloves, delphinium, lavender, roses, and calla lily, all available in several colors. To soften a fence or arbor, I recommend clematis, honeysuckle, or jasmine. Wisteria is a strong, spreading vine that requires heavy-duty support systems. Also, seek drought-tolerant species and succulents. In my garden, I like to create a painter's palette of color with minimal spacing between plants, however, strategically placing just a few select plants is impressively impactful.

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Calla lilies are elegant and flower annually.