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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



The edible Jerusalem star known as salsify tips its purple flower towards the sun. Photos Cynthia Brian

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to live on this beautiful and astonishing Planet Earth. In the morning, I woke up with a sense of gratitude." ~ Earl Nightingale

In California, May reigns as one of the most colorful months of the year. Mother Nature has fully awakened from lingering winter doldrums to burst into bloom. The radiant combination of lush green lawns against cheerful vignettes of glowing, flowing flowers, trees and shrubs is mesmerizing. Beauty, fragrance, and food beckon from every direction.

With appreciation, I awake each morning and fall asleep each night to the lullabies from a multitude of songbirds. Pollinators are busy buzzing from nectar plants to other food sources signaling a healthy garden environment. The succession of blossoms changes daily from spring bulbs to robust roses; bright bearded iris to sprouted seeds scattered last fall.

May is the optimum time to plant annuals, vegetables, and herbs together in a potager garden. By combining a medley of edibles and florals, biological pest control is ignited providing plants to protect one another and be a shelter for beneficial insects. Nasturtium, calendula and marigolds are the colorful workhorses attracting hungry caterpillars and blackflies away from brassicas and beans. Garlic planted between roses, lettuce, potatoes, or even fruit trees will keep the aphids, Japanese beetles and ermine moths at bay. Parsley attracts pollinators and protectors of tomatoes.

Mint deters ants and aphids but make sure to plant in a pot as mint can overtake an entire garden. Before planting, weed thoroughly, enrich the soil with compost or add new soil, and rotate crops to maintain vigor while producing greater yields.

Jerusalem star, also known as go-to-bed early, vegetable oyster, or salsify is considered an invasive weed in some areas, but this dandelion-related plant is a forgotten beloved Victorian-era edible that tastes like an oyster and grows like a carrot. Its yellow-flowering relative is named goatsbeard. The taproot grows to 12 inches into the ground. Harvest with care to not break the root. In the kitchen, salsify is versatile and delicious in soups, stews, bisques, casseroles, or grated like beets in a salad for a fresh seafood/artichoke flavor. The entire plant has been used medicinally.

Be cautious of poisonous plants invading your vegetable garden. Poison hemlock is everywhere and is deadly if ingested. The pretty plant displays lacy and fernlike leaves with very delicate white flowers. A member of the carrot family, it is often mistaken for Queen Anne's lace, a less-lethal specimen. The best way to identify poison hemlock is to look at the stems which have red or purple spots or streaks. Its most poisonous alkaloid is coniine which causes complete respiratory collapse. Only mechanical or artificial ventilation can save someone who has ingested poison hemlock. Wear gloves and a mask to dig out the root. Don't weed whack it or burn it as small particles could be inhaled. Socrates drank hemlock tea as his preferred method of dying.

The yellow blooms of the elderberry tree signal spring's arrival, and people need to be aware of the toxicity of this beautiful tree. The stems, seeds, leaves, bark, and roots are all poisonous to humans containing a cyanide-inducing glycoside. The blue-black berries are safe to eat only after boiling for at least 20 minutes. Elderberry jam and wine are popular and include major health benefits.

Foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea*, a spectacularly beautiful biennial plant, is extremely attractive to children and every part of it is lethal to humans. Compounds from this plant are used in heart medicines. Since they grow tall, five to seven feet tall, plant them at the back of a flower garden and keep them out of your kitchen garden.

Besides getting my potager and vegetable garden installed, my latest fun spring project has been creating a living wall garden by using a decorative frame from Nature Hills Nursery that features a built-in watering tray and a reservoir for drainage. This instant wall planter is a step up from the DIY picture frame with chicken wire-filled moss that I designed several years ago. I added potting soil to the portrait garden, arranged a variety of succulents, attached a found turkey feather, watered, and hung it on the exterior of my house in the sunshine as a growing art piece.

Every day I am immersed in gratitude for the wonders of Mother Earth as I watch the procession and succession of nature's bounty. Walk gently through your garden to enjoy the miraculous magic of May.

The Goddess Gardener's Gardening Guide for May

FERTILIZE: If you haven't already, fertilize trees, shrubs, rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias, lawns, and ground covers while the days are warm, and the evenings are cool.

FEED indoor plants.

BAIT for snails and slugs that will damage new seedlings with organic Sluggo. The active ingredient is iron phosphate. Corry's Slug and Snail Killer contains 5% sodium ferric Exceda that is safe for pets and people and can be used on edibles. After eating the bait, these gastropods slink to their hiding places to die. Because both male and female mollusks lay eggs, one slug or snail can contribute to thousands of these pests terrorizing crops if not eradicated.

SPRAY roses, crape myrtle trees, and ground cover susceptible to aphids and fungal diseases.

DEADHEAD roses as the petals fade to encourage continuous blooming.

PLANT annuals and perennials including zinnia, salvia, calibrachoa.

ELIMINATE standing water from gutters, old tires, or saucers to reduce the breeding of mosquitoes.

TRANSPLANT small trees, including fruit trees such as nectarine or avocado to the desired area.

MOW tall wild grass to three inches or less as a fire defensible space.

COMBINE edibles and flowers in a kitchen garden with a variety of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, beets, squash, garlic, parsley, borage, nasturtium, calendula, roses and marigolds.

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



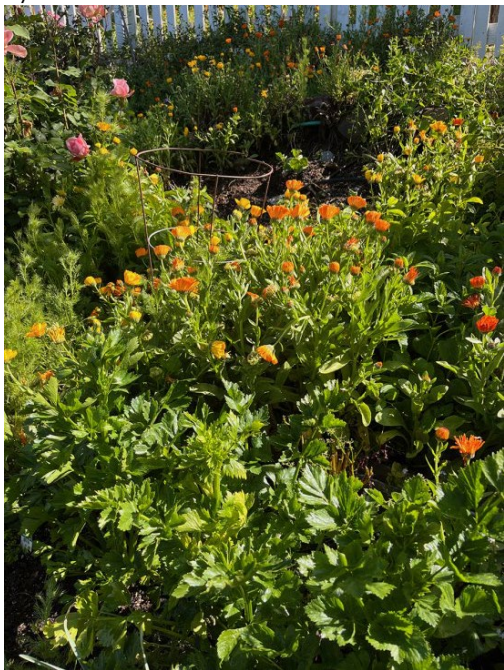
The elegant foxglove, *Digitalis purpurea*, is toxic to humans. Photos Cynthia Brian



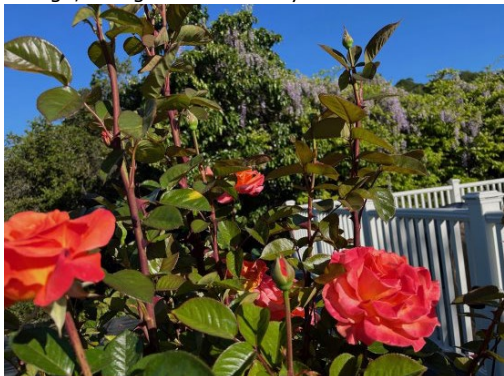
Final call to fertilize lawns to maintain the lush green for summer. Photos Cynthia Brian



The finished frame of succulents with a turkey feather adornment hangs on the house exterior. Photos Cynthia Brian



A healthy potager planted with calendula, rose, parsley, tomatoes, peppers, marjoram, oregano, mint, borage, and garlic. Photos Cynthia Brian



Roses are bedrocks of a gorgeous garden. (Arizona rose)



Intoxicating scent of yellow bearded iris combined with pink carpet roses.



Cynthia Brian is elated about the rain! 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 books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD and special savings. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

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