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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



A plethora of flowers beneath the tangled weeds means hand-weeding is essential Photos Cynthia Brian

"Digging the garden tending the weeds, Who could ask for more?" John Lennon & Paul McCartney

Before the weather gets too warm and the soil hardens, we must eradicate weeds from our gardens. I know, I know. A weed is just a plant growing somewhere it is not wanted; where we live and how we cultivate determines the perspective we may have about what is a weed and what is wanted a specimen.

The weeds in my garden are invasive, prickly, adaptable, and undesirable. The grass weeds that have blown in from the hills make excellent hay; yet the thistles, euphorbia spurge, hemlock, bindweed, black medic, pelargonium robertianum, and geranium purpureum are a constant source of pain, strain, and drain.

Everyone knows about wild thistles. They have prickly leaves and stems with colorful flower heads. They are in the same Asteraceae family as daisies and sunflowers. What you may not know is that they are ecologically important, providing food and nectar for

pollinators, including bees, butterflies, birds, and mammals. In some parts of the world, they are cultivated for their ornamental value. As I was about to pull out two large thistles, butterflies landed on the leaves and purple buds. Watching them savor their meal, I let these weeds live another day. The artichokes we enjoy on our dinner plates are also a thistle in the Asteraceae family. They have been specifically bred to be edible and tender without the spiky prickles.

In the past, I have written extensively about euphorbia, hemlock, bindweed, and black media. But most people are not familiar with pelargonium robertianum and geranium purpureum, although you may have seen it. Interestingly, geranium robertianum, a native of Europe, with its delicious musky fragrance when stepped upon, is coveted by many gardeners and foragers. Its flowers and leaves add a spicy flavor to food, and the crushed leaves are an insect repellent. It also boasts medicinal uses to lower blood sugar levels, reduce inflammation, and arrest diarrhea.

In a patch growing alone, it is a pretty groundcover; however, when it grows in mixed beds, it tends to twine and strangle plants. It is in the geranium family and is known by several names, including Herb Robert, Red Robin, and Stinky Geranium. The reason I don't cook with it derives from its common name. death come quickly. It arrived in my landscape about three years ago, probably in a potted plant or perhaps from a bird, and has spread everywhere.

A subspecies of geranium robertianum, pelargonium purpureum, known as Little Robin, is on the California Invasive Plant Council list. It doesn't possess a strong fragrance, only a very slight aroma. It is pervasive throughout California, spreading by seeds and dispersed by animal and human activities. They both have tiny pink flowers and lobed leaves. Because I grow anemones, weeding is challenging if the plant is not blooming because their lobed leaves are very similar. It is for this reason that I weed slowly and by hand.

Can you tell the difference between a weed and a domesticated plant? Why is it necessary to weed? To maintain a healthy garden, weeding is obligatory. If you have an area that is growing only weeds, weed whacking is easiest. If you have a large landscape as I do that is filled with flowers and shrubs competing with the weeds, you'll need to weed by hand.

Here are the reasons that weeding is crucial.

Resource Competition: All plants require water, nutrients, and sunlight. Weeds compete with garden plants for these resources. By removing the weeds, the plants you love are allowed to thrive.

Aesthetic Appeal: In my opinion, weeds make a garden look unkempt. Look at the photos in this article of my garden. Although there are hundreds of blooming flowers, the weeds have overpowered the plants, making the garden look messy.

Disease and Pest Prevention: Weeds harbor diseases and pests that could spread to cultivate plants. My weeds are so dense and so tall, that again, this week I received another tick bite, despite wearing protection. Reduce the risk of ticks and other infestations by removing the weeds.

Air Circulation: When the weeds are dense, air circulation is impeded. Mildew can occur. Free up the airflow by getting rid of the weeds.

Seed Spread: Weeds develop seed heads and once they burst, they disperse thousands of seeds that float through the air to increase the weed population in other areas. Many of my weeds have already started shooting their seeds before I could pull them.

Soil Health: Many weeds have deep root systems that disrupt the soil structure, making it difficult for other plants to grow. Weeds like euphorbia spurge emit a toxin in their roots that kills other plants, making way for only the spurge to flourish.

Stress Reduction: There is a peacefulness and tranquility to weeding. When I'm kneeling or sitting in the weeds, I am up close and personal with the plants. I hear the birds singing, and the wind rustling. I

witness the butterflies, bees, and bugs that hover around the plants. I smell the leaves and scents emanating from the soil. My senses are alive and I feel connected to nature and all things. My prescription to stress less, is to get your hands in the dirt. Give it a whirl!

As fire season approaches, it is essential to cut weeds. The hills are lush and green now, but soon the heat of summer will be upon us, and the grass will be dry and brown. Heed the checklist from our fire departments to create defensible spaces around our homes. Many of us, including my family, have had our homeowner's insurance canceled or non-renewed because we live in a designated fire zone. As frustrating as this is, it is imperative to harden off our homes. Follow year-round directions at www.mofd.org/our-district/fuels-mitigation-fire-prevention

To summarize fire district recommendations:

Prevent embers from igniting your home by clearing leaves, needles, and debris from gutters, eaves, porches, and decks.

Mow grasses and weeds.

Keep your garden watered.

Prune tree limbs to keep the lowest branches 6-10 feet from the ground.

Reduce "fire fuel laddering" by not allowing bushes or trees to touch one another.

Keep combustible materials 15-30 feet away from structures.

Maintain your property and be alert for any fire danger.

Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Gardening Guide

To easily kill weeds in cracks, bricks, driveways, or paths, use a solution of 30% vinegar available at hardware stores mixed with table salt. Spray on a windless, hot, sunny day. This spray will kill whatever is growing, so be cautious around desirable plants.

Mosquitoes are breeding. Empty any containers of water or add Dunks or a few drops of bleach to birdbaths or other non-circulating water features.

Don't cut back your daffodils or other yellowing bulbs. To provide the nutrients for next year's bloom, the leaves need to dry and be crackling like potato chips before pulling.

Make sure to rotate the location of your vegetables when planting this season. Don't plant tomatoes near potatoes as they are members of the same family and susceptible to the same diseases. Plant neither of them in the soil where peppers or eggplants grew previously.

Check your irrigation system for leaks and breakage. As the weather warms, watering in the morning or evening at least once a week will be necessary for garden wellbeing.

It's Mother's Day. Make sure to treat your special Mom with a glorious bouquet or potted plant.

Flowers are always appreciated.

Digging in the garden. Tending the weeds. Who could ask for more?

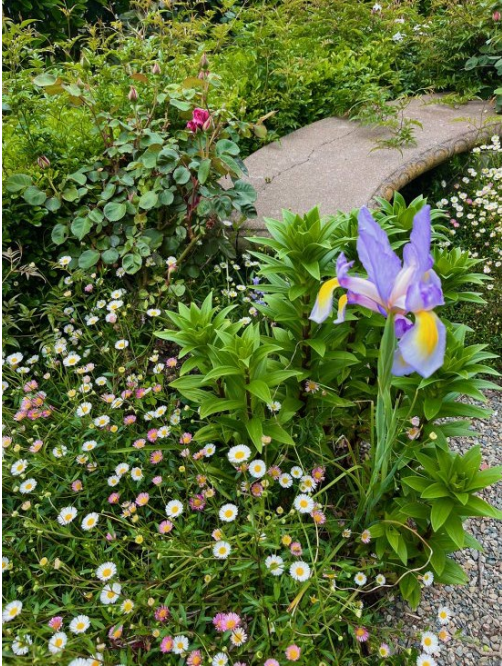
Happy Gardening. Happy Growing. Happy Mother's Day



Pink azalea, yellow freesia, and bluebells appear after weeding Photos Cynthia Brian



Pink Poseidon clematis outshines the weeds. Photos Cynthia Brian



Santa Barbara daisies, Dutch iris, and roses. Photos Cynthia Brian



After weeding, California poppies fill the field. Photos Cynthia Brian



The ubiquitous weed, *geranium robertianum*. death come quickly.



Tournament of Roses rosebush blooms amongst the weeds.



A bee savors nectar from a mock orange tree.



Edible wild leeks, also called ramps, can be as invasive as weeds.



Like every mom, Cynthia Brian enjoys her beautiful bouquet of blooms. For more gardening advice for all seasons, check out Growing with the Goddess Gardener at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/books>. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia Brian 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 which was just honored as the 2024 Nonprofit of the Year by the Moraga Chamber of Commerce. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Her newest children's picture book, Books in the Barnyard: Oh Deer!, from the series, Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures is available for discounted pre-sales at <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com/online-store>. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com <https://www.CynthiaBrian.com>

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