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Gardening with Cynthia Brian: ANIMAL HOUSE

By Cynthia Brian



The Birdhouse Tree, aka a dead walnut tree, is now the home for hundreds of species.

stairs looking to rid the garden of rodents. Swarms of honeybees were busy in the red apple aptenia, bumblebees vibrated in the lavender using their buzz pollination technique to dislodge the pollen grains, and ladybugs danced on the cosmos. As the sun set behind the hills, the frogs launched their vocal competition. We giggled at the antics of a litter of cottontails nibbling the dandelions in the lawn. Not to be outdone, a covey of quail scampered about chirping while searching for tasty bugs. Animal house was in full bloom.

A portion of her gift from me was to choose whatever goodies from the garden she wanted. "Oh that's so delicate. What is it?" she asked as she pointed to the pretty petals of blue. "Oh, you definitely will remember today!" I laughed as I explained how the seeds of forget-me-nots stick to everything to ensure they'll be around everywhere next season. In fact, I suggested she plant her socks, already blanketed with sticky seeds. Although she had used nigella in dried arrangements, she had never seen how lovely it is flowering. We picked a bouquet of the petals and pods of this black cumin, both a medicinal and culinary source. Soon we were hungry. Recalling how I grew up on a ranch, she teased me about how if I were still living there, all this wild game would have been a most delicious dinner. Instead we gathered eggs from the henhouse, picked fresh artichokes, lettuces, mustards, calendulas, chamomile, guava flowers, and sprinkled choice herbs to enjoy with a feast of barbecued ahi.

Here's how you can create your own animal house garden party and become a wildlife enthusiast.

- Feed the critters! Plant trees, shrubs, bushes, and flowers that wildlife like to eat. For example, if you want Monarch butterflies, plant common milkweed which the caterpillar feed on. I happen to enjoy my dear deer, therefore I plant extra fruit trees, hollyhock, and roses specifically for their food fetishes. Hang a variety of bird, squirrel, and hummingbird feeders filled with the appropriate seeds, suet, and nectar. Plant drifts of five to seven specimens to provide seeds, berries, foliage, fruits, flowers, and fragrance ensuring a balanced diet.

- Give them a beverage and a bath. Provide a shallow saucer of clean water for butterflies to quench their thirst, and a gurgling fountain or birdbath for birds to bathe, drink, and play. Build a toad abode-a pond for the frogs to frolic and the water lilies to delight you.

- Build them a safe house. Our garden guards need hiding places. Birdhouses, thickets, brush, rocks, brambles, ground covers, tree branches, tall grass, or specific man-made structures will protect our friends from predators and the elements. If you have a tree that dies, consider adding colorful birdhouses to create your own personal Bird Tree.

- Invite the natives. Plant native species and wildflowers as much as possible to attract the wild kingdom.

- Be organic. Avoid pesticides and herbicides. Both kill beneficial species as well as the ones we want to deter.

- Practice sustainability. Compost your own leaves and scraps. Use organic mulches, fertilizers. A less manicured landscape attracts the good guys.

- Build a nursery. Whether it's a nesting box or dense shrubbery, provide a place where the wildlife can raise their young. My geese hatched their eggs in a doghouse!

We have been green washed by many campaigns, yet most of us truly want to be more environmentally friendly. Keep your garden healthy by regaining your power to live in a natural world. By catering to the needs of the creepy crawlies and the critters your personal sanctuary will be guaranteed.

Every moment I spend in my environmentally sensitive surroundings, my quality of life improves. I breathe in

the beauty and am grateful for this place to play, pray, and stay. I am reminded of the Cree prophecy: "When all the trees have been cut down, when all the animals have been hunted, when all the waters are polluted, when all the air is unsafe to breathe, only then will you discover you cannot eat money."

Whether in a time of prosperity or recession, your garden is your doorway to other universes, especially to the world of wildlife. The flowers, trees, and plants are their buffet, bursting with bugs, worms, and succulent berries. Set a delectable dinner table by planting extras of everything for each to enjoy and you will reap the harvest of the pollinators. Life is a party in your backyard when we live in harmony with the animals.

Cynthia's Digging Deep Gardening Guide for July

After months of weird weather, the sunny warmth of summer is shining upon us. The longer rainy season yielded weeds thicker and higher than in years past, while knocking off the buds to our fruit trees. Don't despair, the fun is about to begin. Read, plant, grow!

- REPEL pests and attract beneficial birds and insects by planting aromatic herbs.
- REDUCE weeds by mulching with grass clippings, leaves, and other organics.
- ROTATE annual plants for a healthier garden.
- WATER consistently without allowing the ground to get too soggy or too dry.
- ENRICH the soil by adding compost and three inches of mulch.
- HARVEST beans, eggplants, greens, and peppers before they reach their full size. Smaller vegetables are tender and tasty.

- TURN pots, and containers about 90 degrees at least once a week to keep the plants growing evenly on all sides.

It's a pain, but it works wonders to enhance the balanced design in your outdoor rooms!

- CATCH run off water from hanging baskets by placing a bucket underneath as you water.
- PULL the remainder of the dried stems from daffodils, tulips, iris, or other bulbs to clean up your garden. If

you

pull out the bulbs, either store in a clay pot until the fall, or replant immediately.

- FEED the birds and supply saucers of water for butterflies and bees to maintain natural pest control, beauty, and balance.
- FERTILIZE the vegetables and summer flowering annuals with applications of nitrogen. Container plants need more frequent fertilizing as the food leaches out with watering.
- DEADHEAD roses for a steady flush of blooms. Make potpourri from the petals or add to bath water.
- ADD edible flowers (without any pesticides) to your salads and cuisine. Pretty and delicious petals include roses, calendula, pansies, chive blossoms, carnation, citrus blossoms, day lilies, nasturtiums, scented geranium, sunflower, guava, and the florets of all herbs.
- BECOME a wildlife advocate.
- WATCH the fireworks of changing floral displays in your backyard.

Have a glorious 4th of July, a stellar summer vacation, and happy birthday friends.
Happy Gardening to You!



Mother and Father Goose with their goslings marching through the mustard. Photo Cynthia Brian



The perfect red rose. Photo Cynthia Brian



The wildflower garden with thistle, chamomile, euphorbia and great hiding places for wildlife. Photo Cynthia Brian



Nigella flower and pod with boxwood Photo Cynthia Brian

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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