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## Digging Deep-Gardening with Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



Baskets of geraniums grace an old bicycle.  
Photos Cynthia Brian

Two decades ago, a San Francisco family made their way across the Bay Bridge in search of a quiet neighborhood, warm weather, and good schools within easy access of the freeway. At the top of a private drive in Lamorinda, Pam's instinct encouraged her to place a bid on the first house she saw - a stylish Cape Cod backed up to a hill of majestic oaks with plenty of privacy on three-fourths of an acre. When Bob saw the property, though it was overgrown with poison oak, blackberry bushes, and brush, he could visualize the garden of his dreams. Together they envisioned a landscape that would look like it had always existed in nature, albeit with a little help from a professional. The property was cleared of weeds and debris, deer fencing was erected, new topsoil was delivered, and the design was executed.

The family wanted a babbling brook that cascaded into a pond. Forty tons of boulders were trucked in from a Napa quarry and lifted by crane over the house since there was no access to the backyard. The stream springs from the top of the hill property, flowing over river rocks surrounded by ferns, hellebores, trailing geraniums, grasses, and a plethora of lush specimens until it splashes into the

pool where friendly koi gather and a turtle named Flash sleeps beneath the water lilies.

Off the master bedroom, they planted a formal rose garden in the French chateau style, bordered by a clipped boxwood hedge. They kept the original brick patio and outdoor fireplace near the house while creating meandering paths that wind up and down the hill opening unto unexpected garden rooms. Three spectacular Japanese maples and three madrones anchor the design, offering year-round form, structure and color. Drifts of hydrangea, rhododendrons, azaleas, agapanthus, hostas, daisies, carnations and various ground covers fill the background. The gardener in the family, Bob, enjoys experimenting with a variety of specimens. He has created a berry patch with raspberries, blueberries, boysenberries and blackberries. Around another bend, he grows citrus, including a healthy kefir lime plus trees of apple, plum and fig. At the top of the hill, beans, tomatoes, horseradish, herbs, pumpkins, potatoes, asparagus and peppers thrive. An underground spring augments their watering system. Bob's efficient home-built compost bin resides outside the fence, ready to nourish the garden organically.

I met Pam, a retired flight attendant currently enjoying a second career as an actor, when she worked as an assistant on my TV series, "StarStyle-Live Your Dreams," and I've been privileged since to coach her as on-camera talent. An avid fan of flea markets, Pam taps into her artistic power discovering interesting tossed treasures that she creatively displays throughout the plot. Culminating at the end of the raspberry row, a 1950s oven opens featuring plants in a pan. Around a turn, an old bicycle bears baskets of pink geraniums. Walk up the path a bit further, and a rusted children's pedal car is stranded on a boulder. Rock cairns are piled on an overhang at the pond. Restful seating areas and sweet surprises delight the senses throughout the backyard. My personal favorite is the mystical gravel and river rock topped table set with glasses and a bottle of wine reserved for two. Behind the wire fence with twining vines and ivy, ceramic birds perch on a branch

ready to break into song.

A few years ago, Bob decided to plant a vineyard. One hundred and twenty vines of Syrah grow on a side hill above the stacked stone retaining wall. Roses bloom at the end of each row, succulents and pots of cacti climb the stairway. Pam's whimsical contribution to the vineyard includes an antique children's tractor parked between the vines, and a collection of whirly birds to keep the flying birds from devouring the grapes. Sal Captain of Captain Vineyards helps with the management of the crops while Bob does his own bottling and labeling, winning awards in the process.

The gardens and vineyards are beautiful, bountiful and bucolic. It's obvious that Bob and Pam take great pride and joy in their voluptuous, unique garden. With all the stone, wood, water and living greenery, this outdoor oasis claims a natural structure and feeling of security and protection. Although they both love "the city," they are thrilled that they took that drive through the tunnel 20 years ago to discover their own personal nirvana.

Their dream of a secret garden has been realized as they share the view together, toasting Father's Day with a glass of their private label Turtle Crossing wine.

Cynthia Brian's Mid-Month Reminders

ROTATE crops. Don't plant vegetables in the same spot as last year.

BUY summer annuals for containers to add color to your patio.

PINCH petunias and dahlias to keep them blooming.

RAISE the blades on lawnmowers to offer more sun protection and moisture retention to your grass.

PROVIDE abodes for toads by placing broken clay pots throughout the garden. By inviting toads into your garden, you'll be getting free insect control.

RESCUE thirsty bees and ladybugs that dive into your swimming pool during the heat. Use a net to capture and release to avoid unnecessary stings.

HELP reverse the decline of pollinating insects, honey bees, native bees, birds, bats and monarch butterflies by joining the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge. For information, visit <http://millionpollinatorgardens.org>.

BEWARE of ticks hitchhiking in your hair after hiking or working outside. If you get bit in the neck, call your physician or go to urgent care immediately. I know the dangers from a recent experience!

A salute and thanks to all the Lamorinda dads, especially the ones who garden and dream!

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.

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Cynthia Brian

The Goddess Gardener

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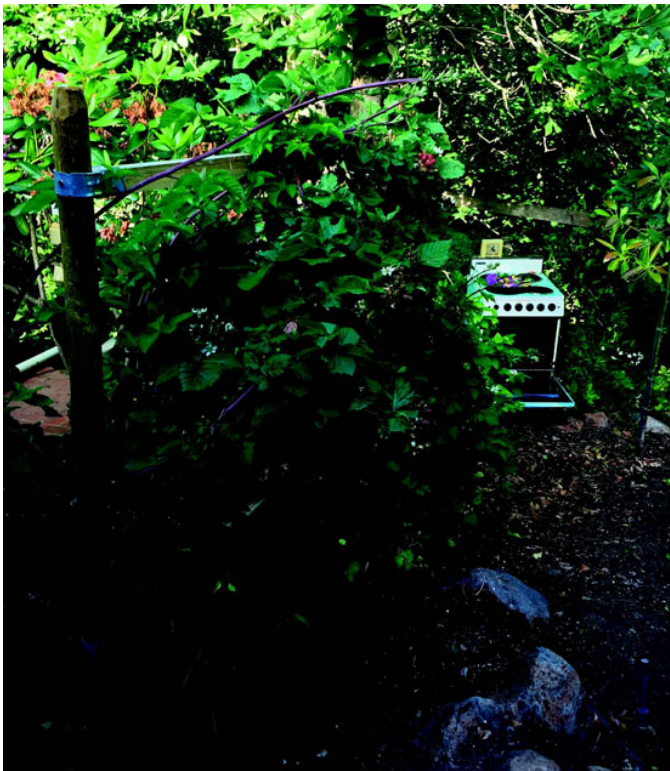
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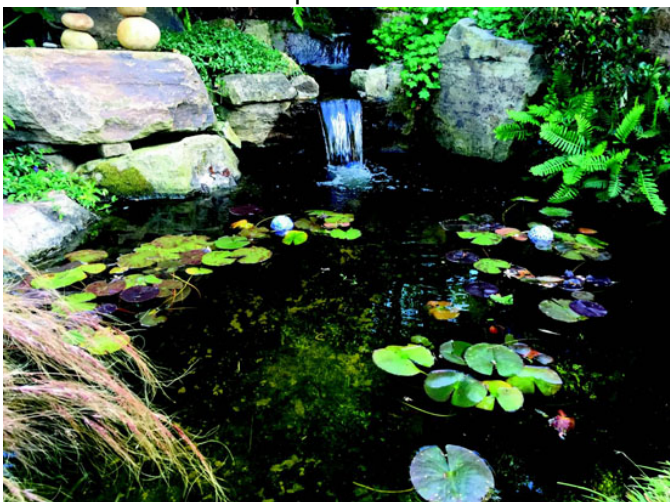




A 1950s stove is a surprise at the end of the berry patch.



The home-built compost bin



The brook ends with a cascading waterfall into a natural looking pond with koi and Flash, the turtle.



The Syrah blossoms on the vines.

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