

Armchair gardening

Winter planning
sows success
come spring



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Question: Now that my gardening is done for the season, how can I wisely plan for next year's garden?

Answer: First frost signals the end of the outdoor growing season for most in the Pacific Northwest. It can be a welcome break from the demands of weeding and watering, but our work is not necessarily done.

When inclement weather keeps us inside and our gardens mostly slumber under blankets of mulch, we have time to plan for next season.

Thoughtful planning is the gardener's best strategy for success. And now is the time to look back while issues are fresh. Though the months between harvest, last bloom and spring restart are long, human memory is not. Sowing the seeds of thoughtful armchair gardening now can make a bountiful difference for you and your garden next spring.

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

We garden for all sorts of reasons: from simple enjoyment, to feeding families, supporting pollinators or with an eye on sustainability. Every choice we make in our gardens may support or thwart that purpose. What do you want your garden to do for you?

- Did your garden serve your purpose/goals? Why or why not?

- Do you want to shift your purpose or goals?

HOW DID YOUR GARDEN THRIVE THIS YEAR?

No gardening season is ever perfect. Things happen outside our control. But there are a lot of choices we can make that will prevent many issues from becoming a problem in the first place.

Planning also can ensure our successes are more than happy accidents and turn them into repeatable practices. But gardens have a lot of working parts.

Here are some areas to think about:



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Good seed and plant catalogs contain an almost encyclopedic amount of knowledge regarding their offerings.

SOIL CONDITIONS

Soil matters. The best quality blueberry bushes can't thrive (perhaps even survive) at the wrong pH. Some plants are heavy feeders, others don't like the wet feet they may find in heavy clay. Tilling wet soil will destroy its structure, making it less supportive for plants.

What do you know about your soil? Are your current practices helping or hindering?

- Do I need to order a soil test?

- I have already done a soil test. What do I need/plan to do for amendments?

- Do I need to add organic material? What type? Where will I source it?

- Do I need to mulch? What type might be best for my plants/microclimate? Source?

- Am I working my soil too early or too much?

- What nutrients are lacking or in over abundance in my soil? How will I amend it? Will I choose organic or synthetic fertilizers?

SEED AND PLANT CHOICES

The best preventive decision a gardener can make is choosing the right seed, the right plants for your purpose and plot. These choices can involve

Reading the information found in plant catalogs carefully may prevent wasting time, money and effort in attempting to grow plants that are destined to failure because an inappropriate choice has been made.

your sources (seeds and plants collected or grown for your area often do best), using seed or starts, when and how you plant (did you harden your seedlings off?), where did you plant them (did they get enough sun exposure, enough room?), etc.

- What choices will you repeat?

- What do you want to do differently?

WATERING SCHEDULES AND METHODS

- Do I have adequate, accessible and affordable access to the water I need for what I have planted/want to plant?

- Does my water delivery system work well for me and my garden (optimum amounts, optimum times of day)? If not, how might I adjust it?

FERTILIZER

- What does my soil offer and what are my plants needing?

- Did I fertilize specifically, one size fits all or

not at all?

- What are my options (organic, synthetic) and the pros and cons?

- When do I need to fertilize each plant and with what?

PRUNING

- Do I have plants that require pruning for optimum production/health?

- Are these plants on a proper pruning schedule?

- Do I need to learn how and when to prune? Roses, shrubs, fruit trees and berries have highly specific pruning needs.

PEST CONTROL

- Did I have pests?

- Can I live with the amount of damage or not?

- Do I know my management options?

- What response will I choose? Pros, cons?

SUSTAINABILITY

- Is my plot the right size for my goals, time and energy? If not, what do I need to adjust?

- Do I have a destination for my harvest?

- Do I have a plan and space for garden waste?

AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY:

- Does my garden give me joy? (Because after all, isn't that a critical reason we garden?)

So grab a cup of coffee, some paper and a calendar. Or maybe you already keep a garden journal to keep your gardening life at hand. Look through the seed catalogs that have been clogging your mailbox. Thumb through your gardening books. Spend some time reflecting and planning.

Make a list of questions and reach out to your extension office for answers. Put your action items right onto your calendar so you will be ready to go at the turn of the month's page.

Even daunting tasks become doable when you approach them bit by bit.

Sowing the seeds of a little armchair gardening now will blossom for you in the spring.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregon-state.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU

Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.

