



PIXABAY.COM PHOTO

New year, fresh starts

Start planning now to help ensure the garden you envision is a success

BONNIE COURTER
Master Gardener

Question: I'm new to gardening and want to be successful this coming new year. Do you have any suggestions that would help me improve?

Answer: Ah, New Year's resolutions. It's a great time of year to look over the past gardening season and see what we can do to improve things. Here's some random suggestions that might make your gardening experience a happier one for you as well as for our environment.

- Get a jump on planning your vegetable garden by checking out our local retail and nursery stores for seeds. Buying locally often supplies seed varieties that do well in our region.

- Plan your vegetable garden ahead of time, taking into account what crops have similar watering needs and group them accordingly, as well as what crops grow well together. Remember to rotate your crops each year. Pick vegetables that your family enjoys, and consider planting more than you can use so you can donate to local food pantries such as United Community Action Network and FISH.

- Examine your landscape for shrubs and trees that are struggling, and plan to replace any disease-susceptible plants (including roses) with more resistant varieties. The best time to do that is February.

- Resolve to get your soil tested. This can save you a lot of disappointment and frustration. Soil testing breaks down what kind of soil you have, its pH and the percentages of nutrients found along with suggestions on how to improve your soil. Call the Master Gardener Plant Clinic to find out more at 541-672-4461.

- Take a pruning class. Learn how to correctly prune your orchard trees as well as ornamental plants. Oregon State University Extension Agent Steve Renquist will be giving a class on pruning fruit trees at the Discovery Garden in the afternoon of Jan. 18. Call the Extension Office for details.

- Resolve to limit the use of chemical pesticides to only when cultural, physical or biological controls are not effective. When using chemical pesticides, always thoroughly read the pesticide label for the safest and most correct



MARTIN POOLE PHOTO VIA THINKSTOCK

Even in January, it's not too early to begin planning the year's garden.

application. Try insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, botanical insecticides and organic pesticides first, opting for the least toxic approach to remedy the situation.

- Encourage biological control agents such as birds of prey to control rodent populations. By erecting owl boxes on your property this time of year before they begin nesting, you can attract these excellent rat and mice exterminators. Check with Fish & Wildlife on how to build

nesting boxes – they often have boxes available for free to the public certain times of the year as well.

- Resolve to start a garden journal this year. This is a valuable tool, especially if you keep one each year. By writing down what, when and where you plant as well as methods used, pests encountered and how you dealt with them, when and what kind of fertilizer used, crop yield, weather conditions and other pertinent information, it

greatly helps you plan for the next year to be more successful, which is the goal of any gardener.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.