

Keeping a garden journal



Linda Estep

Ask a Master Gardener

Question: My summer garden is completely done and it was a successful year for me. One area I struggle with is remembering what grew well and what didn't, what varieties I planted, when I planted, and the outcome. I attempted to keep seed packets and jot down notes as I went through the season, but I feel like my attempts were unorganized and haphazard. Do you have some suggestions for me in terms of keeping a garden journal?

Answer: I commend you in recognizing the need for a garden journal. Ideally, such a journal is kept up-to-date daily, or at least weekly, during the growing season; however, it is not too late to go back and recreate your garden successes and failures.

Then next year, at the beginning of your garden season, you can start a new journal using these tips.

Consider a journal as one of your valuable garden tools. You could purchase a journal specifically designed for gardening or just purchase a simple spiral notebook with no designated categories. Some gardeners are very artistic and like to draw pictures of the plants or the garden layout. I am not artistic at all, so I just keep empty seed packets and make detailed factual notes and also personal narratives regarding my work in the garden.

Find a journal that fits your personal style and decide what information is going to be a priority to help you make adjustments in future years. Your journal can be created to fit your own personality. There is no right or wrong way. Just get that information down before it becomes a dim memory.

Once you start journaling, concentrate on the basics. Record the date, temperature, weather conditions, what's blooming, what looks like it's dying and your solution... whether it works or not.

Mapping out and documenting where I planted each crop



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI EXTENSION

A gardening journal is unique to every gardener. It can be as simple as a spiral notebook or as intricate as a journal specifically designed for gardening. The important part is making the journal a part of your gardening routine.



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA EXTENSION

A gardening journal can be as intricate or as simple as you want, but should include the basics: the date, temperature, weather conditions, what's blooming, what looks like it's dying and your solution. Mapping out crops can help with crop rotation for future gardens

variety will be invaluable next year for the purpose of rotating my crops, an important practice to reduce disease and insect damage.

Record bug infestations and any issues with plant disease.

I personally like to make notes about the type of soil I'm using since I have raised beds.

I record the product names of the bagged soils I buy and the

store where purchased and I record when I use my own heavily composted homemade soil. I record any use of soil amendments and applications of fertilizer.

I keep a separate pouch filled with empty seed packets and those little information tags that come with the potted plants. Some gardeners simply tape or staple the packets and

tags to the journal.

I also like to record my experiments and which experiments worked or did not work.

Create your journal in a way that is going to work for you. Organize your journal so that you can look back at the recorded information which makes sense and helps you move forward. The goal is to become a more successful gardener with each passing year.

For me personally, I have to make my garden journaling part of my daily routine. If I don't maintain the habit of daily journaling, I really do forget important information. So I follow the same routine daily: water, pick, weed, journal. Sometimes my journal entries are very brief with only the most basic of facts and other days, if I have the time and desire, I will include more details and perhaps an anecdotal narrative.

For instance, recently my young granddaughter was helping me work in the garden and I recorded her fascination with the bees pollinating the squash blossoms. My

narrative was not essential to my gardening success, but it was a moment that I wanted to remember.

When I journal, I slow myself down enough to use legible handwriting and I make sure that my notes make sense. I want to be able to use the information in the future, so I personally don't take shortcuts here. My garden journal is not pretty or fancy. In fact, the pages quite often have smudges of dirt, but for me that is part of the charm of journaling. Again, do what works for you.

The hardest part of journaling is just getting started and then staying consistent. You are creating a new habit. I hope you have continued success and I know that your garden journals will provide valuable information.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, by phone at 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg.