



SMARTGARDEN™ —For the Record

Keeping track of gardening successes and failures will pay off in the long run

The more you know about your site, your plants, and potential problems you may encounter, the more success you will experience in the garden. Although numerous resources are available to guide your gardening endeavors, the most important is your own gardening experience. Keeping records is among the most valuable of gardening activities. Both your successes and failures provide lessons that will make you a better gardener.

Interrupting your planting or weeding efforts to jot down notes in a diary might seem like a nuisance at the time, but it will help you make the most of your garden efforts for years to come. Record the names of those plants that have performed famously as well as those you'd rather forget. This way, you avoid repeating a mistake that may result in the loss of an entire growing season.

A GARDEN DIARY

Keeping a gardening diary is a simple way to record events in your garden from year to year. There are garden journals on the market designed for just this purpose.

Some garden diaries allow for multiple years' entries on the same page—one page is allotted to every week of the year, and it is divided to accommodate four or five year's worth of records. This allows you to look back to see what was going on in the garden at the same time in previous seasons.

Less elaborate systems can work just as well. A simple notebook or a calendar with enough room for your entries can accommodate important details. The critical aspect of a garden diary is not what it looks like, but that you write in it. Regularly.

WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Some of the most fascinating garden records are photographs. A spectacular garden is all the more dramatic when you can compare the "before" and "after" shots. Growth of trees, combinations of perennials, and successful container plantings can be documented for future reference. And a snapshot can be very helpful to someone trying to diagnose a plant problem.

Diagrams of planting schemes are also helpful. A sketch of your vegetable garden will assist planning future crop rotation schedules. A bed layout will remind you of the location of ephemeral perennials or those that begin growth late in the season. This helps avoiding accidental damage when you are adding to the garden before or after the existing plants are visible above ground.

PLANT PARTICULARS

While garden records needn't be lengthy, a few items

are very important to include. Be sure to record the full name, including its variety, of any plant you acquire. Note the planting date and location in the garden. Then when it's time to replant your strawberries, and you want the same (or a different) variety than you planted half a dozen years ago—was it 'Surecrop' or was it 'Tristar'?—it is just a matter of checking your records. And when you order vegetable and annual flower seeds, you can sit down with your notes, ordering those varieties you considered tops, and avoiding those that were disappointing.

Taking note of where you purchased the plants or seeds you like is often helpful, especially for those hard-to-find varieties.

OTHER ITEMS FOR THE RECORD

Always record modifications you make to your soil. Keep your soil tests from year to year as well as any amendments you incorporate. Records of your soil fertility and pH are most useful when changes can be observed over time. Be sure to identify areas that receive different treatments.

Routine maintenance such as mulching, watering, fertilizing, and pruning should be recorded. Knowing the quantities of mulch and fertilizer you use in a season helps estimate future purchases.

Observations about plant growth, including flower and fruiting dates, are helpful as you plan additions to the garden. Perhaps you want a shrub that blooms at the same time as those in an existing planting, or a raspberry that ripens after your blackberries are finished. Keeping track of planting and harvesting dates in the vegetable garden helps you plan for an extended harvest and an ideal sequence of crops.

Many pests of vegetables can be avoided by planting earlier or later than the pest's annual arrival to the garden. This necessitates, however, your knowing when to expect the unwanted visitor. Because these dates vary even within a region, the best source of this information is your own garden records. The onset of a disease or pest infestation is equally important to note on ornamental plants so you can be prepared to minimize damage.

With the arrival of the new year, it's a great time to resolve to keep records of the successes, failures, additions, changes, and efforts that take place in your garden. Buy a garden journal, or just a simple notebook, and commit yourself to recording those events that will shape your garden. You will profit from a primary source—your own experience.

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