

New Year's Resolutions for Gardeners

By Valerie Rose

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Prepare your priorities for the new gardening season.

Lose 10 pounds, clean out the garage, take a Spanish (or English or Japanese) language class, ride my bike, finally learn to play the hurdy-gurdy; everyone has something they resolve to do or change in 2010. Gardeners certainly have New Years Resolutions - here are some of mine:

- Before buying new seeds, I will do an inventory of the seed packets I already have. (For seed storing information, see Infobox.)
- Get my garden soil tested. Learning what's resting in my garden beds, and what that soil may need, is a great way to start the gardening season. (For soil testing information, see Resources Infobox.)
- No more struggling with rusty tools and dull edges! Time to sharpen the spade, lopper and pruner blades, etc.
- Fence in the front yard to keep dogs from leaving 'souvenirs,' so I can safely grow vegetables on the sunny west-facing former lawn.

RESOLUTIONS FROM OTHER MASTER GARDENERS

Many other Skagit Valley Master Gardeners, and a few of my gardening friends from around the world, shared their resolutions for 2010:

- During the dormant season, I will move 25 plants that are in the wrong locations.
- To help me stay ahead of all those perennially-crowded perennials, I will make a chronological list of the timing for dividing irises, euphorbia, daylilies, etc. (For a calendar suited to the maritime NW garden, see the Resources Infobox.)
- I will post this list in my office so I see it and actually do the work in the right season.
- What is that brown stubble? To solve this and other mysteries, I will label all my plants.
- Practice 'crop rotation,' organize where and when I plant vegetables. (For crop rotation instructions see Infobox.)
- Work with our maritime climate and garden all year. Binda Coleman's book 'Maritime Northwest: Cool Season Crops for the Year-Round Gardener' will be my new guide. (For details see the Resources Infobox.)

- Get rid of the loud, smelly gas-powered lawn mower and buy an old-fashioned push mower. It is]s great exercise (cheaper than a health club) and I can enjoy the voices of birds while mowing.
- Forget the lawnmower; I'll just dig up the lawn and plant vegetables and flowers.
- Using all the space where my lawn used to be, I'll build raised beds, grow vegetables and give them to the local Food Bank. (For a Grower's guide see the Resources Infobox.)

KEEPING IT ALL IN BALANCE

Finally, a wise Master Gardener shares a resolution to enhance and enjoy all the above activities:

- I hereby resolve to take time to quietly sit in my garden and enjoy the fruits of my labors before rushing off to the next project.

Storing Seeds

Keep seed packages in a labeled container in a cool, dry place, protected from insects. An easy, effecting way to store seed is to place seed packets in a jar, seal the jar tightly and place it in a refrigerator or freezer. To help absorb moisture, place a small cloth bag filled with dry, powdered milk beneath the seed packets in the bottom of the jar. Use about 1/2 cup of dry milk from a recently opened package.

Benefits of Soil Testing for Gardeners

Getting your garden soil tested is a small investment with many benefits. Once you know the major nutrients in your garden soil, you can:

- Take advantage of nutrients already in the soil.
- Identify nutrients that are lacking in the soil.
- Reduce fertilizer applications by applying only what is needed.
- Adjust soil pH to an optimum level.

Crop Rotation

To minimize the buildup of soil-borne diseases, avoid repeatedly planting the same crops – or even crops in the fame family - in one area of the garden. For example, with a 5-year rotation, plant potatoes the first year in a given area; the next year plant corn, the third year grow cole crops, leafy vegetables in the fourth year, beans in year five, and finally, back to potatoes.

Know your plant families! Don't try 'rotating' crops belonging to the same family. Cole crops include broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, radishes turnips, and Brussels sprouts. Plants in the same family are more likely to suffer from the same diseases, so one cole crop should not be planted after another in a succession process.

ON-LINE RESOURCES

‘Collecting and Storing Seed From Your Garden,’ Oregon State University Extension Service: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/fs/fs220/>

‘Soil Testing, the Right First Step,’ Oklahoma State University Extension Service: <http://osufacts.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-4839/L-249.pdf>

‘Results and Interpretation of Soil Tests,’ University of Massachusetts Extension Service: www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest/interp1.htm

‘Caring For Your Tools,’ Cornell University Extension Service: <http://ecgardening.cce.cornell.edu/PDFs/Caring%20for%20Your%20Tools.pdf>

‘Monthly Gardening Calendars,’ Oregon State University Extension Service: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/calendar/>

‘Home Gardens,’ Soil Testing p. 13, Washington State University Extension Service: <http://4h.wsu.edu/EM2778CD/pdf/eb0422.pdf>

‘Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardening,’ Washington State University Extension Service: http://king.wsu.edu/gardening/documents/41FallandWinterVegetableGardening_000.pdf

‘Produce Grower’s Guide,’ Thurston County Food Bank: www.thurstoncountyfoodbank.org/pdf/growersguide1.pdf

EN ESPAÑOL:

‘Plantas Sanas para una Cosecha Mejor/Healthy Plants for a Better Harvest,’ Oregon State University Extension Service:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/ec/ec1539-s-e/>

‘Jardines con plantas Perenes/Gardening with Perennials,’ University of Illinois Extension Service: http://urbanext.illinois.edu/perennials_sp/