

Maintaining a Garden Journal

By Kathy Wolfe

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Details are important planning tool

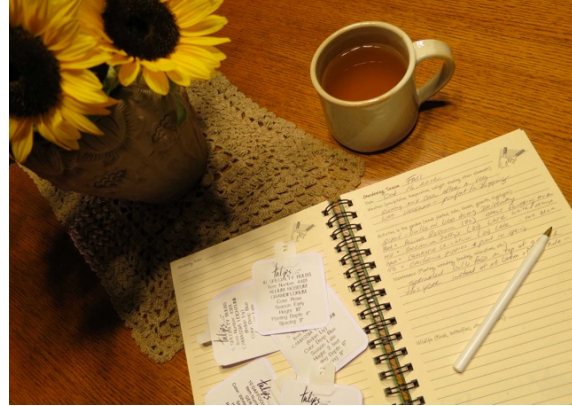
Gardening in winter in Western Washington requires more effort than gardening in the promise of spring or in the rich glow of autumn. In addition to chores of oiling and sharpening tools, sorting and cleaning pots and preparing greenhouses and cold frames for spring planting, many turn to planning for the next gardening season. Imagining how the landscape will appear in the height of summer bloom inspires hours of catalog dreaming and plotting. Detailing how to implement the vision may include starting a garden journal.

Journals are a personal journey that can be structured with as much or as little detail as is beneficial to you. Some people cut out articles of interest, gather brochures from garden shows or just make notes of their musings and drop the information in a desk folder or box. Others prefer binding a garden planner which may include garden layouts, pictures and detailed information about bloom time, plant type and requirements, color and design. Many have data journals setting out what variety of seed was planted where, how long it took to germinate, how weather affects growth, and any fertilizers or sprays that were applied that might influence performance. Any one or combination of these plans would serve the gardener well.

If sketching or photography is more to your liking than strictly the written word, a wonderfully creative pictorial journal of the garden throughout the seasons might achieve your information goal and satisfy your artistic side. Digital pictures from garden tours (taken with permission, of course) or other inspiring vignettes can be added. A loose leaf notebook allows you to insert pages at a later time if you want to keep specific plant information or seasons together.

Perhaps blogging appeals to you if you are interested in in-depth writing, easy up-loading photos, adding links of interest and sharing your information with others. This could be used alone or in conjunction with other journaling tools.

I use a diary-style formatted journal. Each season contains an essay and each month lists reminders for planning, planting and maintenance. The diary sets out weekly entries and shows three years together for easy comparisons. I staple in plant tags and photos taken throughout the season to help jog my memory as I make inspired corrections and improvements in subsequent years. Reminders for crop rotations in the raised beds, problems encountered in previous years, and joys in each season enrich my cultivating experience. I often enjoy being reminded where I got a plant; whether from a garden friend, a plant sale, a garden tour or a favorite garden center. This type of diary has worked for me for the last nine years and is one I am comfortable with. As you begin to work your own journal, you will find what is most valuable for your experience. There are many printed journals available at bookstores or online. Find a format that works for you.



Left: Start with a blank essay book, a garden app, a pre-printed journal or whatever format you prefer; add a few notes, a plant tag or two and your garden journal begins its life. **Right:** Stopping for a few moments to write in your journal at the end of a day in the garden isn't a chore; it can be a chance for reflection and planning, as well as an excuse for a hot cup of tea. **Photos by Christine Farrow.**

Web-based journals are available on line. Many are free and include a selection of templates that allow you to customize your entries. You can choose to keep it private or share with others. Computer program journals work well for gardeners who want to look at gardening activities in a variety of ways. For example, sorting all activities of a particular plant, or sorting by date or



activity such as fertilizing or pruning can be done using this software. Check out the Internet for more details on these options.

Various websites have numerous options for journals, garden guides, planners and templates. Gardening apps are cropping up everywhere as well. Some are free while others can be costly. The range of information offered is quite varied and expansive. Do your own research to find what works for you.

Once you choose a format, record information you will find of value. Examples include planting dates, transplanting dates, source and cost for plants and seeds (any guarantees for plants may be included here together with receipts), weather details, plant characteristics, date of harvest or bloom, date and type of fertilizers or chemicals applied and to which plants, and general observations of your garden.

Your journal can be sectioned into seed packets, pictures, reference materials, garden plans, daily activities, wish lists, dried bloom, inspirational thoughts, websites you like and why, recipes for your garden harvest, supplier notes of where you like to shop, and garden costs (if you dare!).

However you decide to proceed, the experience can add to your gardening success and enhance enjoyment of your garden. Time spent documenting the past year's garden triumphs and planning for next year's successes is never wasted. Remember, those who cannot remember past gardening failures are more apt to repeat them. And where's the fun in that?

RESOURCES

- “Garden Journaling,” Katie Geist, CSU Teller County Master Gardener and Mark J. Platten, CSU Extension Director, Teller County
- Colorado State University Extension Service
- “Creating A Garden Journal,” Helen Yoest, *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 2011
- “Keep A Garden Journal,” George L. Egger II, *Vegetable Gardener*, April 1997