

New Year's Resolutions for Gardeners

By Valerie Rose

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This year will be different!

How many years have you been contemplating gardening resolutions for the New Year?

Here are some timely gardening ideas you may be able to use. If you need a little extra time for those resolutions, keep in mind that the Chinese New Year is little more than a month away on February 3rd. This Chinese New Year will bring the Year of the Rabbit. Like other wildlife, rabbits in your garden can be so entertaining, yet so destructive!

Other common garden visitors we may meet are deer: maybe not if you have installed fencing - where the local building code allows for eight-foot-tall fences. The six-foot fence limit in many municipalities may not be a challenge for some of Bambi's distant relatives since deer will leap over these six-foot fences.

Regardless which animal is featured in the Chinese New Year, rabbit control only requires a small-mesh, two-foot-tall fence. If you're putting up deer fencing, add small-mesh fence along the bottom, firmly against the soil, and protect your garden from four-legged foragers, both short and tall.

Thank goodness there's no Year of the Slug/Snail. I practice post-sunset slug-catching, armed with a flashlight and plastic yogurt container. The neighbor's chickens enjoy the small slugs, along with snails of all sizes. This is somewhat effective, but requires my presence every evening. That's fine for tending livestock, but slugs and snails don't deserve such loyal attention.

My resolution: pour cheap beer into half-buried yogurt containers. The brew must be changed every three days, but even that gives me more flexibility in choosing which brands I will use to deter those slugs.

Some Other Resolutions:

Clean out and organize the garage. Create safe, easily accessible storage for those rusty garden tools.

Clean and sharpen rusty garden tools.

My refrigerator is crammed with jars filled with half-used seed packets. Next time I clean the fridge, I won't just move the jars around. I'll inventory the seeds before buying more.

Learn more about composting. I've been encouraging (OK, pestering) a friend to take one of Callie Martin's great, free Skagit County composting workshops, so he can establish 'recycling' systems for both yard waste and kitchen scraps. I'll get the schedule of springtime workshops by

watching the *Home and Garden Guide* in this section of the paper. Then my friend and I will attend, learn from the masters, and get composting.



Resolve to add more beauty to your gardens in 2011. Photo courtesy of Metro Creative Services.

‘Gardening Today, Groaning Tomorrow’

Like slugs drawn into a garden at dusk, the first warm, sunny day of late winter/early spring brings gardeners out of the warm interiors of greenhouses and homes. So many of us begin the planting season with a hearty day of digging, bending and carrying, followed by days of aching and hobbling around. Winter isn’t just time to read books and daydream over seed catalogues – I can put my gym membership to good use and get in better shape before rushing out to garden.

This winter I’ll get my garden soil tested to get current information about what cover crops to plant, and which soil amendments may be helpful.

While I’m thinking about dirt, there’s another measurement I can take without a lab report. Soil temperature is a crucial factor in successfully germinating seeds. A soil thermometer is essential. (Note: Drop hints about getting a soil thermometer for your spring birthday.)

Buy and wear big sun hat to protect myself from skin cancer. (Note: Drop hints about getting a big sun hat.)

Winter is a great time to do a focused inventory for your garden purpose: take poor-performing perennials out, and consider putting edible landscape plants/more garden beds in their places. If

you plant more than you can use, this means more room for veggies for area food banks, as the Victory Gardens program at the Community Action Agency demonstrates.

More beauty!

I will add garden art to the beds and along the borders and fences of my yard. This can range from large sculptures to re-purposed pieces of furniture, such as an old table leg shaped like a harp.

I will break the rules and get away from planting rigid rows of vegetables. It's time to explore islands of Swiss Chard among the nasturtiums, and bunches of Cosmos, Four-O'Clocks, Sunflowers and Bee Balm everywhere else to create a feast for the eyes.

Share the Work, Share the Bounty

My neighborhood friends plan to help each other with garden preparation in the spring, and other chores and projects as the growing season continues. Shared work can be more fun! For the produce that we don't cultivate in our own gardens my buddies and I can enjoy shopping together at the farmers' market. My final resolution is to cultivate gratitude for all my blessings. It's always the right time to plant those seeds.

RESOURCES:

- 'Cottontail Rabbit Damage Management,' WSU Extension:
www.extension.org/pages/Cottontail_Rabbit_Damage_Management
- 'Using Home Remedies to Control Garden Pests,' Oregon State University Extension: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/ec/ec1586.pdf>
- 'How to Take Your Soil Temperature,' Oregon State University Extension: http://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/story.php?S_No=340&storyType=garde
- 'Soil and Plant Tissue Testing,' University of Massachusetts Extension: www.umass.edu/soiltest/
- 'Conserving Pollinators: A Primer for Gardeners,' WSU Extension: www.extension.org/pages/Conserving_Pollinators:_A_Primer_for_Gardeners