

Time for a Garden Journal

By Kathy Wolfe
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Details are an important planning tool

“Journal” and “journey” come from the French root “jour” meaning day. The original function of a journal was to record day-to-day living events such as business transactions, weather, travel observations, births, death, etc. Over time journals became more about reflecting personal commentary on one’s own experiences, ideas, and dreams.

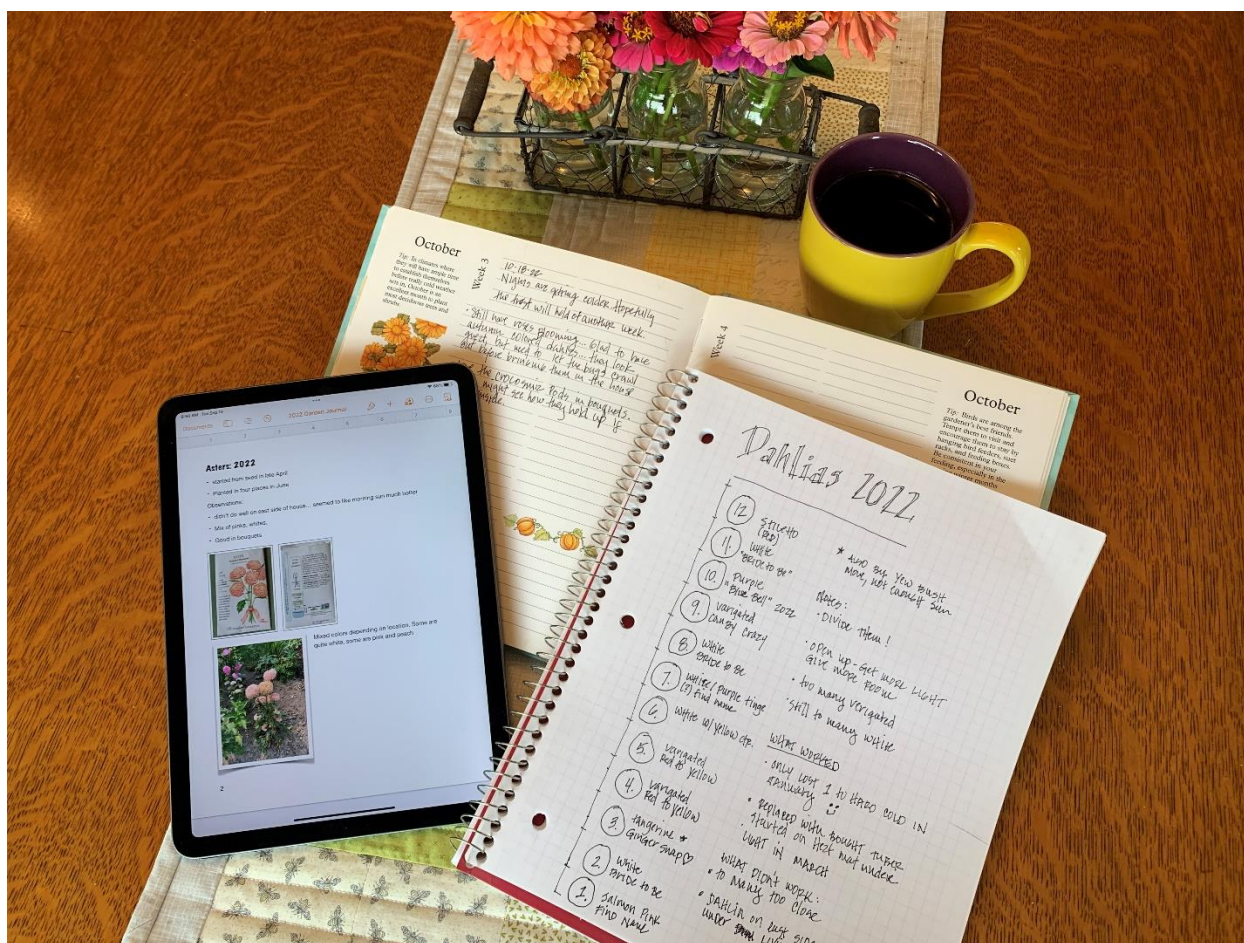
Garden journals can be used as a tool to note what worked and what didn’t each year and plan for future projects. They can also be a creative outlet for your writing, artwork, or photography. A journal can contain as much, or as little detail as you prefer or will find useful.

Fall is a good time to start your garden journal because the results of your current garden plan are right there, ready for you to review. Consider what you like. What can be improved? Does a plant need to be moved? Take your camera on your next walk around the yard and photograph various segments, showcasing what this year’s fall garden looks like. These pictures will refresh your memory once you begin working on serious winter planning for the coming year. See, your journal has already begun!

When deciding what type of journal format might work best for you, think about what contents would be useful.

Some concepts to consider:

- Record of vegetable varieties you enjoyed this year or what tomato withstood blight the best.
- Sketches of your layout from season to season to help you with crop rotation and planning new beds.
- Photos from garden tours (taken with permission, of course) and other inspiring vignettes to help find ideas that fit into your landscape.
- Pictures of the garden that focus on color combinations, where you could add a plant, or when it is time to divide or move an existing plant.
- Lists of successes and failures.
- Data on the date seeds were started, the germination rate, how many starts you needed for transplanting, date of transplanting, date of harvest, and yield.
- Trusted plant suppliers and garden costs (if you dare track them!).
- Daily, weekly, or monthly observations to be compared year to year.
- Dates of when you divided perennials and where your extras went.



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. *Photo by Ginny Bode / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

Once you decide what information would be valuable to you then determine what type of format you prefer. Explore the choices available ranging from online journaling options to pre-formatted hardcover planners. Some online resources allow you to create an online sketch of your garden so you can virtually move plants and add features such as rocks and fences. Some seed company websites provide calculators for planting dates and the quantity of plant starts you might need. Other free online options include Smart Gardener & Vegetable Gardening Online.

Though not specifically designed for gardening, computers, tablets, and phones often come with apps/programs that work great for journaling. Day One, Evernote, and Apple's Pages are a few apps/programs worth considering.

Many gardeners prefer the flexibility of building their physical notebook and creating a system of record keeping custom-fit to their needs. When planning a book or binder-style journal, be sure the binding allows the book to lay open and flat with room for adding photos, seed packets, plant tags, receipts (if plants include a guarantee), dried blooms, harvest recipes and more. Look for journals containing blank pages for observations, note taking and inspiration, and graph

pages to help sketch garden layouts. There are many options available online and in local stores for purchase for this type of garden journal as well.

Also consider if a single-year journal is best for you or if a multi-year version, one where you can compare past seasons, would work better. Many garden journals have seasonal task reminders that can help you stay on track, lists of pest and disease problems and solutions, and tables for rainfall and temperature recording that can be valuable.



The accessibility of the camera on your tablet or phone makes it easy to build a photo archive for reference when planning for the next season. *Photo by Ginny Bode / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

Whichever format you chose for your garden journal, you will soon look forward to making updates with your triumphs as well as your not-so-successful endeavors. You will begin planning next year's garden and sitting down this winter and revisiting your garden season.

Whether you choose a notebook, 3-ring binder, published journal guide, digital journal, or a cloud-based app, the experience can enhance the success and enjoyment of your garden. Choose a schedule for recording in your journal (daily or weekly is best) and stick to it. Journaling should not be a chore but as another way to more deeply appreciate our natural world.

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?



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. *Photo by Ginny Bode / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

RESOURCES

- “Garden Journaling,” Katie Geist, CSU Teller County Master Gardener and Mark J. Platten, CSU Extension Director, Teller County, Colorado State University Extension Service.
- “Garden Journal: A helpful gardening tool”, Nicole Flowers-Kimmerle, Agriculture and Natural Resources (Horticulture) Educator, University of Illinois Extension, May 21, 2020.
- “Creating A Garden Journal,” Helen Yoest, *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 2011
- “Keep A Garden Journal,” George L. Egger II, *Vegetable Gardener*, April 1997
- North Carolina Extension Gardeners Handbook Feb. 2022
<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/appendix-a-garden-journaling>