

Garden-related Record-keeping

You! The couch slouch with the pile of garden catalogs and the dreamy look on your face. Do you know what you should be doing? Either initiating a system for keeping track of garden-related information, or refining the system you already have.

Why set up such a system? It will give you something to do during the winter. It will relieve the stress on your memory. When you keep records of data such as bloom times, pest cycles, and weather, you will be able to identify patterns in the garden. You'll be a better gardener as a result.

How will you put together a record-keeping system? Your system will have to be personalized to fit your needs, but it will very likely include some of the following:

Logs and Lists

- a daily log for tracking such things as precipitation, temperatures, and what is happening in the garden, as well as your reaction to what is happening
- weekly to-do lists
- feeding, pruning, spraying and watering schedules
- monthly plans and records of what should be and/or has been done in the garden: what you bought, divided, moved, planted, pruned, shared and sprayed; what bloomed, what was bothered by pests or disease, what died...
- seasonal overviews: pre-season goals and how well you met them
- lists of plants in your garden, with botanical names, sources, the date each was acquired, locations, flower colors and bloom times, good sources of information for care
- notes about special treatments that need to be or have been given to certain plants
- record of how much sun various areas of the garden receive at different times of the year
- date you started seeds (in containers or in garden), set out plants, first harvested a particular type of vegetable or fruit, first noted insects or disease on a certain plant
- amounts (in pounds) of produce harvested, preserved, given away
- problems: diseases, weeds, insects, animal pests
- delights: butterflies, beneficial insects, birds, gift or volunteer plants that look just right

Graphics, Clippings, Miscellaneous

- photographs showing various beds at different times of year
- diagrams of vegetable, flower and shrub beds; sketches; maps

- gardening tips from magazines, newspapers, tv programs, friends
- notes from gardening lectures and books
- quotations, poetry, pressed flowers and/or leaves
- recipes, taste-test results
- equipment warranties, receipts, copies of seed-catalog orders, garden expense records, empty seed packets

Where will the system be located? Probably in a combination of the following:

computer: calendar software, special gardeners' software, data base, spreadsheet, word processor

- file cabinet drawer, file box or accordion-fold file holder
- three-ring binder
- bound journal with either blank pages or pages set up specifically for gardeners
- bulletin board
- clip board
- calendar
- shoe box
- spiral notebook(s), 8 1/2 X 11 or smaller size if carrying it around appeals to you
- plastic bags with zipper closure

When?

During what part of your busy day will you be able to implement this system? Give your daily log five or ten minutes that are linked to some activity that is already a firm habit: reading the newspaper; having a cup of coffee or tea; watching the evening news. Try to devote an hour each week to filing accumulated paper, making to-do lists, and tracking accomplishments in various areas. Once a month, allot an additional hour for an overview: note what has finished blooming, what is in bloom or just budding out, what you want to change or do differently next year. Yearly, add extra pages to the monthly sections of a binder or transfer the previous year's pages somewhere else for reference; or start a new binder.

Three-ring Binder Systems

Versatile, familiar and expandable, three-ring binders are a solution for many of us gardeners looking for a way to organize information and paperwork related to our passion. Graph paper, sheets with index tabs, sheet protectors, a three-hole punch, high-lighter and other colored pens/pencils and lots of notebook paper are useful companion tools.

Vegetable Gardening Records

The single-page chart Jim Hildreth describes in the Mother Earth News article cited below is worth studying and adapting to your needs. Across a double page, Hildreth lists the vegetable name (spinach, for example); the variety; the age of the seed; how much seed he started (number of pots, sets or cloves; length of row; area in square feet); days to maturity and germination time; dates planted, sprouted, transplanted and harvested; and brief notes. The year and the dates of the last and first killing frosts are noted at the top of the chart.

A graph paper diagram of the vegetable garden layout for each year reminds you how much space you devoted to each crop and helps you in planning crop rotations.

A section of the gardening notebook devoted to seeds might indicate variety, source and price, how much is on hand and its age (and whether its viability has been checked); how much needs to be ordered; how many row feet a certain amount of seed will plant and how much produce that yields; how you liked the taste and productivity of the variety (outstanding; okay; wouldn't plant it again). Data such as this should not be trusted to memory.

Examples of Commercially Available Systems

Botanica Plus Garden/Plant Encyclopedia, a CD-ROM plant reference and database, contains a journal. Growing notes for each month of the year can be added to any plant in the database. Monthly growing notes can be viewed for all plants with entries in the displayed month. Users may enter plant names, descriptions and attributes to the database and assign photos and captions to their entries. These entries are incorporated into all searches, and can even be shared with other *Botanica Plus* users.

Although no member of the team responsible for this website has had the opportunity to use the Botanica Plus encyclopedia, one of us uses and enjoys *A Gardener's Journal*, published by Canada's Lee Valley Tools. The heart of this 170-page bound book is the ten-year diary section. Each oversized page is devoted to a day of the year, with sections for entries of important events in ten successive years. The gardener may circle one of five descriptions of the weather for the day (sunny, part sunny, cloudy, rainy, snowy) and record the high and low temperatures on the provided blanks before making the brief daily entry. The remainder of the book provides room for sketches of garden layout; records of soil tests, gardening purchases, planting and harvesting; inventories of woody and perennial plants, and of tools; insect and disease controls; and (why not??!!) clothing size reminders. The Lee Valley Holiday 2003 Gift Catalog indicates a price of \$28.50 for item LA205, *A Gardener's Journal*.

You are convinced, aren't you, of the necessity of maintaining good garden records? Then use some of the ideas presented in this article to help you individualize your system, and take Sydney Eddison's advice: "Writing is thinking. If you do not already commit your thoughts to a garden notebook, try it. It will be the most useful gardening book you ever read."

Resources

Eddison, Sydney. *The Art of American Gardening*. Horticulture, The Art of American Gardening. Jan 1998 v95 n1 p28(1).

Fischer, Thomas. *A Gardener's Journal: A Ten Year Chronicle of Your Garden*. Horticulture, The Art of American Gardening. April 1995 v73 n4 p89(2).

*Hildreth, Jim. *The Nuts and Bolts of a Gardening Notebook*. Mother Earth News. August/September 1995, p58(2).

Hyde, Brenda. [Garden Diary Tips](http://www.oldfashionedliving.com/gardendiary2.html). Retrieved November 20, 2003, from <http://www.oldfashionedliving.com/gardendiary2.html>

Julien, Don. *Garden Tools: Recordkeeping*. Originally published January, 1998, in Rose Petals, the official website for the Seattle Rose Society. Retrieved November 20, 2003, from <http://www.bmi.net/roseguy/gtrecord.html>

[Lee Valley Tool Ltd.](http://www.leevalley.com), P.O. Box 1780, Ogdensburg, N.Y. 13669-6780; 1-800-871-8158

*Ortinou, Rebecca. *Keeping a garden journal*. Crafts 'n Things. July 2003 v28 i7 p20(1).

**Our readers tell us why and how to keep a garden journal*. Sunset. July 1991 v187 n1 p102B(1).

**The importance of keeping good garden records*. Countryside & Small Stock Journal. July 1999 v83 i4 p71.

*The asterisk preceding an entry indicates that individuals who possess a Fort Vancouver Regional Library card may access the article online by following these steps:

- From the FVRL homepage www.fvrl.org click on "Magazine and research databases" (on the right side of the screen, under Quick Links).
- Click on "CONNECT TO DATABASES" on the left side of the screen.
- With library card number available, follow directions for logging in.
- Select "Info Trac Database Group" from the "Available Databases" listed on the left side of the screen.
- Click on "proceed".
- Scroll down to "Info Trac OneFile" and click on "Start Searching".
- Select "Journal Search".
- Enter the journal name in double quotes, click on "search", and follow the directions.