

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 05-04-05) Garden Record Keeping and Drought Predictions © 2005

This year would be a good year to begin keeping gardening records. Try recording the plants you put in and the temperatures and rainfalls for this year. Then in 2006 and several years to follow you can see how accurate the predictions in the press were. Besides many gardeners keep meticulous records and swear by the process. The following ideas might whet your own appetites.

Everyone has a different style both of gardening and of keeping records. Adapt the method that will work best and be the most enjoyable and efficient for you. It can be as simple as taking photos of plantings, noting dates and locations on the back of the photos; or noting details on a calendar or in a spiral notebook.

Try saving the tags that come with new plants. Tape the tags to an index card and note any details you want to remember such as how much you paid for the plant, where and when it was purchased, and its location in your garden. Also note any special care instructions you want to remember. You could even use different colored cards (i.e. separate colors for perennials, herbs, woody shrubs, trees, vegetables). You'll also want to note weather conditions such as rainfall, temperatures, snow and frost dates. Check out the differences in the different zones in your own garden. You'll be amazed at the ranges right on your own plot of land.

If you grow a vegetable garden you'll want to note where you purchased your seeds, how long they took to germinate, and how the fruits of your labors tasted. Most gardeners don't use all the seeds from a packet. Write the date and year on the packet if it isn't already noted. Most seeds remain viable for several years. In the dead of winter when all those great seed catalogues start pouring in, you'll be better able to remember where you purchased your favorite seeds and how many new packets you'll need.

It's also a good idea to create a map of your vegetable garden. Don't worry about how true to scale it is, the important thing is to show what you planted where. Many vegetables grow better if they are rotated in the bed. Additionally, it fools the bad bugs when they go looking to nibble on little seedlings or on root crops. Many crops replace or leach certain nutrients out of the soil. Crop rotation helps replace these nutrients.

Record keeping is especially helpful if you're renovating or newly landscaping your garden. My favorite way to do this is through photographs. Purchase a photo album that gives space to write a few notes next to the photos. You'll be amazed in a few months or in a year when you look back and see how much work you accomplished. You'll also be astounded by how quickly plants grow and fill in the landscape. I've been sporadic sometimes about some of my record keeping efforts, but every year I've taken photos and have always enjoyed looking back to see how our garden has grown and flourished.

If you decide to purchase a garden journal for record keeping, make sure it has room to include many of the tips I've already listed. At the least make sure it has plenty of room to draw planting diagrams, make notes about plants and has room for any photos or plant tags you'd like to save. One year I found a journal that had envelopes at the back to store the tags or any receipts I wanted to save. Many journals list tasks to be done each month and give tips about planting and harvesting for particular times of the year. In that case, make sure the journal applies to our specific growing conditions in the maritime northwest. Hopefully you'll each try your luck at keeping gardening records this year.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or email ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us