



Garden Resolutions

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As the year comes to a close and we are inspired to do better next year, let's not forget our gardens! This is a wonderful time to pause, reflect, and plan. Stop and consider: is your garden meeting your needs, or are there fundamental changes you want to tackle this coming year? Are you using resources wisely, and is your garden helping to feed your family better?

Many of us put hours of wonderful, healthy work into our gardens. Hopefully your garden doesn't cost too much to maintain and provides more than one payback, such as beauty, great food and wildlife habitat. Gardens do not need to be static water guzzlers that only have curb appeal. They can provide much more. Edible plants can be scattered about if you don't have deer, and gardens can help cool our homes in summer and protect from cold winds in winter, if planted carefully.

Gardening helps us reap rewards of being in tune with nature that we are part of ourselves. That connection has been shown to actually improve mental and physical health. And don't forget that when gardens create useful wildlife habitat, we also benefit from the birds and butterflies that come and share our yards; what better place to enjoy bird watching than from the comfort of our breakfast table!

This year, let's strive to create gardens that are not only beautiful, but also healthy, wildlife-friendly, people-friendly, and resource-conserving. Some potential 2014 gardening resolutions may include changing up your vegetable garden by rotating crops, to help to both thwart insect pests and prevent depletion of specific nutrients. Also, try getting to know three new veggies that you've never tried such as Jerusalem artichokes, kohlrabi, and curly leaf kale. Consider shifting

the main focus of your garden from warm season (summer) to cool season (winter) vegetables, primarily using rain to grow your food, at a great reduction of cost and work to you. Rain infiltrates most row covers that may be needed for frost protection.

Create a garden notebook, and use it. Sketch a scaled template map of your yard that can be copied, and keep track annually or seasonally of new plants, any plants that die and why, where various veggies were planted, what your pruning strategies and timing were, and what yields/successes/problems you had.

Test your soil -- stop delaying, and just do it! Talk to a local nursery or call the Master Gardener office to find out how to take your sample and where to have it analyzed. There is a fee, but it's helpful to know what specific deficiencies your soil might have. Soil tests help save money and work in the long run by allowing you to choose plants matched to your site, and to manage your garden efficiently.

Resolve to use your harvest this year. We often start in spring with enthusiasm and energy, doggedly care for veggies throughout summer, and then lose interest by fall just as crops explode. Stay in touch with your garden year-round, and use all that wonderful bounty. Also, start a compost pile. Even a simple stack in an out-of-the-way place will eventually decompose and give you compost. If you add about half green material (spent veggies) with brown material (dead leaves and straw), all mixed up or even layered, the result is a wonderful supply of life-giving compost in six months to a year.

Support your local nursery. There are several wonderful small nurseries with regionally-grown plants and staff knowledgeable about our county regional conditions. Avail yourself of their healthy plants and relevant advice. Last, but not least: attend at least one Master Gardener class this year. The three-hour Saturday morning classes can be a wealth of information and inspiration.

We, the Master Gardeners, wish you and yours a bountiful, healthy, soul-nourishing garden for 2014!

There is no Master Gardener public education class this Saturday, Dec 28, 2013. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Note the office will be closed for the holidays from Dec 24, 2013 until Jan 7, 2014. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.