

gardening

WINTER DREAM, SUMMER GARDEN

Maps, lists and notes
are the first steps to harvest time.

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leisure Columnist

Now may be falling outside the window and the earth looks frozen and dead, but spring is creeping up on us and now is the time when I relax at the end of the day with my stack of seed catalogs. I browse through those tantalizing pages with my pencil in my hand and start to draw up the first tentative garden plans of the year.

I confess that I'm an inveterate list maker. I make lists of things I did last year, things I must do today and things I want to have accomplished in five years as well as more prosaic lists like grocery lists and lists of chores for the kids. With this tendency you can imagine that I'm also a great plan maker. And if things don't always turn out according to plan, well, that's just an excuse to come up with a new improved plan.

Actually, during the gardening year my list and plan making go hand in hand. First I wander through the catalogs and keep a list of what I want to buy from whom. Then I have to sit down and plan where I'm going to plant, and what I'm going to do with the harvest.

The plan is what helps me hold my scattered wits together so that I can consider my family's tastes, our short growing season and maturity dates of vegetables all at the same time. The purpose of the plan is to help me grow as productive a garden as possible while keeping the soil healthy, vigorous and fertile. (The purpose of the garden is obvious enough, to provide my household of six with vegetables of taste, quality and freshness that cannot be matched at the supermarket, to take stress off the food budget and to grow some treats that are not readily available at the store.)

I keep in mind the different ways I can store food when I make my plan. I'll can pickles and relishes, of course, and I'll freeze as much as possible because less nutrients are lost in freezing, and it's easier and less time consuming. However, because freezer space is limited I will plant potatoes, onions, winter squash, beets, carrots and cabbage that I can store in my dirt and stone cellar, as well as beans (soy, navy, soldier and Jacobs Cattle), that I can dry and store on my pantry shelves.

With this dream and goal of an

abundant and varied harvest in mind, I start to draw a garden "map" on graph paper. Because I don't use chemical pesticides in my garden, my map helps me keep track of the plants I want to grow together like beans and marigolds, tomatoes and basil, and peas and carrots.

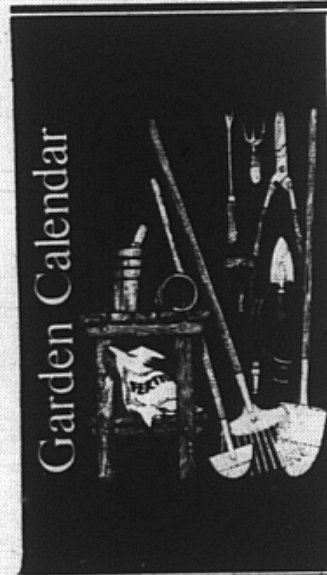
My map also helps me plan succession planting. I try to have as little unplanted space in the garden as possible. When the peas are harvested, in go the beets. Spinach is followed by the tomato plants that I've started indoors while I waited for the soil to warm up.

When the weather is fine and the planting fever is on me, I know a lot of information and planning flies right out of my head. My map is as important a tool as my trowel and hoe when I go out to plant.

When making up this year's map, I have to stop and confer with last year's map that is miraculously in its place in my looseleaf garden book.

As part of my system for developing and maintaining a healthy soil, I rotate my crops. I don't want to plant a heavy feeder like corn where I planted a heavy feeder like cabbage the year before and I don't want to plant root crops in the same place every year. Again, from experience, I know I can't trust my memory.

All this sounds purposeful, but it's done slowly, dawdling through the catalogs and doodling day-dreams on graph paper with great hopes that the vision of abundance, fertility and beauty will be achieved. My winter dreams don't take much notice of drought, cutworms or potato bugs, but it's this dream that helps me survive the various garden disasters that befall me so that I can dream again. □



The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service:

Now is the time to:

- gather branches of spring flowering shrubs such as pussy willows to force inside.
- order vegetable and flower seeds if you haven't done so already.
- keep houseplants out of drafts.
- contact the Franklin County Extension Service for a booklet on growing vegetables.

Note:

- Continue to bring in bulbs to force which were potted in October.
- After this winter you may want to plant a windbreak around the home. □

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