

The Grapevine

Planning the Garden

Over the last couple weeks, the gardening catalogs have started to arrive at my house. With the cold weather around Christmas and the gardening catalogs showing up I've definitely been dreaming of summer and started to think about my vegetable garden for this year. While early January is still too early to start most things it's also the best time to start doing some planning for your vegetable garden. Here are some steps for planning your garden this year.

One of the first steps to planning your garden for 2023 is to remember your garden from 2022. I know the drought last year wreaked havoc with our vegetable gardens but we can still gain some valuable insight for this year. Make sure you remember where you had your vegetables planted last year. It's important to rotate your vegetable families around the garden rather than planting them in the same spot year after year. The goal should be to rotate your vegetables so there are three years between when a specific vegetable was planted in that spot. For example, if I planted tomatoes in one corner of my garden in 2022 I should not plant any other member of the nightshade family in that spot till 2025. Something else you should remember were any disease or insect issues that might have happened in your garden. One way to keep a record of this over several years is to create a garden journal with drawings of where things were planted and also any records of issues. It can also be helpful to keep track of what varieties did well and what didn't to help for future planning.



The second step to planning any garden is figuring out what you want to plant. I love this step because this is where I get to dream and look through all the pretty catalogs at the different options. Last year our garden was relatively small and I didn't have room to plant much but we have expanded this year so I have far more room to play with. I'm going to try to do more succession plantings which will help me utilize the space I do have more efficiently. I intend to plant some cool season crops this year in the ground then transition them to warm season crops as they mature. Be sure to pick vegetables that fit what you want to get out of your garden. This year I'm going to try a miniature cherry tomato because while I love cherry tomatoes but I cannot keep up with the larger varieties. If you are planning on starting seeds sort through what you already have and make a list of what you need. I would also do a test germination on your seeds to see if they are still viable.

If you are planning on starting seeds pay attention to the seeding dates based on your frost-free date. Those dates should also be noted in your plan so you don't end up with too big or too small plants. (I might have been guilty of both of those in the past, oops.) A side note, January is the time to start onion seeds and toward the end of the month start cole crops. It takes 6-8 weeks for onions and cole crops to grow to a size to transplant. To figure out when you need to start your seeds first find your frost-free date, then read on the seed packet to find how many weeks before that frost-free date to start seeds. In El Dorado the last frost date is typically April 20th but be aware that we can have frosts after that depending on the year.



Gardening season truly starts well before we can actually work the ground. I don't know yet what this winter is going to be like but summer dreaming definitely helped get me through the snow and cold before Christmas. If you are new to gardening your plan doesn't have to be very specific but the basics will help to give you a guide when it comes time to start planting. Happy growing everyone and I hope you are having a wonderful winter season.

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Reminders

- Check your houseplants for any unwanted visitors. Check the humidity levels in your house to see if you need to run a humidifier.
- Test the germination of old seeds by placing several in a damp paper towel and seeing if they sprout.

Houseplant of the Week-

This week's houseplant of the week is succulents. A succulent by definition is a plant with parts that are thickened, fleshy and engorged. These parts usually retain water in arid climates or soil conditions. The term "succulent" comes from the Latin word *sucus* meaning juice or sap. Cacti are a form of succulent that stores water in the stem and has very small leaves or no leaves at all. There are succulent plants in more than 60 plant families with many being cultivated for use as ornamentals and houseplants. Succulents became very popular over the last few years because of their bright colors and their supposedly easy to care for nature.

Some of my favorite succulents include the jade plant, desert rose, aloes, echevaria, kalanchoe and euphorbia. Succulents have some really cool features that set them apart from other plants and allow them to survive the hot and dry climates where they usually live.

Unlike most plants, succulents open their stomata at night to reduce the amount of moisture they lose. As a result, they actually have a modified form of carbon dioxide fixation and photosynthesis which occurs at night rather than during the day like most plants. The second cool feature are those modified plant parts that help hold water during periods of drought.

Many succulents hold water through their thick, fleshy leaves while others like the desert rose hold extra water in the thickened stem at the base of the plant. Succulents are relatively easy to care for. Indoors, most prefer very bright light (with a few exceptions such as snake plant),

otherwise they can get leggy while outdoors most can be acclimated to full sun. They prefer to stay on the dry side and it is very easy to over love them and kill them by overwatering. The best time to water is when the leaves are starting to get slightly soft as this means the plant is pulling extra water from the leaves to supplement. Another way to check if they need watered is to stick a wooden kabob stick all the way to the bottom of the pot then let it sit in the soil for 10 minutes and pull it out. If the stick is completely dry the plant probably needs some water, if not wait a few more days and check again. There are many succulents that are hardy outdoors in Kansas such as sedums, cacti and hens and chicks but most will need brought indoors in the winter time.



Activity of the Week-

This week's activity of the week is growing mushrooms. I love mushrooms (I might be alone in this with the rest of my family) but I think they are a wonderful addition to any salad and many different dishes. While it might seem intimidating, it is actually relatively easy to grow several different types of mushrooms at home. It might surprise you but the part of the mushroom we actually eat are the fruiting or reproductive bodies of the fungi. Unlike many plants, mushrooms do not photosynthesize and rely on the substrate or material on which the mushrooms grow for their food. As the substrate decomposes the mushroom can take up the nutrients. Mushrooms can be grown on logs, straw or other sources and the substrate needed will depend on the type of mushroom you grow. Some of the most common mushrooms to grow at home are the Oyster mushroom and the shiitake mushroom. Oyster mushrooms are delicate with a mild flavor and are rarely seen in grocery stores because they are hard to ship. Their color ranges from tan to pink to white to yellow and they are grown on a tower of straw. The mushrooms will typically start to form on the outside of the tower in approximately a month. Shiitake mushrooms have a smoky flavor and can be found in the store but they are inexpensive to grow. Shiitake mushrooms are grown on hardwood logs and one log could produce mushrooms for up to 3 to 5 years. There are several kits available for sale to help you get started with this endeavor or you could attend a class to make your own.



Upcoming Events-

- *February 1st at Noon: More Plants From Your Plants: Introduction to Vegetative Plant Propagation*
Vegetative propagation, cloning, and asexual propagation are all terms used to describe the process of making new plants that are genetically identical to your existing plants. Join Dr. Jason Griffin, Woody Ornamentals Horticulture Extension Specialist, as he discusses the basics of plant propagation for the hobby gardener. With a little knowledge and some simple tools, learn how to be successful propagating your plants. For more information on the Garden Hour series [click here](#).
- *March 1st at Noon- Houseplants: Basics and Beyond*
Over 66% of U.S. households have at least one houseplant, but often the terms used to describe their care can be confusing. Join Cassie Thiessen, Post Rock District Horticulture Extension Agent, & Calla Edwards, Butler County Horticulture Extension Agent, as they decode common houseplants terms related to light, water, and other plant needs. Learn about some unique houseplants and the best practices to keep them thriving. For more information on the Garden Hour series [click here](#).
- *March 14th at 6 pm- So you want to grow vegetables in containers?*
Are you interested in growing your own vegetables but live in an apartment, have a shady backyard or have a physical limitation that prevents you from gardening in the ground? Container vegetable gardening is a great way to still grow your own vegetables on your window sill, patio, porch or even your front step. Join us at the Bradford Memorial Library to learn how to grow your own tomatoes, corn, herbs and any vegetable in a container.