

Yard and Garden – 12-26-09 – Ted Griess /Extension Horticulture Assistant

Where did it go? All the anticipation and preparations for Christmas 2009 are now but memories. It is my hope that for each of you, those memories are happy and joyous; but remember — time marches on.

The New Year will soon be here. With the anticipation of its arrival, one may be inspired to make New Year's resolutions. Although this age-old custom resurfaces each year at this time, I hate to admit it, but I'm usually reluctant to make resolutions. Over the years I've learned that following through is difficult. Although I wish to improve my life for the coming New Year, making and following resolutions generally becomes two opposing entities. All too often my good intentions fall short of my actual accomplishments.

Establishing gardening resolutions comes highly recommended by the National Garden Association. While recently reading an article titled New Year's Resolutions for Vegetable Gardeners published by the National Garden Association (NGA), I discovered that I wasn't alone. Most gardeners find accomplishing resolutions difficult. However, the fact remains, if one sets gardening resolutions and sticks to them, one will realize a savings of time, energy, and frustration.

According to the NGA, approximately nineteen percent more people grew vegetables in 2009 than in 2008. The article didn't explain the increase, but I'm reasonably certain it can be attributed to the economy. How the economy fares in 2010 is yet to be determined, but I have a hunch those who gardened in 2009 will again be gardening in 2010.

While making preparations for the New Year, I'm thinking seriously of following the NGA's recommendation of eight gardening resolutions. According to the association, following all eight should be easy for the experienced gardener (maybe there is hope for me) and for new gardeners, success is nearly guaranteed. With that in mind, in a somewhat shortened version, I share with you the NGA's *Eight Resolutions for a Great Garden*.

1. **Have a plan.** It's easy to head out on a sunny spring day, buy a bunch of seeds and transplants, and pop them in the garden, but having a garden plan in mind before you plant will help you grow more, grow better and save time and money.
2. **Build the soil.** If your vegetable garden looked a little anemic last summer and the plants didn't grow as well as you hoped, improve your soil. Start with a soil test.
3. **Use raised beds.** Unless your soil is sandy, gardening in raised beds leads to better plant growth. Raised beds warm up faster and dry out more quickly in spring; they also use less space.
4. **Grow in containers.** If you only have a small deck or balcony, grow vegetables in containers.
5. **Mulch, mulch and mulch some more.** Organic mulches such as hay, straw, chopped leaves and untreated grass clippings suppress weed growth, conserve soil moisture and add nutrients to the soil.
6. **Visit the garden regularly.** The best sign of a healthy garden is the gardener's footprint. A garden that's visited every day, even for just five to ten minutes, spells well tended, healthy plants.
7. **Pick early and often.** For many vegetables, the more often you pick, the more the plants will produce.

8. **Keep planting.** Once a crop is finished, plant something else. Succession planting allows you to keep the vegetables producing into the fall.

Now that I've revealed all eight resolutions, one might find the list a little daunting. If so, I have a suggestion, pick one or two and follow through. Remember, if one sets gardening resolutions and sticks to them, one will save time, energy and frustration.

In the meantime, cherish those memories from Christmas 2009, but get ready to say hello to the New Year, 2010!