

## **Yard and Garden - 02-11-2012 - Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant**

My customary *modus operandi* is awakening in the early morning hours, much too early to arise for the day. There I lay, wide-awake. Tossing and turning, I attempt to fall back to sleep. With eyes wide open, staring into the darkness I am alone with my thoughts. The time becomes private moments of reflection. Memories of the past few days, weeks, months and years briefly occupy my mind giving way to thoughts of what I wish to accomplish, what I need to accomplish and, of course, sometimes a gnawing mental reminder of those things I have not yet accomplished. Consciously, I attempt to replace any feelings of anxiety with those of anticipation.

I am convinced that it is during those dawning moments I formulate some of my best ideas. Throughout the years, I have discovered that when this situation occurs, it is important I hop out of bed and quickly jot down my thoughts. If I linger in bed, those inspirational thoughts often vanish after I fall back to sleep. When I do arise, sometimes I venture to my desk. On occasion, I have even sat at my keyboard and drafted an entire column. Perhaps that explains my peculiar persona — just in case you have ever wondered.

Most of the time, however, I end up in our living room. After jotting a few notes, I usually grab a gardening magazine to relax me or turn on TV. Realizing the importance of having the proper amount of rest and fully aware that morning will come soon enough, I either stumble back to the bedroom or fall asleep on the living room sofa. When what seems like moments later, morning arrives and with it the new day.

From such a description, one might think insomnia. Perhaps so, but when I later awaken and examine my notes, they usually make sense, giving me direction. There have been times, however, after looking over my notes, I, too, have questioned, “What was I thinking?” The downside to this strange behavior is how easily I tire, especially during the mid-afternoon hours. Fortunately, because I am semi-retired and work part-time, on my days off, it provides me the opportunity to take a well-earned nap. During my workdays, all I can say is, “Thank goodness for coffee!”

By now, you may be questioning what sort of message from all this rambling am I conveying, and what does it have to do with gardening.

Although perhaps somewhat of a stretch, here is my message. If gardening is in your plans for 2012, dreaming, planning, reading and preparing notes are sensible approaches. A well-planned garden is easier to maintain. It saves time and is more productive. Planning now better prepares you for work when planting time finally arrives.

The success of your garden depends greatly on its location. Select an area that has good soil. A loose, fertile and well-drained soil is best. When in doubt, have your soil tested. The site should receive adequate sunlight. Six to eight hours of direct sunlight per day yields healthy, high-quality vegetables. Avoid placing your garden where trees or shrubs compete. Water is essential. Select a site near a water supply.

Garden size is also important. Although the size of your garden might be determined by how much land is available, start small. Determine beforehand how much time you are willing to spend gardening. In addition, knowing in advance what types of produce you intend to grow and the quantities of each makes good sense. Take the time to sketch your plans.

I offer one last suggestion. Attempt to gather all your inspiration, planning, and dreaming during the normal hours of the day. Otherwise, I can assure you, doing all this preparation in the early morning hours hinges greatly on drinking lots of coffee and taking advantage of a well-earned, quality, afternoon nap.