

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

Two thousand seventeen has arrived and perhaps, prior to its arrival, you made New Year's resolutions. This age-old custom resurfaces each year and over the years I've discovered that most people (including yours truly) have little difficulty making resolutions —following through is where the difficulty lies.

According to a report from the National Garden Association (NGA), during the past five years there has been a significant shift toward more Americans growing their own food in home and community gardens. Recent statistics show that more young people, particularly millennials (ages 18-34), are the fastest growing population segment of food gardeners. One in three households are now growing food - the highest overall participation in a decade. This increase is attributed to several events: an improving economy and strong national leadership, including the launch of the "Let's Move" initiative and White House Kitchen Garden by First Lady Michelle Obama.

Establishing gardening resolutions comes highly recommended by the National Garden Association (NGA). Although, like most people, gardeners find accomplishing resolutions difficult, the fact remains if one sets gardening resolutions and sticks to them, one will realize a savings of time, energy, and frustration.

While making preparations for the New Year, I urge gardeners to consider the following eight gardening NGA resolutions. Sticking to them spells success.

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 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.

One might find these eight resolutions a bit daunting. If so, I suggest picking one or two and following through. Remember, if one sets gardening resolutions and sticks to them, one will save time, energy and frustration.

Cherish the memories you made in 2016, but remember, time marches on.
Happy 2017!