

Landscape Journaling

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator

Landscape journaling, the art and science of keeping track of plants and gardens in the landscape, may seem like a fluffy idea, but the task has merit. Are you having your ash trees treated every other year to prevent an infestation of emerald ash borer? A landscape journal can be a record of when and who treated the tree, along with the timing for the next treatment. Did a new pepper variety perform extremely well in your vegetable garden this year? This can be recorded in a landscape journal to serve as a reminder for next year.

More than once I've witnessed a tree service using lag bolts to stabilize a tree split. Successive years of ring growth over the lag bolts made it invisible to those unaware of the past repair. A concern here is that years later someone using a chain saw will encounter this metal—with scary consequences. Not only is a landscape journal an interesting bit of reading to look back on past tree repairs, I would go so far as to say it should be included with the abstract of the property as a history of what has been done and to prevent injury to others unknowing of past tree work.

Since staking materials should be left on newly planted trees for one year and one year only, a landscape journal is a good place to record when those materials need to be removed next year. Re-training the central leader in your spruce tree after the top died out? Put this down in the landscape journal as a reminder to remove the staking materials after one year and to track progress as the tree recovers.

Keeping a landscape journal helps us to track what happens when. I can't tell you the number of times a tree owner will bring in a sample for diagnosis, claiming "It just happened!" when it is apparent the problem has been ongoing for years. With a set of eyes looking at plants, monitoring for problems and recording what is seen, problems are discovered—and treated—sooner rather than later.

A landscape journal can be a place to keep your plant wish list, to serve as a reminder of a monumental failure, to log vegetable crop rotations, and to stash pictures of landscapes you'd like to emulate. Weather events, a large factor in plant stress, can be recorded in a journal, providing that "ah hah" moment, connecting a cause with an effect, sometimes several years later.

Regardless if your garden journal is a hard copy or an electronic record, the information contained within will be invaluable.