



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



**January 02, 2013**

Experienced gardeners know that good soil is critically important in their gardening success. Our heavy gumbo clay soils have an image problem in that they can be difficult to work but they are quite fertile. Adding organic matter on a regular basis will markedly improve clay soils.



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*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*

It's hard to believe that another year has arrived! One redeeming value of growing older is the fact that we also get to grow wiser.

At the very least, we are provided ample opportunities to learn from our experiences. Learning from your mistakes can provide an insightful means toward gaining wisdom but I am rather partial to acquiring as much wisdom as I can by adhering to following expression: A wise man learns by the mistakes of others.

Since 2013 is only a few hours old, let us make a list of gardening resolutions for the New Year that will help ensure bountiful and healthy harvests of vegetables and

fruits for the upcoming seasons.

- We will amend our gumbo clay soil with ample compost and other sources of organic matter. Our heavy gumbo clay soils have an image problem—they can be difficult to work but they are quite fertile. Adding organic matter to gumbo clay soil on a regular basis will “tame” any clay soil and produce a very workable and productive garden soil.

- We will not plant vegetables and fruit trees in the shade. In general, lack of direct sunlight (less than eight continuous hours) reduces productivity.

- We will plant the right plant at the appropriate time in the proper manner. We will not

try to “cheat” and plant too early in an overly fertilized soil. Plant growth is governed by certain physiological limitations.

We can provide optimum conditions and take certain cold protection measures for early plantings to insure maximum growth and yield, but there is a limit to how fast we can hurry plants without damaging them.

- We will endeavor to increase our understanding of what insect pests we really are trying to control. We will not employ any “spray and pray” or “live in dread, until it's dead” philosophy of action.

- We will not spray our plants with pesticides mixed to dou-



ble and triple strength solutions. Don't subscribe to the philosophy of "if a little does some good, then a lot will do better."

Don't laugh, you might be surprised at the number of calls I get about using "extra strength" sprays. Spraying extra strength solutions can be dangerous for many reasons, including rendering vegetables and fruits unfit for consumption.

- We will exercise a prudent eye on "weekend specials" or "almanac ads" which will supposedly make plants perform unrealistic feats. Think twice if they claim to make plants bloom in the dark, grow 40 feet per year, forever rid your lawn of all pests, or produce miniature oranges in your living room. Again, don't laugh. I recently saw an ad in an almanac promoting a "miracle hormone" that will make "rose bushes grow three times their normal height!" and "young trees double or triple in size in 3 weeks!"

- We will not believe everything we read in seed catalogs. All varieties in seed catalogs are naturally described in somewhat glorious terms. However, not all of the varieties in any given catalog (especially nationally distributed ones) will likely be well-suited for our growing conditions.

Varieties must be evaluated for several growing seasons before such determinations can be safely made. Professionals of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service continuously conduct such trials and recommend to you only those varieties which are tried and proven.

Rely on these as your primary source of fruit and vegetable varieties but do experiment with other varieties. Some might work for you and your particular growing practices and conditions but you should base such assessments on several growing seasons.

- We will not be taken in by "miracles."

Real miracles are too precious to be sold in plastic containers. Any product which has such "secrets" that cannot be listed on package labels should be suspect. While more improvements will definitely be made, there exists today very little original thought in the world of plant production.

Those who are fortunate enough to have "secret" and "miracle" products should be allowed to keep them and those products which claim to contain such. We can bring about a respectable level of "miracles" through our own efforts with sound plant production techniques.

- We will be prudently wary of "sales." Sales occur for reasons—most are good, but some may be bad. "Bad" sales can be caused by excess supplies of unadapted plants (Concord Grape, Bartlett Pear, Red Delicious Apple, Elberta Peach---none of these will do well for most of us here), of untimely items (spring plants of cauliflower), of overstocked items (fruit trees in May, bluebonnets after March, tomato transplants in May) and of poor quality plants (a dying or dead plant is not a good deal at any price).

- We will learn to recognize a mistake and take positive action to correct it. At times, this may be the best course of action, rather than trying to adjust or modify the situation. Such instances which need drastic measures to correct an intolerable, remediless situation include planting a pecan tree beneath a power line and hoping the tree will be a dwarf, or planting small shrubs which turn into monstrous bushes in front of a living room window. Sometimes the only remedy to these situations is action—the action of a chain saw!

- We will attend horticultural seminars offered by the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office. Nine excellent gardening programs are offered this month. Take advantage of the expertise of our speakers

to sharpen your skills and expand your gardening savvy (visit my website for more information on upcoming programs). Remember that the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office, located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main Street in La Marque), has an oasis of free informative publications on almost any gardening subject.

There are many more resolutions which we could all make but these few will give you some ideas. HAPPY NEW YEAR and GOOD GARDENING!

