

# Resolutions for gardening in the New Year

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



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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 2011 is only a few days 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 season.

- We will amend our gumbo clay soil with ample compost and other sources of organic matter. Our heavy, clay soils have an image problem — they can be difficult to work but they are quite fertile. Add plenty of organic matter regularly to your 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 not overindulge our plants. Don't kill them with such kindness as applying so much fertilizer to the garden that your neighbors begin buying snow skis and snowmobiles because it resembles the slopes of Aspen!
- We will endeavor to increase our understanding of what insect pests we really are trying to control. We will not employ a “spray and pray” or “live in dread, until it's dead” philosophy of action.
- We will not spray our plants with pesticides mixed to double 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” solutions. 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 three 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 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 im-

provements 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 that turn into monstrous bushes in front of a picture 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 Extension Office. Eight 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 below for more information on upcoming programs). Remember the Galveston County Extension Office, located at 5115 state Highway 3 in Dickinson, 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!

