

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Herman Auer



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Even though the winter season just started a few days ago, now is the time to start planning for the 2018 gardening growing season in the Upper Texas Gulf Coast region. Galveston County Master Gardeners will provide several gardening seminars during January, including “Growing Avocado and Papaya” on Saturday, January 6.

The New Year will soon arrive. Experienced gardeners are already tending productive winter gardens and look forward to the spring, summer and fall gardening season.

Over the last weekend, I sliced a tomato grown in the garden. The tomato had not ripened on the vine. It was picked a few days ago while it was green

because the mother plant had been killed after the arrival of cold temperatures. Most full-size green tomatoes will ripen if left on a window sill. After enjoying the tomato, I then went out into the back landscape and harvested a few kumquat citrus. Gardeners in the Upper Texas Gulf Coast region can harvest crops

in every month of the year.

What are the most common mistakes made when it comes to creating and maintaining productive gardens and attractive landscapes? You would be correct in thinking that surely there are more than 10 mistakes we make but I think I have found the big ones



based on my experiences as a Galveston County Extension Horticulture Agent. Rarely do I take a negative approach to a subject but in this case, it seems to be the best way to get the points across.

Think of them when making your New Year resolutions for successful gardening.

1.) Not fertilizing the plants. We seem to plant them and forget them. To keep ornamentals growing well, periodically fertilize through the growing season. Bedding plants and vegetables need even more frequent feedings.

2.) Setting plants too close together. Sure, we want the instant effect but close planting is only good for short term container gardens. Note spacing on plant labels or garden guides. If plants are too close, they are far more likely develop pest problems and quickly become overgrown.

3.) Pruning too often. Let your plants grow a little. Pruning back to the same size and shape stresses your plants. It is best to selectively remove overgrown branches and shoots and not back to the same spots.

4.) Planting too close to the home or other buildings. Gardeners are always worried about trees affecting their homes mainly because they have been planted too close to the structures. Keep trees 25 or more feet from your home. Shrubs need room too. A general rule is one-half the expected width of the tree canopy plus one foot from a building.

5.) Picking the wrong plant for the site. No other plant has this problem more than the crape myrtle. Oak trees are another example as gardeners often fail to appreciate their spread and height when mature.

6.) Expecting gardens to grow without our care. One friend said, "visit your garden each day for five minutes and you will spend an hour caring for the plants."

7.) Not training young landscape trees. Trees need your guidance to keep a straight trunk and good branching. Early training can avoid the need for major pruning in the future.

8.) Planting at the wrong time. How many home gardeners still try to grow tomatoes during the heat of a Texas summer? Use a recommendation guide to make sure vegetables are sown or transplanted at the right time. For trees and shrubs in the landscape, January is an ideal time to transplant.

9.) Not preparing the soil before planting. Whether it's growing tomatoes in the garden or trees in the landscapes, proper soil preparation is critical to plant growth.

10.) Not providing plants with optimum drainage. Although we have assurance that the "40 days and 40 nights" ordeal will not be repeated, we often experience only slightly less here in Texas. The need for good drainage was exemplified soon after Hurricane Harvey made landfall last August.

Most vegetables detest "wet feet." Unless your soil is very well drained, raised beds are a lifesaver. Remember, "It is easier to water a desert than it is to drain a swamp."

New Year resolutions tend to have a short lifespan. I have provided ten common mistakes that gardeners make. Make the avoidance of these mistakes part of your gardening resolutions for the coming New Year. It's not incidental that I provided ten of them for like the biblically based Ten Commandments, gardeners who think the above are optional or frivolous are also headed for disappointment! And also like the Ten Commandments, we (including myself) should regularly assess our adherence to these guides.

**Upcoming Programs**

WHAT: Growing Avocados and Papayas in the Home Garden  
DATE: Saturday, January 6  
TIME: 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.

WHAT: Growing Peaches in Galveston County  
Saturday, January 6, 2018  
TIME: 1:00 - 3:30 p.m.

WHERE: All programs conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located at 4102-B Main Street (Carbide Park) in La Marque. No fee but pre-registration requested (phone: [281-309-5065](tel:281-309-5065); e-mail: [galvcountrymgs@gmail.com](mailto:galvcountrymgs@gmail.com)).

