

Gardening Resolutions

New year new blooms. Most resolutions fail, even with the best intentions. With that in mind, is there any reason to bother? Although resolutions tend to fail, there's nothing wrong with setting goals, and maybe some will even come to fruition.

If you only have one gardening goal for the entire year, let it be to plant the right plant in the right place. This has two meanings when you're looking at adding to your garden. First, it means selecting a plant suitable for the climate you're in. An easy way to find appropriate plants for our area is to utilize K-State's plant lists, the Kansas Forest Service's regional list for trees or through consultation with local nurseries and greenhouses. The second meaning of right plant right place, is to place the plant in the proper area within your yard. This is the time to read the plant tag! Height and width; making sure shrubs aren't too close to the house and that trees can grow their full height without obstruction, are key. Many maintenance issues can be prevented by giving plants the space they need to grow. I can't say that I haven't bought a plant on sale and put it in a tight spot, knowing it would outgrow the space. But I do so with the realization that the plant will need to be trimmed or removed after a couple seasons. Also on the tag, pay attention to sunlight and water needs. Hostas are planted under trees for a reason! Unless you like crispy brown leaves, put them in the shade! For water requirements, you may want to plant according to water needs. Planting low water use plants together, in the farthest part of your garden, will reduce their likelihood of drowning. In the same token, put the needy plants close to your water spout to avoid the daily lugging of the garden hose.

Along the same vein of plant selection, make sure to look for plants with pest and disease resistance when possible. This is especially important if you've had disease or pest issues in the past. Some trees and perennials have superior varieties but more often annuals, especially vegetables, have been bred for resistance. For example; Jet Star, Big Beef and Florida tomatoes have some resistance to Fusarium and Verticillium wilt. Verticillium significantly reduces fruit production while Fusarium kills the entire plant. Both are worth preventing with variety selection.

While we're on the topic of pests and diseases, make sure you know what you're dealing with before you begin treatment! All gardeners hate to see their plants struggle with problems, but treating for the wrong problem doesn't help! Spraying a fungicide won't get rid of spider mites and jets of water on your roses will make powdery mildew worse. Even if you know what you're dealing with, bagworms for example, timing the spray to when they're vulnerable is key to control. Although the job of identifying these things may seem daunting, it's just what Shawnee County Research and Extension aims to alleviate. Our Extension Master Gardener Response Line is open April-September but we take calls throughout the year. Identifying these issues is key to not only helping your plants, but also to avoid overuse of chemicals and the waste of precious gardening time!

These gardening goals just scratch the surface of what home gardeners can do to have a happy, healthy yard and garden. Although some points may seem obvious, these are common mistakes that end up costing homeowners money, time and labor. You may not achieve all of these goals this year, but striving towards them will improve your garden's beauty and health while enhancing the enjoyment you get from it!

K-State recommended plant lists: <http://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/recommended-plants/>

Kansas Forest Service Northeast Preferred Trees:

http://www.kansasforests.org/community_forestry/community_docs/Pref%20Trees%20NE.pdf