



So what is a Garden Journal? It can be known by many names – Garden Journal, Garden Book, Garden Diary, Garden Log, Garden Planner, and Garden Record. It is a place to document garden observations, plans, lists, photos, and records, anything that relates to your garden. Why journal? To quote The North Carolina Master Gardener Handbook **“By recording information over a long period of time, you will create an invaluable source of information about your yard and garden that will guide you in making any future decisions about plants, problems, or design.”**<sup>1</sup> In short you are creating a form of reference manual for your garden.

By recording observations and reviewing past journals entries you will see patterns in your garden such as microclimates or optimum seed planting dates. Note that you can also document your achievements in your garden as well. Also with all of your garden related information in one spot, it’s easier to find when you need it.

There have been many notable gardeners that found value in creating and maintaining a garden journal. For example, Thomas Jefferson maintained his Garden Book for nearly 60 years. He recorded his observations on the successes and failures of his flowers and vegetable gardens. In fact his journal was used to recreate the grounds of Monticello and also provided important information about heritage plants.

Journal formats fall into two broad categories: low-tech and technology based. The first category is a “traditional journal” and includes anything from a bound journal, to a three ring binder, or even a shoebox to hold plant tags, receipts and articles. Some low-tech journal ideas to consider: calendar, spiral notebook, three ring binder, composition book, index cards, sketchbook, bound journal, diary, shoebox, accordion folder, photo album, scrapbooks.

The second category is digital and includes anything from a spreadsheet to an app on your phone or tablet. There are mobile apps available that allow you to take a picture of a plant and the app will identify the plant, add it to your plant inventory, and track the GPS location of where it is planted in your garden. Digital journal formats include: online journals, journal apps for smartphone or tablet, digital photo journal online or on a laptop, garden records in a spreadsheet, journal software on laptop, garden blog, or even Pinterest or Instagram.

With so many options it may feel intimidating choosing a format. I suggest selecting a format for your journal by looking at your personal preferences in life. Love technology? Use an app on your phone and tablet, or software on your laptop. Like to keep things in order but simple? A simple block calendar may work best for you. If chronological order doesn't matter, maybe a binder or spiral notebook would work for you. Like to write? A diary or even a blog may be your preference. Do you like photography? How about a pictorial journal. Artistic ability? Use your talent to document your garden in drawings or paint. Prefer a scientific approach? If details are for you and the ability to sort or quantify then perhaps a spreadsheet would be your preference. I personally think that if Thomas Jefferson were alive today, he would choose spreadsheets to track his garden. You may find that combining several formats works best for you. For example a binder for observations and digital photos of your garden on your laptop.

The next question to address is what to include in a journal. Below you will find a list of possible categories to include in your journal with detailed suggestions under them. These are provided to get your imagination and thought process going -- it is by no means a complete list nor do you need to include all of them in your journal. You may think of completely different items to include in your journal: include what makes sense to you and accomplishes what your goal is in keeping a journal.

I hope you are convinced that it's time to give journaling a try. A good time to start a journal is in the winter when our gardens are at rest. Start simple with a format that works for you. Let your journal evolve over time. Most importantly have fun!

## **1 The North Carolina Master Gardener Handbook**

**Appendix A. Garden Journaling <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/appendix-a-garden-journaling>**

# **Suggestions For Things To Include in a Garden Journal**

## **Future Planning and Wish Lists**

- Things you dream of doing in the future.
- Future garden bed plans and diagrams.
- Wish list of plants.
- Wish list of tools, arbors, rain barrel etc.
- Garden tips and ideas for the next season
- Pictures and articles from magazines of dream gardens.

## **Looking Back: An End of Year Review**

- Vegetable successes and failures, noting ideas for improvement in the future.
- Crop rotation, throughout the season and from year to year.
- Companion planting trials results.
- What plants you like and don't like and why.
- What plants did well and which didn't.
- What did you learn?
- What do you want to do, try or change in the next growing season?
- Keep track of how much you spend.
- Photos of your garden to show the growing stages.
- Create a seasonal/monthly maintenance task list from observations of typical garden work.
- What was missing from your vegetable garden this year?
- Which vegetables did you grow too many?

## **Periodic Observations (daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally)**

- Bed preparation.
- Take "before" photos of a new garden project.
- How you prepare your soil, what soil amendments you use and the dates you amend it.
- Latest and earliest frost dates.
- Unusually high temps.
- First spring sightings.
- When it rains and how much.
- Observations of what is happening in your deck or patio garden, perennial beds, tree and shrub borders.
- What pollinators and other insects are visiting the garden.
- Arrival of butterflies, hummingbirds and other birds.
- Departure of hummingbirds and other birds.
- Track how well or poorly plants are doing.
- Observe and identify insect eggs and caterpillars when they appear.
- Record plant diseases.
- Plants you'd like to move or divide.
- What's coming up, what's blooming,

- What looks like it is dying and what you are doing about it.
- What did the deer, voles, Japanese beetles etc. eat, or not eat?
- Vegetable harvest information and dates of vegetable harvest.
- How much of a harvest did you get from your plants?
- Date and type of fertilizers or chemicals applied and to which plants.
- Record when you fertilize your plants.
- Record when you prune or deadhead.
- Any storm damage that occurs.
- Capture images of your garden from different angles through the year. Images can be photographs or sketches if you are artistic.
- If a plant requires annual pruning, deadheading, staking, etc., it's worth noting so you can perform the task at the appropriate time in the future.
- Having color and interest year-round is enjoyable. A list of the months and which plants are blooming will show you where you may have holes in your landscape.

### **Plants and Seeds**

- When you start seeds inside and then transplant them outside, note how they did.
- When you direct seed vegetables outside.
- Record collecting and storing seeds.
- What vegetables you plant each year.
- Companion planting.
- Note any plants of special importance for example your grandmother gave it to you, or you planted it for the birth of child.
- Information on plants you purchase including receipts for plants that can be replaced if they die in the next 12 months.
- Note where you plant perennials so if they are slow coming up in the spring you won't plant over them.
- Plant labels or seed packets.
- Plants you currently have in your garden.
- Nurseries and catalogs used.
- Pressed specimens.

### **Property and Garden Bed Diagrams**

- Current garden bed diagrams.
- Sketch of your entire property including garden areas and hardscapes.

### **Reference, Test Results, Humor and Inspiration**

- Reference materials.
- Soil test results.
- Gardening inspirational thoughts.
- Garden comics or jokes.
- Websites you like.