



A Gardener's Resolutions

It's that time again! The new year brings new resolve. Of course you're going to lose ten pounds and clean out the junk drawer, just as you've promised yourself every January. But what resolutions are you making for your garden? Cut out this article, stick it on your refrigerator, and let's see how many you can keep this year.

1. Recycle your Christmas tree. Set it outside in one piece, decorated with suet, seeds, and fruit, to feed the birds throughout the winter. Or cut it up and use the branches to protect perennial beds. A tree sent to the transfer station is a wasted resource.
2. If you don't already have a compost pile, start one now. Instead of bagging them up for disposal, layer leaves and grass clippings alternating with kitchen scraps (but no meat or bones; take those to the transfer station compost bins), for free, all-natural fertilizer next spring.
3. Grow something from seed. I'm always surprised at the number of people who love to garden but are intimidated by the thought of starting from seed. Apart from a few finicky species, most seeds are easy to grow, and your reward is a vastly larger variety of plants than you'll find in any garden center. Unless you're growing on a near-commercial scale, the packet will contain more seeds than you can possibly use, so share them with friends, or donate the leftovers to the seed library.
4. Even if you've always been strictly a flower gardener, plant at least one vegetable. If you're a novice, start with something basic, like tomatoes, but make it not-so-basic by choosing an unusual variety: purple "Cherokee," bright yellow pear tomatoes, or a striped heirloom, maybe?
5. Plant something you've never grown before. I'm planning to buy some saffron crocus bulbs. They look just the like the crocus you see all over town in the spring, but bloom in the fall. The saffron that's indispensable to paella is actually the stamen of this crocus. It takes about 70,000 flowers to produce one pound of saffron—150 to collect a single gram!--which explains its high price tag. The paltry few dozen I plant will barely yield a harvest large enough to flavor a single dish, but what fun!
6. Start spring with a clean slate by clearing out old containers of pesticides, herbicides, and other uglies you bought before you knew any better. All it takes is one quick trip to the hazardous waste facility, and afterwards you'll feel so virtuous.

7. Plant at least one native perennial, ground cover, shrub, or tree. Or all four. It's not possible to have too many natives, and the insects, bees, birds, and critters will thank you. For guidance, go to <https://wildones.org>.
8. Start tackling the invasives in your yard. If there's too much to deal with all at once, just do what you can. If digging them out is too daunting, at least cut them down; doing so repeatedly will eventually kill at least some species. Someone planted three red barberry bushes in my front yard a few decades ago, and now there's almost a quarter acre of their offspring--reverted to green, but no less tenacious—in the back. The roots are bright yellow and very stubborn, so every summer I dig until my energy gives out, then cut down the rest. It's slow going, but I'm making progress. Thorny barberry is a safe haven for mice, and likewise for the ticks they carry, so I find ticks on myself after every battle. Wear white to make them easy to spot, and be sure to check.
9. Make this the year you rewild some lawn. We have about 65 million acres of lawn in the U.S., on which we spend billions of dollars and far too many precious summer hours. Turf grass is useless as food or shelter for people or wildlife, and the chemicals we use to keep it "perfect" can damage ornamental landscaping and leach into our waterways. Do yourself and the ecosystem a favor and create a wild corner somewhere.

Every new year is an opportunity to try something different. If you're becoming bored with your garden, you're doing it wrong!