

Keeping a Garden Journal (published 2025-12-20)

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There's still time to enroll! 2026 **MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM** Enroll now for classes at the Sullivan County Extension office beginning January 27, 2026. Go to [2026 Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Program/Training | Sullivan County](#) for details.

Where is the receipt and plant tag for the shrub I planted last fall? When should I start seeds indoors here in Northeast Tennessee? Those tomatoes I grew last year were the best ever, but what were they!?

Wouldn't it be great to have all that information at hand? Gardening is busy. It's hard to keep organized and harder still to remember all those important details. Have you asked similar questions? If you want a more appealing and productive gardening season, appreciate being organized, and want to learn from your experiences, a garden journal is for you!

A garden journal is a place to keep a written record of your garden whether it is a vegetable garden, flower or herb garden, container garden, house plants, or home landscape plantings. This written record contains gardening information important to you in an accessible form that can span many years.

There are many types of garden journals available. You can find beautifully designed, well thought out guided diaries or logbooks and free garden journals online. They make great holiday gifts! Or you can use blank spiral or looseleaf notebooks set up any way that makes sense to you. Garden journals can be digital too. Several apps are available for smart phones or tablets.

Whether you decide to begin with a guided format or a blank slate to design a personal journal or scrapbook, the content will likely be similar in both. Important information that you choose to record can be noted on charts and log sheets divided into sections. North Carolina State Extension has many resources to help you set up a journal at <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/appendix-a-garden-journaling>

Below are some suggested sections and information to record.

GENERAL INFORMATION

At a minimum, include the USDA plant hardiness zone and the first and last frost and freeze dates of the year for your location. Your gardening goals can also be noted in the front of the journal.

LOGGING AND SUMMARIES

It's good to relax with pen in hand to reflect on your gardening activities. Daily weather and gardening experiences, a brief monthly record and yearly summary can be invaluable records of newly gained knowledge, successes, and failures. These reflections and summaries will guide you in setting your goals and plans for the following year.

BUDGETING

This section may contain project descriptions and supplies lists, their projected and final costs, as well as the dates completed. Pockets to keep receipts and other data help with tracking your spending history.

PLANT RECORDS

You might want the plant record to be divided into sections by trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, bulbs and annuals. Include the information on a plant tag such as the common and botanical names, and the light and water requirements. Another chart might list all plants that are natives or plants that attract pollinators.

GARDEN DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Bring out your artistic side by laying out garden designs on graph paper. Draw the location of plants in all your different gardens. Overhead photos are a great way to see the big garden picture. Label all plants and any special site conditions such as shady or wet locations. Using a phone or digital camera to photograph or video your garden produces a time-stamped, multi-year view of the gardens as they grow and change. It's easy to see if a plant needs to be added for continuous seasonal blooms or a plant or crop needs to be moved to another location. Include garden structures or future projects and design ideas with clippings. Colored pencils, crayons or watercolors would be helpful for a realistic effect. Make this as simple or artistic as you choose.

MONTHLY GARDENING TASKS

Here is an excellent resource with gardening tasks by the month that you can insert into your journal. The 2026 version should be available soon. For the 2025 issue, go to:

<https://uthort.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/228/2025/01/W436-2025-version.pdf>

GARDEN MANAGEMENT

Keep soil test results, soil conditions and characteristics here. Include detailed information on pests, diseases, other garden issues, struggles and solutions. Watering schedules, fertilizing schedules, pruning, spraying, and plant propagation can be recorded here. Dates when seeds were started indoors, germination dates, projected harvest date and amounts harvested would be suitable here.

Keeping a personal garden journal is a great learning experience that becomes more valuable over the years. It will prevent making the same mistakes, help you work more effectively, produce more, and garden more successfully. Why not begin a garden journal of your own? The records you need to grow those same wonderful tomatoes again are right there in your new, colorful garden journal! Happy gardening!

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.