NEW YEAR’S “SUGGESTIONS” FOR GARDENERS
Blanca Poteat, Frederick County Master Gardener

The New Year is here, like a blank slate or a newly tilled garden. Since “New Year’s Resolutions” often involve unrealistic goals, here are a handful of “New Year’s Suggestions” instead. Nothing about weight, wisdom, health, or relationships, although gardening might help these, too. Just the satisfaction and enjoyment of growing your own.

Don’t wait! Now is the time to search for inspiration and ideas - get out those seed catalogs, look at them online, or visit your local nursery supply store. Whether you have a single flower pot or acres of ground, dream large – what seeds will you plant in 2014?

* Diversify: Look for varieties that thrive in your soil (tests: http://extension.umd.edu/hgic/soils/soil-testing) and climate conditions (Frederick County includes plant hardiness zones 5, 6, 7, and 8.)

* Add some new names like Brandywine pink tomatoes, Annapolis baby leaf lettuce, Magic Molly purple potatoes, Striped Armenian cucumbers, Purple Haze carrots, Black Prince tomatoes, Hooligan squash, Gypsy broccoli, Purple Passion asparagus, Cheyenne Spirit coneflower, and Zowie! Yellow Flame zinnias. Really. You can look it up.

* Timing is everything: Go for the “layered garden” effect. Choose plants that mature at different times to produce a “sensory garden,” a continuous array of growth, color, aroma and produce.

* Garden helpers: Grow native wildflowers and milkweed. A weed? Indeed. For monarch butterflies, bees and other pollinators, milkweed is one of their essential food sources along their migratory pathways. Many suppliers have “bee feed” and “butterfly and hummingbird” seed mixes.

* Garden un-helpers: Use your plantings to prevent and control insect pest damage. Plant marigolds and borage near tomato plants to repel tomato horn worms. (Tip: borage may grow enthusiastically.) Put empty plastic bottles to work in your garden by cutting circular “collars” and planting squash seeds inside them to repel borers. Plant squash or pumpkins or melons in the yard and you won’t have to cut grass most of the season. And add coffee grounds to your compost or spread them in damp places to repel slugs, mosquitoes and cats.

*Space: Expand your gardening efforts. Consider joining a community garden. There are spaces in many communities throughout Frederick County. Signups are usually first-come, first-served. Rental costs are reasonable. You’ll meet interesting people, get some exercise, swap your harvest, and try some new things. http://extension.umd.edu/growit/community-gardens/frederick-county-community-gardens Or share your gardening space. Do you have a garden plot but don’t have much time and/or energy? Do you have a friend or neighbor who likes to garden and could...
help plant and cultivate your yard or other space? Conspire with your gardening neighbors, plant more than you each need; together you will produce plenty to share and trade.

For more gardening suggestions, check out:
Grow It Eat It: http://extension.umd.edu/growit
The Gardener’s Guide: What To Do and When:
http://extension.umd.edu/sites/default/files/_docs/locations/frederick_county/MG%20Gardener%20Guide%20MD%202012.pdf

And remember, “Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant.”

Robert Louis Stevenson

Wishing you a new year of adventures in the garden!

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.
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