

Become a Better-Gardener-Faster

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- 1) Develop a plan. Think long term.
 - a. Size matters! Start with major features and work down.
 - b. Figure out a realistic passion, time, and money budget. Marathon...not a sprint!
 - c. Prioritized projects you can “win” with.
 - d. Try to imagine the end result. See the “big picture.”
 - e. Don’t be derailed by trends, gimmicks, or ideologies.
 - f. Resist impulse!
- 2) Develop a style and learn elements of design early.
 - a. Visit lots of gardens and learn what you really like. Lead your garden; don’t let it lead you.
 - b. Steal ideas from public gardens, private gardens, nurseries,
 - c. Keep it simple (at least at first). (Or just steal ideas from Piet Oudoff).
 - d. Don’t fear (being) the reaper. Edit early and often.
 - e. Don’t become a one-season wonder.
 - f. Regularly look at your garden with disdain (like a visitor).
- 3) Identify and rely on only the best references.
 - a. Obtain the best books by recognized authoritative authors.
 - b. Extension services.
 - c. Public gardens.
 - d. Plant trials.
 - e. The internet (.edu suffixes)
 - f. Chat rooms.
- 4) Understand how soil, water, and roots work.
 - a. Fascinating and important!
 - b. Almost everything else depends on this.
- 5) Do good “ground” work. Prepare!
 - a. Do not take shortcuts with your soil and bed preparation.
 - b. Careful plant selection.
 - c. Choose healthy plant stock.
- 6) Develop excellent basic skills.
 - a. Learn to plant.
 - b. Learn to water.
 - c. Learn to mulch.
 - d. Learn to prune.
 - e. Learn to recognize stress.
 - f. Develop situational awareness.
- 7) Be more stubborn than weeds!
 - a. Don’t be denied.
 - b. Don’t let the bastards win.
 - c. Be prepared to be stubborn in a flexible way.

8) Don't Be Afraid

- a. Any garden is better than no garden.
- b. There are no mistakes that can't be fixed.
- c. You can't be arrested for killing your plants and the families of dead plants can't sue.
- d. Failure is an option, and a good learning opportunity.

9) Grow things from seed

- a. No better way to observe and about learn soil chemistry, water movement, and the miracle of roots.
- b. Will lead to an understanding of fertility.
- c. Develops an appreciation for plants as living things.
- d. Develops an appreciation for the resilience of life.
- e. Develops wide ranging plant knowledge—genus, family, etc.
- f. The economy of it encourages growing and using many different plants, which encourages trialing, massing, trading.
- g. The challenges of growing from seed leads to understanding of pests, diseases, and ultimately, hopefully, IPM.

10) Associate with other gardeners.

- a. Join plant societies and garden clubs.
- b. Consider becoming a Master Gardener.
- c. Go on tours of private and public gardens.
- d. Volunteer.

11) Dirty hands and worn out knees. Do it!

- a. Practice makes perfect.
- b. It ain't gonna plant itself.
- c. Rome wasn't built in a day.
- d. (Platitudes and more platitudes)
- e. All theory and no play leads to very shallow knowledge.
- f. Working in the garden leads to crazy thoughts and healthy curiosity!

12) Learn botanical Latin

- a. Look up the meanings of plant names as you acquire them.
- b. Names are often clues for
 - Places of origin.
 - Flower colors.
 - Foliar characteristics.
 - Soil preferences.
 - Light preferences.
 - The name of its discoverer.
 - More.
- c. Helps to accurately identify your plants.
- d. Surprisingly fun!

Favorite References

General Gardening Principles

Principles of Horticulture, Hugh Johnson*****

Soil and Bed Prep

The Well-Tended Perennial Garden, Tracy DiSabato-Aust
Rock and Alpine Gardens, Thomas H. Everett, and NARGS
USDA Soil Food Web website

Tree and Shrub Selection

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, Michael Dirr
(Any other book by Michael Dirr)
Native Trees for North American Landscapes, Guy Sternberg

Tree and Shrub Care

Arborists' Certification Study Guide, International Society of Arboriculture

Perennials

The Well-Tended Perennial Garden, Tracy DiSabato-Aust
Armitage's Garden Perennials, Alan Armitage
Manual of Herbaceous Ornamental Plants, Steve Still
Understanding Perennials, William Cullina

Annuals

Armitage's Manual of Annuals, Biennials, and Half-Hardy Perennials, Alan Armitage

Grasses

The Color Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses, Rick Darke

Vegetables

The Self-Sufficient Gardener, John Seymour

Design

The Well-Designed Mixed Garden, Tracy DiSabato-Aust
Planting Design: Gardens in Time and Space, Piet Oudolf
Planting in a Post-Wild World, Thomas Rainer and Claudia West
Plants with Style, Kelly Norris

Integrated Pest Management

IPM for Gardeners, Cloyd, Nixon, Pataky
Insects and Gardens, Eric Grissell

The Garden as an Ecosystem

Bringing Nature Home, Doug Tallamy

Noah's Garden, Sarah Stein

My Weeds, Sarah Stein

Botanical Latin

Botanical Latin, William T. Stearn

Dictionary of Plant Names, Alan Coombes

Growing from Seed

Jelitto Seed Company Catalog

Seed Germination Theory and Practice, Norm Deno

Other Favorite Writers

William Cullina

Henry Mitchell

Plant Societies

- North American Rock Garden Society
- The Holly Society
- The Magnolia Society
- The American Conifer Society
- Hosta and Daylily Societies
- Rose societies
- Many others.