

# 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.