

Journaling Your Gardens and Landscapes

By Cindy Murray

Last Christmas I was gifted a wonderful book called A Gardener's Journal. The concept of garden journaling is to record the varieties of trees, plants, and seeds in your gardens and landscape, jot down important observations, and keep track of the weather. This will help you in your future gardening and landscaping endeavors. The key is to be honest with yourself, meaning that you must write down your failures as well as your triumphs, and how you got there.

Determined to record the low and high temperatures for each day of the year, I got online help from The Weather Channel (TWC) for the occasional days I failed to take readings on my own property. (TWC usually gets its data from Flagstaff Airport).



They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so adding a few photos to your garden journal is a good thing. The Murrays protected their plots from scrub jays and grasshoppers in 2025 by draping insect netting over the bean poles and frost cloths over the young zucchini plants.

Here's a sampling of other notations and observations.

Once or twice a week after January 4 and throughout the spring, when there had been little to no precipitation, I noted that I was using a handheld watering can for my most cherished perennials, Palmer's and Sunset Crater Penstemons, and Lewis' Flax.

For three days, February fourth through the sixth, my husband watered our fruit and ornamental trees, and many large shrubs.

On March 11, I recorded the Flagstaff airport reached a high of 49° and a low of 24° and had 33.9" of snowfall between March 6 and March 15. Our region experienced scant precipitation the remainder of spring and much of summer, so we irrigated far beyond the rate we had in previous years.

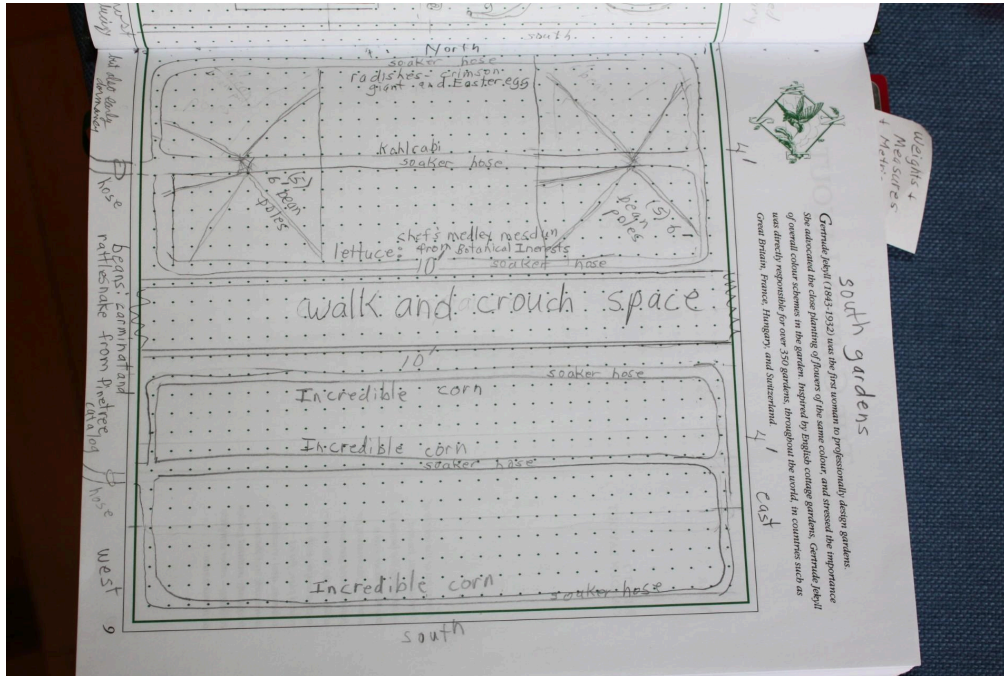
By April 13th our peach tree was in full bloom with the apple trees not far behind; all of our fruit trees were abuzz with a spectrum of pollinators.

Because a hard freeze was forecast for the overnight hours of April 18 and 19, we placed sheets and frost cloths on easy-to-reach blossoming branches of each fruit tree. We repeated this whenever a hard freeze was due. This worked well for our peach tree but was not needed for the apple trees. Our neighbors' trees produced a bounty of apples without coverings.



The Murray's peach tree yielded peaches on the few branches that were protected from freezes.

My gardening journal has a section labeled “The Garden Layout,” featuring enough blank grids for several years of garden mapping, so on June first, I penciled in a tentative map of our four vegetable garden plots. This served as a constructive guide as we planted veggie seeds through the remainder of the month.



It's a good idea to sketch a map of your vegetable garden in your journal. Here are 2 of our 4 gardens.

I journaled many notable events throughout the growing season, for instance on July 1, “Radishes and lettuce planted June 3 are ready to harvest 28 days afterwards.” And on July 13, “‘Astia’ zucchini bearing the most and largest flowers of any other year.” Also, because the monsoon hadn’t yet kicked in, on July 25 and 26 “watered front yard and east side yard; watered backyard.” Then on July 26, “harvested so many zucchini, we put some in a box placed next to the road with a sign, ‘Free to Good Home’.”

What did we learn from journaling our gardens? Looking back, I see why the majority of our dozens of yarrow perennials perished—The only perennials I had watered through the winter were penstemons and flax.

If our grasshopper population ever explodes again as it did last summer, we’ll certainly be glad we made note of which pest controls worked and which ones didn’t.

The extra irrigation we provided for our landscape and vegetables was well worth the time and expense, because despite lackluster winter storms and the skimpy monsoon, most of our ornamentals presented a vibrant exhibit of autumn colors, and our vegetables produced admirably. So, if the winter starts out dry again in 2026, we'll begin irrigating the trees in February, and hand-watering as many perennials as possible.

In previous years, we assumed we'd remember the details of what and when we planted, how we prepared for bad weather, when we fertilized, how we planted each tree, and so on. But there's simply no way we can remember many of those vital details. Going forward, we'll be able to look back at the journal and repeat gardening practices that worked in the past and avoid those that didn't.

Whether you choose to purchase a detailed hard-cover edition like mine or simply fashion your own from a rudimentary wire-bound notebook, I highly recommend all our readers utilize a garden and landscape journal. You may discover that it sets you up for more successful gardening and landscaping in years to come.

Cindy Murray, University of Arizona Master Gardener, has long edited Gardening Etcetera and contributed many columns and photos. Gardening Etcetera is written for the community by certified Master Gardeners of the University of Arizona's Coconino County Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program. To learn more visit

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