



Spencer Horticultural Solutions

Homegrown Horticulture

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Gardening Records

I got a lot of my love for gardening and horticulture from my mom and my maternal grandparents. When I was growing up, we often made the trek down to the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan to visit them. As kids, we would stay for extended visits in the summertime. During each visit, we would be exposed to all sorts of different growing things, whether it was the showy Black-eyed Susan vines growing on the stump planter in the front yard, the giant pompom marigolds growing in the cinderblock wall along the property line, the trees surrounding the house, or the vegetables in the garden.

One of the things that has always stuck in my memory of my grandparents is that there was a desk calendar in my grandpa's office. On it was written a record of the weather conditions from each day. As a kid, I don't know that I ever wondered why they made a record of this, but today, as an adult horticulturist, I think that I understand a bit better.

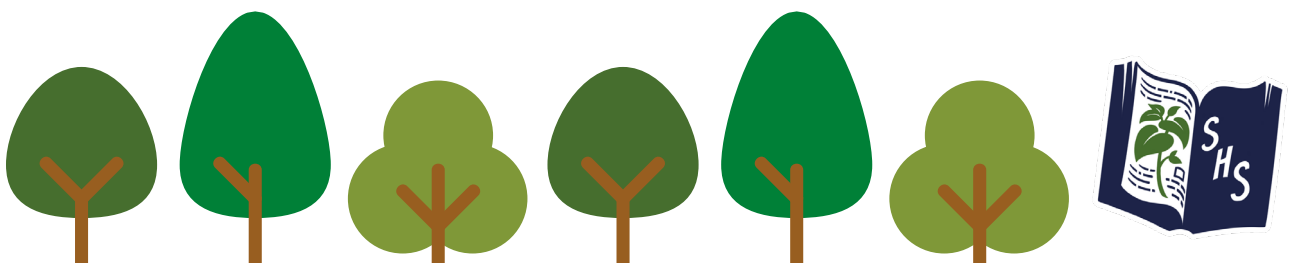
Records form the basis upon which we build our future. Keeping a daily/weekly/monthly record of our gardening activities serves several purposes. When we write things down on paper, or make a record of something electronically, it isn't forgotten. We have captured that memory and that moment in time, and we can go back to it and learn from it and use it. Data that we collect can be referenced later on.

Gather basic information

It is important to gather information. While you might question it in the moment, you will likely find that information is relevant a week, a month, or much later on. Start by recording the basic weather data, such as the high and low temperatures, and the total precipitation amounts. If you happen to have a simple weather station, you could also capture things like wind speed, or relative humidity. Realistically though, temperature and precipitation are going to be the most practical and useful to you.

You might ask, "*Should I only collect this data during the spring and summer?*". The answer is simple. No. Collect it all year round. The weather events in the winter will have as much, if not more, impact on our gardening efforts than the summer ones. In the prairies, we get a lot of our annual moisture in winter. The extreme fluctuations of temperature directly affect the winter survival of our perennial plants.

The weather now can be connected to your gardening successes and failures down the road if you have the data.





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Consider your experiences

The physical act of making a record or documenting something forces us to consider our experiences. If we sit down and think through our day, we'll be able to see the different occurrences. Record the different activities that you did that day, whatever that might be. Did you fertilize? Weed? Prune? Water? Add or take away anything? When did you plant that crop, or that tree? What varieties did you grow?

If you are a more visual person, you might draw a map of your yard and garden at different times. Mark where you planted which vegetables. Have a labeled inventory of your trees and flowers. I can guarantee that you will struggle to remember some specific details down the road, especially when the kids have pulled your markers out, or the tags blow away. And some of that information might just matter.

It might seem odd to record such things, but really, without that information, you can't see any patterns. If you find something that works, or if something goes wrong, would you rather have records, or a hazy, vague memory?

Learn from what you did

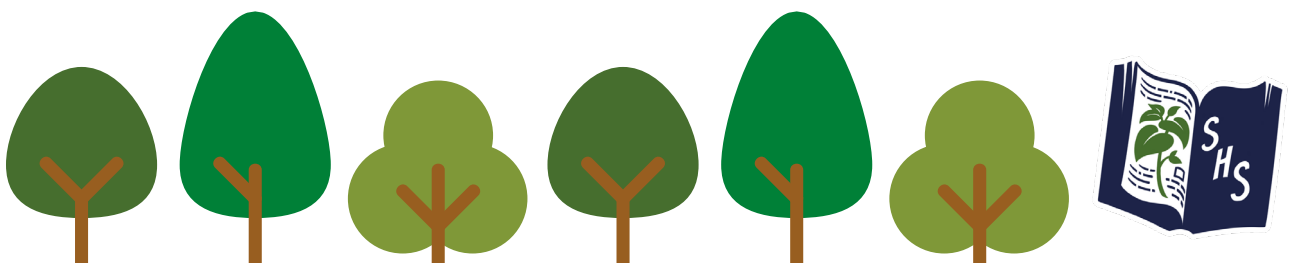
We record and document not only to help us remember what happened, but so that we can learn from it. If something performed well, you could go back to your records later and pull out the details you need to repeat the success. If something didn't work, you don't have to repeat the mistake over and over again. If something could be improved upon, you have the details that will help you to make the adjustments to take things to a higher level.

Make connections between events

It is often when things go wrong that we need records the most. If you find that you had a particular problem, such as a disease, or some poor perennial survival, you can probably find a connection between the weather and the symptoms that you observe. If you find that one variety of vegetable did particularly well one year, but didn't in another year, you might be able to link the weather or something else that happened in the good or the bad year.

I can't count the number of times when I've had questions about the horrid disfigurement of a cherished tomato plant, or the overall poor performance of the garden, but despite the mostly obvious and likely culprit, the homeowner will say that "No, we didn't spray anything" or "No, we didn't add anything to the soil...I think". Eventually, it will come out that someone (the husband is usually thrown under the bus at this point) treated the dandelions in the lawn a few weeks ago, or a load of compost was added to the beds this spring, closing the loop.

What is the point of all that? Keep records. You won't regret it, and you'll definitely benefit from it.



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