

Article by Soni Forsman

What's Happens Outdoors and in the Garden: *Entries in a Garden Journal*

“Anyone who thinks gardening begins in the spring and ends in the fall is missing the best part of the whole year: for gardening begins in January with the dream.”

Josephine Nuese, the County Garden



Journal entry June 11, 2019 - 'Snapper on deck.' (It was late afternoon and misting heavily when a rather-large snapping turtle climbed onto the deck and crossed over. We assumed on its way to a local pond).

Outdoors the gardens lie dormant under a blanket of snow while inside gardeners are imagining them in the warmer months ahead. This dreaming usually starts when the seed and perennial catalogs begin arriving in mailboxes in late December into January. Sitting in a favorite chair, maybe next to a fireplace, snuggled in a blanket we flip the pages admiring the bright colors and lush foliage. Even more personal is rereading the notes you made about last year's gardens - what you liked, what you didn't, what needs to be changed and so on. Are you thinking, I don't write about my gardens? Make that a 2022 New Year's resolution. It could be the easiest to keep.

A formal garden journal may have a beautiful floral cover with the words 'Garden Journal' imprinted on it. Or, it can just be a plain old spiral notebook. There are websites for everything including guidelines for garden journaling. Some seem quite rigid such as decide to do it and stick with it; plan how often to write and how much you want to write; and set aside a time each day to write. Things suggested to include in the journal (notebook) are a sketch of the garden, successful plants, ones to avoid, bloom times, new plants to try, when seeds were started, sprouted, transplanted and eventually moved into the garden. Include photos.

I did not keep a diary as a teenager or journal about anything until 2003 when I decided to start Victoria waterlilies seeds. I wanted to remember everything I did from seed arrival, planting, sprouting, upsizing to larger pots, the move outside, the first bloom and the final entry, off to the compost pile. I even recorded the high and low daily temperatures beginning in May until the first bloom in August. I also monitored the water temperature. I wrote all this information in a 5x7 inches spiral notebook I purchased at the grocery store. I added to that same notebook in 2007, when I grew Victoria seeds again. My earlier jottings were a great refresher.

Following that intense journaling, I purchased a new notebook and started fresh. I was more casual. I did not have a plan of when to write or how much to write but most entries are usually about something related to water gardening. Each new year usually begins with the pond ice melting, Mr. and Mrs. Mallard visiting and the first goldfish slowly swimming around. The entry for the year concludes with us bidding the water gardens 'have a good winter.'

I love firsts. The dates I see the first frog, a dragonfly flitting around, the first waterlily to bloom and the variety and even the first lotus bud spotted and when it becomes a flower. All of this is probably useless information but fun to read when the wind howls and the water garden is frozen over. Most of these events happen about the same time each year. Every year, the same two or three varieties of hardy waterlilies seem to compete for the title, First to Flower.

I usually note when I see the first Japanese beetle. I make little mention of them again. My only hope is that they emerge early in the spring so a few of the later lotus flowers are spared disfigurement. There is another pest I write about more, the neighborhood deer, but only if they feast on the waterlilies.

I make notes about any new plants I purchase either in-person or by mail-order. I include the dates and my first impressions. I follow them all summer. Were they as good as advertised or better or?

Whether you wax poetic about your garden or use just a few simple words or phrases to describe garden happenings, jot down what you want to remember, was interesting and feels natural to you. A garden journal is a look back as you look forward to the coming season. Have fun!!!