

Holidays are over

Once the holiday excitement is over, when there is no more shopping and interior decorating to do, planning a spring garden is about the best thing to prevent the winter “blahs”. Yes, most of the trees are leafless; looking much like bare skeletons, but this is an illusion. Underground, roots are still absorbing water, and billions of beneficial microorganisms continue to keep plants healthy. These associations between roots, bacteria and fungi are the unsung heroes of life on earth.

When all the company has gone home, gardeners can get back to the serious business of horticulture. Gardeners may tend to be social people, but when there is a choice between getting our hands in the soil and formal entertaining, many of us will opt for the soil. This is the time to look at catalogs, cherish the memories of the successes of last season, and think of how to prevent the repetition of any failures. Personally, I prefer handling paper catalogs, although it is possible to get the same information on the internet. The internet is a phenomenal tool, library and entertainment all in one, but it does require a bit of caution. Just because information appears on-screen, it is not necessarily accurate. Many of the available sites are full of advertising to sell a product, but it is better to have all the information before buying anything.

A picture of a plant might be beautiful and quite tempting, but the desert gardener must ask how easily it can grow here. If one is willing to spend unlimited time, money and resources, s/he can get anything to grow in southern Nevada. The number of people with unlimited time, money and resources, however, is limited.

Even if one is not attempting to produce peonies and gardenias outdoors, some plants will not thrive in this climate. Beefsteak tomatoes, for instance, frequently cook on the vine before they have reached full size.

Despite those difficulties, this desert environment is terrific for many kinds of vegetables, even during what we consider winter. This is why we are able to talk about our multiple growing seasons – late winter to early spring, spring into early summer, late summer into fall, and fall into early winter. I skipped the dead of summer, but even at those hot times, melons and pumpkins will keep growing.



Local winters can be chilly, even occasionally cold, but as long as temperatures are above 40°F most leafy and root vegetables will thrive. Lettuce, spinach and members of the cabbage family will grow well, albeit more slowly in cooler times. Roots such as beets, carrots and radishes will also survive and produce a tasty vegetable. Many of these food plants actually have better flavor when they have been exposed to a bit of chilling. Protecting them from the coldest nights will help them endure, and this can be done with many varieties of cover, even a sheet of light plastic sitting above, not on, the plants.

Happy gardening in this New Year, peace and good will to us all.

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