

Garden Line - January 2012

by Brent Moon - HPARD Urban Garden Manager

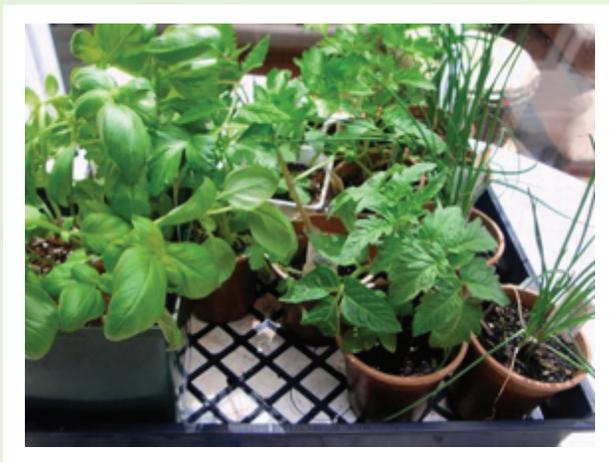
Now that the holidays are over, this is a good month to reflect on the previous season's gardening activities. Which plants did well? Which ones did not? What can you do to ease the workload in the garden this year? Is there a spot in your landscape that has been bugging you? This is a great time to evaluate and redo anything you aren't happy with. Our "off-season" only lasts about two months here in Houston, so make the most of it!



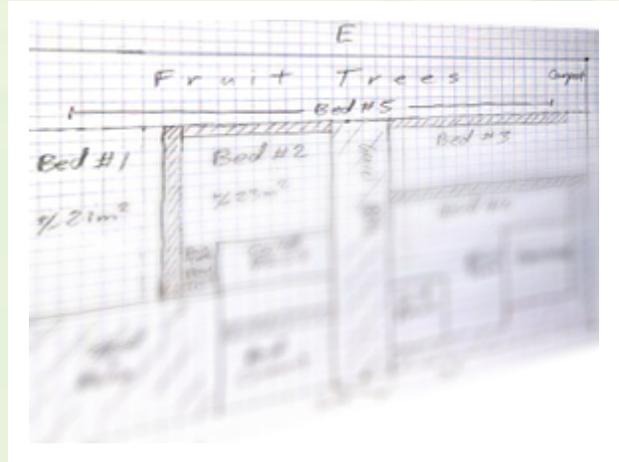
If you had plants, whether edibles or ornamentals, which did not perform well, do some research into their culture. Did you provide them with the conditions they need to thrive? Perhaps you planted your tomatoes in a bit too much shade. Maybe that orange tree did not do well because it was planted too deeply or you planted that moisture-loving carex in a dry, sunny location. Don't feel bad if you've made these mistakes. We've all planted something where it didn't belong; yes, even this horticulturist. The important thing is to research your plants and provide them proper care. Gardening is supposed to

be fun, so spending a little time reading up on plants will pay dividends when you plant your new acquisition in the right place and give it the right care from the get-go.

If your space is limited (such as an apartment or a small lot), don't feel you have to miss out on the bounty. Many vegetable crops can be grown quite easily in containers, though maybe on a limited scale. Anything you can grow in the ground or in a raised bed you can grow in a pot; you just have to pay more attention to water and fertilizer requirements. Start with a good quality potting soil and maybe mix in some compost. Make sure you don't use topsoil, as it will pack down and drain poorly, dooming your plants to a slow death in their pots. Plan to fertilize every two to three weeks for potted vegetables to keep them growing well, as all that watering leaches the nutrients out of the soil very quickly.



If you have a bare spot in your landscape or are considering a major overhaul, now is a great time to sketch out a plan. Don't worry if you aren't an artist; trust me, I'm not. No one has to see the sketch but you; and I really do mean a sketch. Some simple drawings that take scale and ultimate plant size into consideration are all that's needed. As long as it makes sense to you, you're good to go. You aren't trying to win a design contest, only trying to put things down on paper so you can think them out. Some ideas that seem good in theory can be obvious problems once you see them on paper.



January is also a great time to do some of the following items:

- Prune dormant trees and shrubs (but not those that will bloom in early Spring, such as azaleas and some camellias)
 - Rake leaves and compost them
 - Transplant existing shrubs and trees or plant new ones
 - Amend your soil with compost
 - Clean up and sharpen gardening tools; apply a light coating of oil to prevent rust
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- Drain gasoline from mowers and trimmers or add a fuel-stabilizing agent
 - Add winter color to your landscape, such as pansies, violas, kale, snapdragons, etc.
 - Fertilize established fruit trees for the spring growing season
 - Buy a fruit tree at the Urban Harvest Fruit Tree Sale on January 15th (<http://www.urbanharvest.org/events/fruittreesales.html>)
 - Plant winter veggies such as lettuce, cabbage, radish, etc. (Yes, there is still time!)