

February

February is all about planning! Check out mail-order catalogs and garden store seed racks and plants to help you decide what to grow in the spring. Since it hasn't rained a lot lately, spend your time outdoors digging in lots of compost and manure so your plant roots will love their new home and produce lots of vegetables for you!

Successful gardens result from both planning ahead and paying attention throughout the growing season until harvest. The amount of time and effort you know you'll be able to give to your garden this year should determine how extensive it will be.

It's very hard to resist planting a lot, especially when the seeds are so small and the tiny plants are so cute! After a long winter, all of us are eager to overplant, only to be swamped with tomatoes and overwhelmed with zucchini. Limit your garden to the amount of space and number of plants you'll be able to take care of well when they're mature. Then you'll be pleased with your successes rather than disappointed with your attempts.

Draw out a "map" of your gardening plot and mark where your spring plants will go. Remember to rotate your plants from where you planted last spring. Crop rotation is very important to prevent disease and pests from destroying your young seedlings. Read plant tags and seed packets to determine spacing. Don't overcrowd your plants!

Try something new! You'll automatically include the veggies you know your family will enjoy, but adding something new will give you a new adventure. Who knows—you might even discover a new favorite.

Start seeds indoors such as eggplant, peppers, and tomatoes for summer planting. Direct sow into your garden now peas, carrots, radishes, beets, lettuces, spinach.

When choosing carrot varieties, consider the heaviness of your soil—sow short stubby carrots in heavy clay soils, and longer tapered ones in looser sandy soil. The soil at the Gardens tends to be on the heavy clay side.

Winter irrigation needs

Adjust your water timer to water in the mid-morning for 5-7 minutes every other day. Be sure to cover your timer and water valve to prevent possible breakage due to early morning low temperatures.

Gardening can be either frustratingly uncertain or an exciting challenge. Each gardener gardens differently, according to his or her own needs and desires. Soils differ in proportions of sand, silt, clay and organic matter. Weather seems to never be consistent from year to year. There's always something new on the market to try as the perfect vegetable or flower or tool or technique. The great fun is in discovering and making the perfect garden happen! The great payoffs are in eating the delicious veggies, admiring the beautiful blooms, smelling the wonderful fragrances, and marveling at the plentiful harvest from those few tiny seeds and plants.