



Ahh, the bright, shiny promise of a new year brings tears to our eyes and the lengthening days put bounce in our steps. For restless gardeners and avid armchair planners, that bounce happens as sources yield up the current version of catalogs. So many hard copy (and online) seed, plant material, and tool catalogs, so little time. A word of caution for the overenthusiastic and hopeful souls – do a seasonal review and then work up a plan for the upcoming season before those orders are placed. Every year, at least once, each gardener should be evaluating the process and the materials involved in their landscape. Now is a good time. Review the successes and failures of existing beds and plants, evaluate the amount of time expected and tools needed for all landscape work, and then honestly look at how happy the whole gardening process does or does not make you.

Plants can surprise, delight and disappoint – all at the same time. During the growing season, it is easy to get lost in the beauty of what each new day brings. And let's face it, we gardeners can easily be distracted by a new flower, an exceptionally green leaf, or an unusual stem formation. Even if you are professionally evaluating a plant or plants, observation skills can be overshadowed by the awe for those small and beautiful joys of nature. Oohs and aahs overpower our ability to register that insect quietly devastating the leaf beneath that new flower. Take the time now to walk through the garden and seriously ponder each plant, recalling as many of those small details as possible. If the issues were continuous and troublesome, think about replacing those offending plants with something that will provide less work and more interest. I inherited a particularly troublesome perennial bed. It defied control in any form, the insects laughed at me, and the weeds grew twice as fast as anywhere else. I swear that the rabbits had trained the plants to grow in a protective circle around their lunch table (formerly known as my baby spruce). This should be a cause for joy – think about it - an ecosystem that developed a strong defense that blatantly defied human control. I should have embraced and enjoyed that planting, but this one just got the better of me. After fighting for control for more than two years, I decided that re-landscaping was in order. And it looks better now – the entire area responded very well to the riding lawnmower. And that new garden bench is quite comfy. It's amazing

how a seemingly small, well thought out decision can make a big difference.

Good time management is important to success in loving gardening. During this dormant period (for this part of the country) make time to look at the expectations, and the realities, of the past season. Was enough time allowed for managing the tasks at hand? Probably not, and if you can't afford to devote more time to your endeavors – look at either reducing the amount of work you expect out of yourself or - for Pete's sake - hire some help. There are people out there that would love to do the work for you. Let them enjoy your money for the hard work done and train yourself to enjoy the completed projects. And really, how many large projects can one person handle in conjunction with daily personal commitments? Probably not as many as you think you can. Get over it. Schedule the projects so that normal humans can realistically complete them. Choose a provider that will give an honest estimate with a real timetable. Call around, get references, listen to quality reviews, not petty competitors. How do you evaluate your time needs for 2007? That really depends on how honest you are with yourself and your expectations of others. If all people and objects appear to have a consistently rose tinted appearance, you may want to double time estimates. If you are in doubt about the usefulness of the current tool supply in the landscaper area of your garage – take a good look at them all. If they are pristine, with tags attached, after a normal season or two – you can safely give them to the neighbor with your best wishes for a speedy use, elsewhere. If they look well loved, they are probably well worth the money invested in them.

Does gardening make you happy? Is it worth your time? If you even have to think about the answers – just stop doing the work yourself. You are obviously not enjoying the process. But, the delightful end result can still be yours with the right service provider. And the hard part is often just making the decision to give up the hands-on control of the day to day activities. Once that is done, make your list and do the interviews. For the rest of us nuts, once the review is done, it's time to figure out what to change, and what to leave alone. Only then will we feel free to order the new seeds, plants, and tools. Oh what fun!