Looking Back at the Season

As leaves fall from trees and plants are tucked in for their winterôs nap, it is time to reflect on the growing season. Jotting down some notes now ï what worked and what didnôt ï will guide you to a beautiful and bountiful landscape next year.

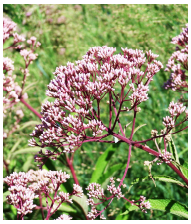
Annuals

List your favorites so you will remember them next spring. Plants that presented flawless foliage all summer long or bloomed in the perfect shade of pink deserve a repeat performance. On the other hand, donôt relive missteps. Annuals that required continual deadheading or vigorous plants that assaulted their container companions shouldnôt get a second chance.

Make notes about the overall look of your annual plantings and containers. Consider plant characteristics like height, width, texture and color. Container gardens that were simply satisfactory can be spectacular next summer with a few well-planned tweaks.

Incidences of disease or insect infestations are important to log. Impatiens (walleriana types) leveled by downy mildew should not be planted in the same place, if at all. Next season, you may decide to try SunPatiens or New Guinea impatiens ï both immune to downy mildew.

Perennials



Try to recall any plants that didnôt perform as expected. If some late-blooming perennials grew too tall, make a note to cut these back in spring. It will delay their flowering but keep them more compact. Examples include perennial mums, asters and Joe-pye weed.

Decide now what to do with plants growing too aggressively. If they are merely growing too large for their allotted space in your landscape, you could divide them to share with friends. But pass sentence on garden thugs and make plans to remove them from your garden.

Determine why plants that once bloomed beautifully failed to put on their seasonal show. If encroaching shade from maturing trees or shrubs is reducing their sun exposure, you can prune the tree or move the perennials and replace them with more shade-tolerant plants. Or they may simply need division. Dividing perennials keeps them growing vigorously and blooming generously.

Resolve the garden chaos caused by flowers that didnôt bloom the shade you expected. Choose now who will have to relinquish their position for the sake of garden harmony so you are ready for the move in spring.

If your garden wasnôt home to lots of butterflies, spend time in the winter researching plants that provide food for caterpillars and nectar for adults. Some larval sources include parsley, dill and fennel; bee balm, black-eyed Susan and coneflowers are just a few nectar sources. Select your favorites from an abundance of choices.

Vegetables

Make a quick sketch of the garden if you donôt already have one. Note the location of each vegetable so you will remember to rotate crops. Crop rotation manages soil fertility and reduces the chances of diseases and insects.

List each type of vegetable grown with anecdotes about best tasting and most productive varieties. It is also important to note which plants didnôt grow as expected. If you found a favorite recipe or new way to prepare your harvest, write this down too.

Note the type and timing of any disease or insect problems so you can be on the lookout next year. It is easier to cope with these occurrences if they are caught early. Insect eggs scraped off the undersides of leaves may eliminate the need for an insecticide.

We have all learned lessons the hard way: the inexpensive, but flimsy cages your tomatoes demolished as they grew; or the shade cast on your peppers by the sweet corn planted on their west side. Record these mistakes so you donôt repeat them.

Once youôve completed your season summary, you are ready to spend the winter seeking information and inspiration. There are a number of resources. Gardening books and magazines, seed and plant catalogs, and your local garden centerôs website are just a few.

Planning next seasonôs containers, designing additions to the perennial border, and dreaming of new vegetable varieties keep gardeners ógardeningôall winter long.

Diana Stoll is a horticulturist and the garden center manager at The Planter's Palette, 28W571 Roosevelt Rd., Winfield, IL 60190. Call 630-293-1040 ext. 2 or visit their website at www.planterspalette.com.