

# Garden journal best tool for planning, musing, and keeping it all straight

## GARDEN MIND

By Rebecca Hart

Hothouse's *A Gardener's Journal* was my first garden journal, a lovely thing with color photographs on one side and opposite un-numbered, lined pages at the top.

I believe I had the journal for some time before I cracked it and began to use it in a serious manner; my first entries were in 2000, then not again (for those early weeks in January) until 2005. Yes: two different years and two gardens.

By week three I was doing better, with two entries from 2001, one from 2004, one from 2005, and again in 2008. (I don't make entries much when I am busy, evidence shows.)

If I'm anything but consistent, so is the weather, but at least I have a record to share with you; these are some entries for week three:

Jan. 17, 2001: Very mild out. Cleaned up roses. Cut out blackberries. Pulled grasses, first cleanup in three years (a rental property)? Pulled and cleaned up Montbretias; will have corms to transplant.

Jan. 18, 2001: Edged around trees planted in the fall, by double gate; now planning rest of adjacent garden.

Jan. 17, 2004: Put up "new" electric fence to keep llamas from hedgerow. Put up panels to keep llamas away. Poor pines! Dug and potted six native elderberries (*Sambucus canadensis*) to plant out in hedgerow.

Jan. 15, 2005: Cold. Pair of eagles frequenting area, like to cry and play overhead; good sign.

Jan. 18, 2005: Sixty degrees. Very lovely. Even fog is romantic, atmospheric.

Jan. 15, 2008: Cold out. Enough breeze to stir chimes. Below 32 degrees. Lots of wind and rain last night, again. Did a little clean-up, but waiting for weather to turn. (Okay: when?) But the

**"Gardening is a fine art – you need a painter's eye for color and composition, and architect's sense of proportion and symmetry, and a sculptor's feel for manipulating form and texture in three dimensions... I make a record of good things and bad, of brilliant innovative ideas and those which haven't come off because the style, scale or use of plants is wrong."**

*Penelope Hobhouse, A Gardener's Journal: The Art and Practice of Gardening (Frances Lincoln London / Willow Creek USA, 1997)*

Hellebores are getting ready to pop, and tiny roses and hydrangeas have hard swellings. Too wet to mow.

Jan. 29, 2005: White camellia, in pot on deck, blooming. Three white currant (*Ribes sanguineum 'Alba'*), now seven feet tall, just showing buds. Very nice

out, balmy. Weeded some along Himalayan birch bed. Need to lime and feed slow release fertilizer and put down a good layer of mulch. (Clean stalls.)

So, you see what good a garden journal is? Where else would you have this vital information at a moment's reach?

We are near a new year, and now is a grand time to reconsider how and why we garden. For me, a garden journal is one of my few essential tools; it provides a record of the details, large and small.

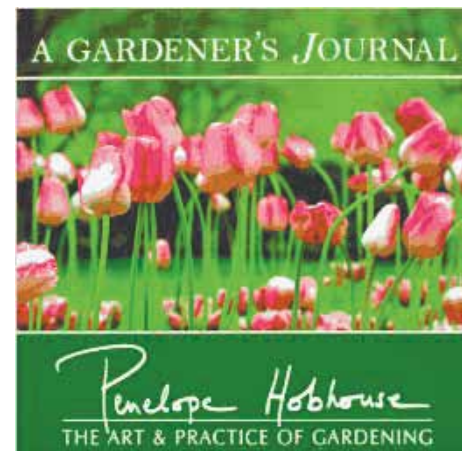
Yes, it's a tool that mostly only goes to the edge of the garden, if outdoors at all, but it's an essential tool for creating of that special place where we muse and weigh the possibilities.

Next month, January, is when the seed companies send out seed catalogs. Halleluia! In advance of this bounty, when our imaginary gardens take early root, I'm recommending two books for your shelf, while there is still time to read.

These will help you to parse some of the new science behind contemporary gardens: compost, biochar, the complex role of mycelium.

I'm not generally prone to hyperbole, but these two books (see footnotes) changed the way I garden. They will enrich your comprehension about what role the garden plays in your life and the life of the planet.

Have a good month. Be sure to disconnect (and drain) all the hoses and irrigation systems. Make sure your ceramic planters, bowls and basins are safe from freezing (they will be ruined



if they split and crack from frost). And be sure to provide fresh water for the wild things that pass through your garden spaces.

## Good reads for gardeners

*Gardening at the Dragon's Gate*, by Wendy Johnson (Bantam/Dell/Random House, 2008) will give you a fresh perspective on organic vegetable gardening. Johnson works closely with Alice Waters, the early Slow Food proponent.

*Teaming with Microbes: A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web*, by Jeff Lowenfels, Wayne Lewis (Timber Press, 2006), got me to stop using fertilizers with nitrogen concentration over 7 percent; you'll have to read it yourself to see why. (I am a former "triple 16" user.)

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