

TAKE ONLY MEMORIES; LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS

By Maritta Perry Grau, Frederick County Master Gardener, July 2023

Bees aren't the only ones "buzzing" in our gardens this summer. Lots of new buzz words (jargon that is quickly mainstreamed) are flying around. One of the most popular words is that of "sustainable" gardening. The term has come to evoke the way we utilize environmentally friendly practices when attending to our gardens and landscapes.

We certainly aren't the first to emphasize the importance of ecological practices. According to Wikipedia, Chief Seattle, a nineteenth-century leader of the Pacific Northwest native American tribe, the Duwamish, speaking about people's explorations of his native lands, is often credited with having said, "Take only memories and leave only footprints." In many ways, that statement applies to the concept of the sustainable garden—that we garden in such a way that we do no harm to the land and that we work with locally available materials and resources.

The American Horticultural Society (<ahsgardening.org>) says that "Sustainable gardening combines organic gardening practices with resource conservation." This kind of garden tries to make as little negative impact on the earth as possible and focuses on working with nature where possible.

The University of Maryland Extension Service ([Sustainable Gardening: Solutions to Climate Change | University of Maryland Extension \(umd.edu\)](#)) further explains that "Sustainable gardening and landscaping techniques can slow future warming by reducing carbon emissions and increasing carbon storage in soil and plants. In addition, you can adapt your gardens and green spaces and make them more resilient to climate change by adding native plant diversity, improving soil health, growing heat-tolerant vegetable crops, and using stormwater management practices. We call this **climate-resilient gardening**." The UMD website adds that we may grow the same vegetables from year to year "by relying on locally available materials and resources, practicing the 4Rs (**reduce, re-use, recycle, rethink**), and minimizing negative environmental impacts." I wonder if anyone ever thinks of Chief Seattle's admonition as they go about their gardening.

Another aspect of the sustainable garden is saving seeds for use the following year, just as our grandparents and other ancestors did for generations. In March, Middletown Library began a "seed library." A local master gardener donated seed packets for participants to plant. In turn, participants will save seeds from those plants and create more packets of seeds for the library to pass on next year.

In fact, you may already be practicing some principles of sustainable gardening without realizing it. When you plant trees, shrubs, vegetables, flowers—all of these are really "green activities." As you think about the "grow" properties of your plants and begin work for those early fall plantings of winter vegetables and next spring's plants, you may browse catalogs and websites. When you plot what your gardens will look like next year and how new plants will fit in with what you already have, remember to take into account how they will adapt to and what impact they will have on your particular plant environment and what size the mature specimens will be—Again, an aspect of "sustainable gardening"—adapting to the environment and growing a greener future.

According to the American Horticultural Society, sustainable gardening considers the future in current plans, takes the ecosystem into consideration, tries to be careful about how that planting and gardening affects the soil in that area, and takes into account the characteristics of the land—pH levels, viscosity of the soil, sun, shade—as well as determining what kind of plants to put where (think native plants).

You will have to decide for yourself just which principles you want to adapt to make your garden sustainable.



Zinnias & Sunflowers: The yellow sunflowers (*Helianthus spp.*) on left and zinnias (*Zinnia elegans*) in varied shades of pink in 2022, both native plants were grown from seeds gathered the year before. They often attract many pollinators, including bees and butterflies. (Photo courtesy of the author)

Monarda: Bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*), is a native plant that belongs to the Lamiaceae or mint family. Although it is not invasive in most areas, it does spread rather quickly by rhizomes; it attracts hummingbirds, as well as a variety of bees, and has long been used medicinally by Native Americans. (Photo courtesy of the author)



Coneflower & Bee: Native coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea*) attract both bees and birds. In the fall, yellow finches especially like to feast on their seedheads. (Photo courtesy of the author)

For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, gardening information and advice visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick

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