



garden spot

Dishing the dirt: Learn from errors



MARTY FIGLEY

Do you believe that all gardens are planned, planted and maintained without one thing going wrong? Let me tell you, they aren't!

Those beautiful gardens are the result of much hard work, trial and error and sometimes a little bit of luck. Even the most impressive "spreads" have had times when things just didn't work out. The best gardeners are always learning.

Let me share some good advice from a book written by my friend, Pat Stone, of North Carolina. He is editor and publisher of GreenPrints, to which many of you may subscribe. Perhaps you'll get a chuckle or two and learn some good gardening tips along the way.

Pat's new book, "Real Gardeners' True Confessions" (Storey, \$12.95, paper), has a purpose: "To make you

feel a little less foolish and garden a good bit more successfully by helping you avoid all of the most common home gardening faux pas."

He shares his own gardening errors along with those made by 46 other gardeners. The old axiom, "Do as I say, not as I did," could apply.

Here are a few examples: One person left weeds right in the garden for mulch, and because it rained soon after, the plants left in the garden began to grow again. Another fertilized container-grown plants when they were dry without watering them first; as a result, the leaves turned black and fell off (although they finally recovered).

Or, a mistake common to almost every house in the country – the fact that the one bib for water is at the opposite part of the house where you'll want the garden to be located. This is a tip for new home builders to remember.

A California friend confesses she planted a short crop on the north side of the garden and the taller ones on the

south (it's better to reverse the order). And one more: One person planted trees underneath a power line and they were fine, until the power company came to clear the right-of-way.

Each chapter is devoted to a particular subject and is filled with excellent information for beginners as well as experienced gardeners. Pat begins the book with the chapter "Site With Foresight," reminding readers about proper location, keeping in mind sun and shade, water sources, type of soil, drainage and more.

Other chapters advise: Don't start too big or too early in the season, ask questions of other local gardeners, make a plan and keep records. Buy the best tool and use the proper one for each job (he shows how) and how to care for them. Plant seeds at the proper depth and label them, watering techniques, hold the plant by the root ball (or leaves if necessary) but never by the stem.

In the chapter devoted to weeding, his advice is to "get 'em while they're

small." Also, be diligent about weeding, and mulch.

Pat's humor comes through loud and clear as he leads the reader through the trials and errors of gardening.

For example, he begins Chapter 12 – "Feeling Bugged? Pest Control" – as follows: "If you grow it, they will come. Yes, they will. Sooner or later (probably sooner), when you start a garden, you'll have to deal with invasive pests. You'll be bugged by bugs."

His personal treatment is organic pest control and he explains why, especially in home gardens. Some advice: Know the insect, grow resistant varieties, rotate crops, use integrated pest management. His advice about pests and diseases is just as thorough.

Pruning, composting, winter protection, staking, soil nutrients, transplanting, sowing seeds and much more good "stuff" is included. The black and white line drawings are very helpful; clever

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