



Keeping a Garden Journal

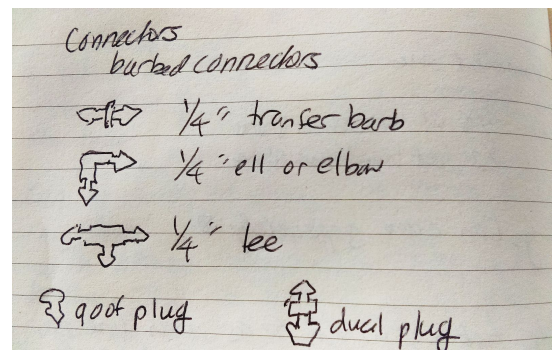
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While not as historically interesting as [Samuel Pepy's](#) diary or as deliciously literary as [Anais Nin's](#) dairy, my garden diary serves as a source of information, comfort and catharsis that cannot be provided in any other way. Sure, the books and websites and planting have all sorts of information, but it will not tell you about your own garden. This is especially true in Alameda County, the Land of Many [Microclimates](#).

A Personal Source of Information

In terms of information, I love to go to talks about gardening, and take copious notes in my garden book. Those notes later get annotated and serve as a reference. For example, I have a hand drawn diagram of connectors. There are notes about heritage fruit trees, how to prune fruit trees, price lists at several local nurseries, and contact information for various resources.

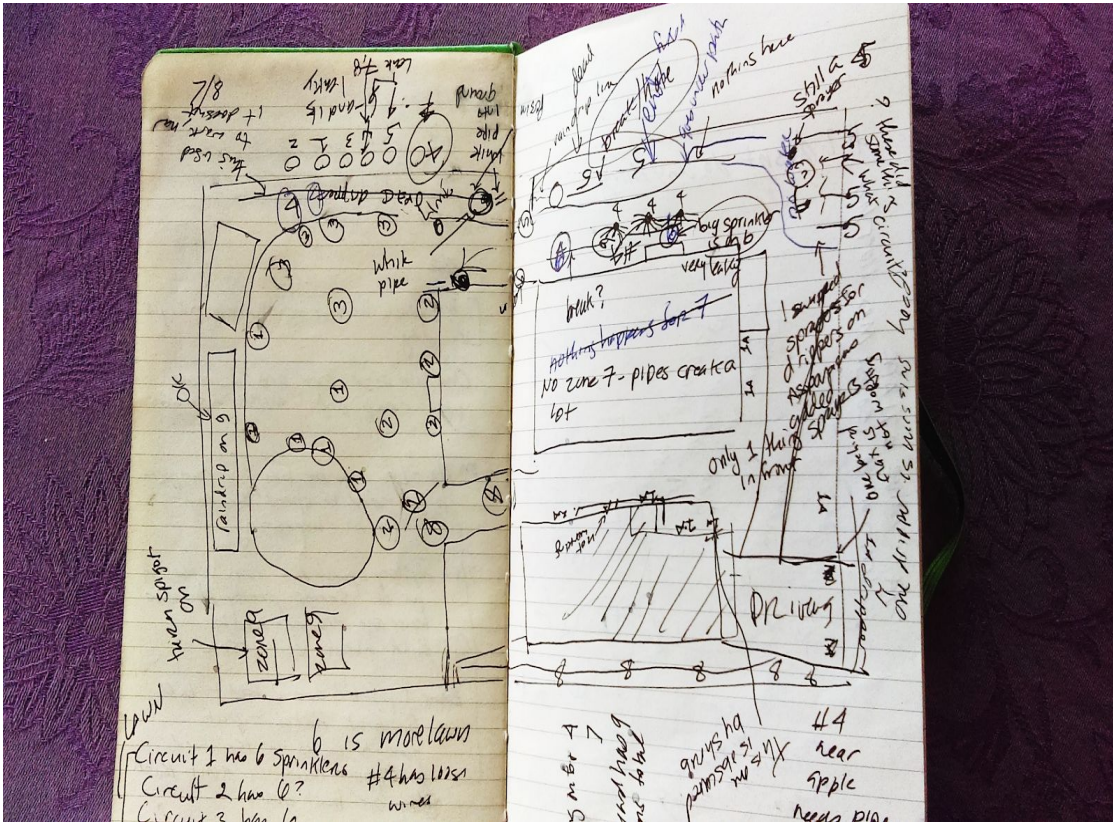


Being a thrifty person who has to pay a water elevation surcharge, I could choose to let my yard look like a wasteland or make it work for me. I have planted 11 fruit trees and am turning the lawn into a victory garden. This mitigates the bimonthly horror that the water district sends me. In order to make sure I'm not throwing more money into the ground than I am getting out, I keep track of how much each thing costs and attempt to record harvests with notes on grocery store prices for comparison.



Another point of information about recording harvests is to know what works. I didn't need 27 tomato plants, especially if they are not sauce tomatoes. (I need more peas. Lots more peas. I can't get enough peas.)

Also, I can't really plant lupines because I get two waves of caterpillars and, although the spring wave gets devoured by nesting birds, no one was nesting during the fall wave that destroyed the expensive plant in 2016 and the other expensive plant in 2017. Lesson learned.



The garden had a complex irrigation system when I moved in and it needs monitoring and repair, so I chart it regularly and run diagnostics to save water. The chart guides me in my repair efforts, as well as shopping trips. I don't need to buy a kit with all the Things for 14 dollars. I might just need two connectors that I already have or two connectors for a buck each.

A Personal Source of Comfort and Reassurance

In terms of comfort and reassurance, sometimes plants can be baffling and confusing. Having obscure varieties of plants can defy the literature. If your [Golden Dorsett](#) produces a sudden burst of bloom, you may wonder what's up. If you've been journaling, flip the pages back to last year and check. For example, on March 7th, I was wondering about my apricot tree. I went out and gave it a good hard **stare**, because, you know, staring really moves things along, right? There were tiny little pre-almost-buds popping on some of the branches. I opened the garden diary and the March 8th entry for 2018 says "apricot tree just started to flower". Also, not all the books are going to describe your situation. What if you have a foggy microclimate in Berkeley with a northern garden? The books will not really help you with your [mildewy roses](#) or tip you off about how well [cilantro](#) can do.

A Place to Vent

Recording the various garden pests and delights who come by can be cathartic. I have a lot of notes about "CEDAR WAXWINGS POOPING EVERYWHERE!" and "SQUIRRELS... AGAIN", followed by a barrage of festive exclamations. I do love the [cedar waxwings](#), despite their distribution of seeds all over the back yard. It also helps when I see that scene from Hitchcock's movie, "The Birds", every March that I know what the birds are and that they are on schedule. Noting the weather has been useful, too. It will, perhaps be of historical interest, that I have commentary on the wildfire air quality conditions in 2018 and the atmospheric rivers of 2019, albeit unscientifically noted.

Garden Journaling Tips

- **You can use a book, your social media feeds, or even your cell phone camera to record what's going on in the garden.** I do not recommend loose pieces of paper or a big mix of media. That's hard to refer back to and things can get lost.
- **Note the dates on everything.** Gardening is all about seasons.
- **Keep it handy and in the same place.** If you have to hunt for it every time, it's easy to forget to take advantage of it. I keep mine in the left drawer of my desk, write entries in it and pop it right back in.
- **Figure out a way to categorize topics so you can look it up later.** For example, I write "TREES" in capital letters in a box when I add notes about my fruit trees and "CEDAR WAXWINGS" for the annual running of the seed poopers in March. With an electronic diary, you can put things in folders or use hash tags to index entries. If you are using Facebook, you could put something at the beginning of the post in all caps or include a photo, so you can spot it when you are scrolling through old posts.
- **You don't have to record everything.** If you are not interested in how much you spent on plants or accessories, don't worry about it. My obsession with cedar waxwings might not be your thing, so don't take my example as law.
- **Make casual maps of your garden, shopping lists and even inventories of your tools.** Take it with you (if you can!) when you go garden shopping.

There's plenty more to say, but I need to go out into the garden and find more things to write about. Happy journaling!

Elaine