



BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS

enhancing life with plants

12 Lessons Learned

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After many years of several types of gardening in many different locations, I have developed the following list of lessons I have learned that may be used to establish, preserve, or maintain a healthy and sustainable ecosystem:

1. Work with what you have - versus trying to impose your wants on your landscape. If you have sun, plant sun loving plants; if you have poor drainage, plant species that like wet feet from time-to-time.
2. Take your cues from nature; it knows how to do it best. Use native plants; they already know what to do!
3. Develop an intimate relationship with your landscape over time. Study factors such as its light, moisture, and air flow.
4. Think of your property as a stepping-stone, or corridor for wildlife – and thus provide safe passage.
5. Plant a variety of plant species and group several of each species together. Many plants are reputed to repel certain pests and pathogens and larger clumps attract beneficial insects more effectively.
6. Learn which plants are hosts to desired insects and animals, and then plant them in groupings of several plants.
7. Always include a source of water, whether it is a bird bath, a pond, or a rock with an indentation that holds water.
8. Avoid dedicating large areas to plants that require significant use of chemicals and/or fertilizers, such as lawns. Keep in mind that monocultures (an entire area with a single plant species) are host to a reduced variety of beneficial organisms.
9. Avoid extensive use of synthetic fertilizers and significantly limit, or even consider ceasing, the use of chemically based herbicides and pesticides.
10. Remember that many of the most beneficial organisms are microscopic, so maintain healthy soil.
11. Compost, compost, compost! I believe that making and applying your own compost is the single best thing you can do for your landscape. Its benefits are countless.
12. Be a lifelong learner and take advantage of the countless sources of information...online, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, public gardens, libraries, Master Gardeners and other plant groups.