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New Year's Resolutions

The list of resolutions made each New Year is probably longer than I could imagine. The list of resolutions kept on an annual basis? Maybe not quite so long. To help make that 'kept' list a little longer this year, here are a few gardening resolutions you might want to think about.

One: add organic matter to the garden. Many of our gardens are well fertilized, yet they still don't grow great crops. The reason could be attributed to soils. Tillage when it's too wet, or a shallow topsoil sitting atop heavy clay can both negate all the good fertility in the world because water and air can't penetrate adequately into the soil profile. That results in the inability of soils to use water efficiently for plant growth. To help, consider the addition of compost or implementation of a cover crop to add organic matter the garden area. Even the simple addition of a layer of leaves (just don't get them too thick) can help when they are tilled in during the fall.

Two: consider trying a 'new' vegetable crop. It doesn't matter whether it's a new to you crop or just a new variety, try adding something new to the garden mix this year. Two of our most popular K-State publications have recently been updated to help you navigate the challenges associated with trying a new crop. The *Vegetable Garden Planting Guide* is a great resource for confirming when you should plant, while providing information on everything from days to germination to frost resistance. Don't even know where to start with varieties? Check our *Recommended Vegetable Varieties* for a list of varieties recommended for Kansas.

Three: exercise. Health related resolutions are often some of the most popular ones made by folks to start the new year. Did you know that gardening can actually help you keep those health related resolutions? For example: don't think that carrying buckets of water (or at harvest, buckets of vegetables) or pulling weeds constitutes work? Even a gallon sprinkler can be the same as an eight-pound weight. Can't get your kids to eat their fruits and veggies? Try them fresh out of the garden – that might make them see peas or strawberries differently. Enhanced hand-eye coordination, reconnecting with nature, increased range of motion activities, and the chance to challenge your brain power as you work on everything from garden layout to how to keep squash bugs at bay are all great activities that help both physical and mental health.

Fortunately, not keeping these resolutions doesn't come with a huge penalty. No added organic matter doesn't mean you won't have a garden, but increasing organic matter might just help you increase production. They don't have to be done perfectly to work, either. Don't like the new tomato variety you tried? Rest assured someone else will. Need some help to get started? Check out one of the two publications listed above or many others available from your District Extension Office and make a New Year's resolution you'll enjoy keeping.