

Gardening article for spring magazine 2016
Kitty Barr, Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Saving Gardening Money the Old Fashioned Way

You are a gardener, or maybe you have just a teeny bit of OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) if you have to restrain yourself from weeding as you approach a friend's door. If work buddies are planning a golf game or a trip to see the Braves, and you are fighting the urge to work in your yard, thinking "Gee, this weekend's supposed to be sunny and mild and I really enjoy cutting grass"; give in to your natural instincts and stay home. Although a day out with friends is great fun, puttering at home in a new herb bed is more enjoyable for the full blooded gardener.

Gardening, just like walking the dog, is good mental therapy. There's no cheaper way to work out a problem than to mull it over while doing something you enjoy be it baking, polishing silver, pushing a mower. A psychiatrist's bill would cause more stress than the issue you're thinking about!

A couple of inexpensive tools can get you started on a healthy hobby while enhancing your property's worth. Next birthday, wish for a pair of good hand pruners, the by-pass type, and a pair of loppers for larger branches. Pruners are handy for every small job. In autumn when plants turn brown, prune and take to your compost pile all the dead material. Neaten up the beds with your handy dandy pruners in preparation for bulbs' spring appearance and new bedding plants.

After discarding a dozen pruners over the years (easily a dozen, maybe more), I now tie a bright iridescent orange or pink plastic strip to the handles so I can find them at the bottom of a clipping pile. Having them in hand constantly for so many years, I was so used to the feel of them that I would gather a huge bundle of branches and cast my pruners, along with whatever I was discarding into the growing pile at the curb. Fifteen minutes later I'd be searching fruitlessly for them. Hence the bright 6" strip of tape which you can find at the big box stores. I like a trailing strip rather than merely wrapping bright duct tape on the handles. The strip usually floats above the lost item, trailing through branches and grass clippings. After spending \$8 to \$15 - prices have risen over the hundred years I've been at this hobby - I figure I've saved a bunch on money not spent. This is not foolproof, because the fool writing this has just misplaced a good pair yet again.

The spring season rapidly approaching is not the best time to buy plants. They are priced dearly and our hot summers will send a wad of your money to the local water department as you attempt to keep your investment from dying. Nevertheless it's impossible to keep a die-hard gardener away from the tempting displays. My car veers uncontrollably into the big box parking lots and out I leap, ready to pay untold amounts for trunk loads of the prettiest perennials you've ever seen. I do try to stick with perennials because they return next spring whereas annuals will die over the winter.

Read The Labels. I preach this, boringly, over and over. Reading these have given me useful information about the plant in question such as whether it is an annual, how big the specimen will grow at maturation, whether it thrives in full sun, part-sun, or prefers total shade. Recently, (I'm writing this in the dead of winter), I was asked why a camellia wasn't in bloom. Discovering it had been struggling in total shade for over a decade, I suggested they buy a new bush and find it a very sunny home with late afternoon shade. Trying to move an 8 foot tall shrub would probably kill it, and the owner.

Labels are not included just to add to your recycling bin. They impart valuable facts. This little nugget of gold will save you hundreds of dollars by preventing you from placing an expensive purchase where it will be unhappy. Expensive to me is any amount I spend. And ...if the shrub's not happy, then I'm not happy.

Occasionally, I accidentally get a new plant with whiz bang attributes. Last year at the end of season sales I purchased a small ferny -like specimen called Green-Leaved Euryops, technically *Euryops pectinatus* 'Viridis'. The label, one of those fancy fold over kinds with a color photograph, said it was deer resistant and evergreen. Only later when I noticed it had continuously covered itself for months in yellow daisy sized blooms did I dig out the label (I confess to the OCD ailment; I keep one of each label in a zip lock bag) and read that it blooms year round and will reach 6 feet tall. Golly gee, if I had only bought more! I might order more online, although no vendor will beat the \$1 sale price I triumphantly paid last fall. I might move it to a roomier spot before it gets too settled into its home.

Besides getting quality gardening tools and buying plants suitable for your yard, the third recommendation I have for long time savings is the pass-along plant. I heard this term one Saturday many years ago at a small selective nursery near Athens, GA. The term has nothing to do with UGA but it certainly educated me!

I thought the nearby customer was naming a plant. Hmm, "passalong"; that's a new one for sure, I thought, as I peered to see which one she meant. Only later did I learn it refers to plants that dedicated gardeners pass along to others when bulbs become over crowded, beds are spilling over with babies or there's just too much of a good thing. Your garden can become filled with sweet memories when you have plants given by good friends and relatives long gone. I have moved these to new gardens in new cities; not willing to leave them behind.

Treasured pass-alongs I possess include the bear claw Lenten Rose, candy tuft, phlox, Mexican petunia, pineapple lily, gladiola, white bearded iris, purple shamrock and the white variety also. The fabulous ground cover pachysandra has been a smashing success. Variegated liriopse, which makes a bigger green and white striped clump and won't spread as the plain green variety will, is a very recent gift from a friend who said "Take it all, I have a new plan." Well, I too have a plan for it all along a path.

Gardening takes some patience and creativity. I had been mulling for months what would best suit that walkway. Having made impulsive choices in the past, only to have to dig it

all out, I was taking my time. Allium is the bad choice which leaps to mind. The generous pachysandra owner also invited us to take a little of his charming white and green leaved creeping vine. Holy Moly, I had a creeping explosion: under, over and around a huge bedding area maybe 6 feet by 25 feet. I don't think I ever conquered it. Those soft vines wove a web about 8 inches deep under every other plant. Now that we have smart phones, do a little research before accepting every gift. Politely murmuring, "I don't think I have a spot for that one," can save your back and your good humor.