



**What Kind of Gardener are You**  
**Marg Hundt**  
**Peterborough and Area Master Gardeners**

Over the years, I've noticed that there are a few different types of gardeners. First there is the "neat gardener" with the tidy boxwood hedges and the meticulously groomed lawns, or there is the "free form gardener: who likes to just let her plants grow as they will (a bit messy at times) Then comes the collector – someone who grows many kinds of the same plant family eg. daylilies, roses or geraniums. Perhaps you are a vegetable gardener or a container gardener. Our personalities and life styles are reflected in the type of garden we have. Sometimes our conditions and space also dictate what and how we grow.

Let's take a closer look at these. If you are the "neat freak" and must remove all plant material at the end of the season, or if you must rake all the leaves off your garden in the spring time, consider these ideas. Leave some plant material at the end of the season that allows for an interesting winter scape. It helps to keep the snow from blowing away and the many seeds that are left will feed the birds in the winter and provide material for nesting in the spring. Leaving the leaves will help to protect your plants in the spring and keep them safe from the "freeze – thaw" problem and, they will turn into compost. Think about the woods where the leaves are never raked and the soil is very rich! Let nature do the work!

Now, how about the messy gardener – sorry "free form" gardener - the two are not really the same. This is a choice and many people love this way of gardening. As long as you are vigilant and allow enough space between the plants for the air to flow, you will not have a problem. You must also be sure to remove dead material as soon as you see it (it isn't going to come alive again, so get rid of it). When one plant has passed its prime, another one is just budding. This casual but cared for look allows enough room for the air to move and you to work between the plants and it prevents disease from entering your garden. Choked gardens retain a lot of moisture and molds can develop.

The collector is someone who is very passionate about a certain type of plants. One concern is that if you get a disease in a particular plant then your whole garden could be wiped out very quickly. The other consideration is that Mother Nature always holds the

“trump card” for example, if you have plants that need plenty of water and it is a dry, hot summer, you will have a poor showing that year.

Perhaps you are a vegetable gardener. Who says you can't plant flowers with the vegetables? Marigolds will help keep those pesky bugs away from your vegetables. These and other strongly scented plants, like basil, really work because they confuse the pests that are looking for a meal. These combinations can produce wild colours and interest in your garden. Follow a simple rule for choosing a companion plant: pick one parsley family member like parsley, dill or coriander and one aster family member like marigold, daisies and sunflowers to match up with each of your vegetable groups and there you are – a garden neighbourhood. These flowers attract bees and beneficial insects to pollinate your vegetables. A cluster of pretty perennials near or right beside your vegetable garden is a “good-bug hideaway” and they can retreat after the hunt. Garlic is known as a friend and repels pests by its odoriferous presence. Try planting it with carrots, onions beets and oh yes with your roses!

Container gardeners don't just have to be people with small spaces or balconies. Plant many containers with herbs, perennials, salad greens, tomatoes and of course your favorite annuals. If something in your garden doesn't do well in a particular year, just move that wonderful container into that space and your garden will be full again.

“Good bugs” – beneficial insects are needed to stand by at all times – ready when pest protection is needed – so we have to feed them and when they aren't eating pests, they eat pollen, so that is why friendly plants are so important.

Leave some weeds. Learn which weeds or wildflowers provide habitat for natural predators and leave a few of them. Some, compete too well for nutrients, harbor pests or diseases or aggressively take over so learn to identify weeds like Queen-Anne's lace and Goldenrod that are safe to leave in place.

Enjoy your garden, whatever your style because all are wonderful. Be aware of the pros and cons of each style and follow a few simple tricks and you will have the most successful garden on your block. Happy gardening!

*Previously published in the Peterborough Examiner*