



GET OUT YOUR GARDEN GLOVES

GARDEN COACHES BRING ADVICE AND IDEAS TO THE HANDS-ON NOVICE

Written By Robyn Roehm Cannon

As the economy swirls around us, the best place to take refuge this year may just be the garden. Ironically, with jobs downsized and many of us finding our professional status rapidly changing, we may have more time on our hands but now need to take a second look at how to best spend—and stretch—our resources.

All of this speaks to the fact that instead of hiring landscape architects, garden designers, and installation contractors as we might have done in the past, there's renewed enthusiasm for pulling on our Wellies and coveralls to plot, plant, and weed our own gardens.

"But wait," you might be saying about now. "Just where do I start? How do I go about pruning that hydrangea? What about fertilizer and when is that applied? Which perennials will give me the showiest flowers with the least amount of care?" I can hear you out there, and I feel your anxiety.

An interesting byproduct of our broken economy is the advent of new niche professions, and one of the most valuable to the novice gardener is the garden coach. All across the country, master gardeners, landscape planners, and others with a rich background in garden design and the principles of garden care are realizing that from the ashes of economic despair rises a golden opportunity to take all that valuable knowledge and disperse it to the do-it-yourselfer for a fee. Consult and you can build and maintain beautiful gardens: Just do as your coach instructs you.

A garden coach may bring you ideas on everything from how to start a garden at a new residence to how to adjust to the gardening climate if you've moved from, say, Minnesota (zone 4) to Phoenix (zone 10) and don't have the slightest idea that your beloved hostas will not survive the summer as they did in your former garden—you'll do better with succulents.

Garden coaches can analyze your soil; identify plants; and suggest which to keep, which to move, and which to give up on and throw in the compost bin. If you're unsure of which tasks to perform each month, a garden coach can develop a personally tailored to-do list that will keep you on track.

Organic gardening, from pesticide-free care practices to raising your own organic vegetables, is a focus of many garden coaches, who can shed light on how to do both. If you're concerned about water usage and reducing your carbon footprint, you can be coached in how to plan a beautiful sustainable garden with native plants and catch rainwater to recycle into your planting beds.

Cameron Scott and his crew at Exteriorscapes in Seattle are a good example of a group that has been at it in the field for nearly fifteen years. Their gardens have won numerous awards at the Northwest Flower & Garden Show and their team is available to build you a beautiful garden from scratch or coach you step-by-step in how to create one yourself.

"We work with clients at all levels," says Scott, "from introducing them to the joys of gardening to providing detailed instruction and training on how to install and renovate whole properties."

An excellent place to start looking for one of these consultants is the Worldwide Directory of Garden Coaches, which can be found online at www.sustainable-gardening.com.

Susan Harris is a Master Gardener, gardening coach, garden writer, and "activist for urban and suburban greening" from Maryland who has compiled this helpful resource, which lists coaches in the United States, Canada, and parts of the United Kingdom.

The reasons for hiring a garden coach are as many as there are varieties of roses, but the bottom line is that there is help out there. In every community, someone's just waiting to cheerlead your successes and make sure you accomplish your gardening goals without suffering the frustration of trial and error.

With all the outsourcing we've practiced in our lives these past few years, there's something refreshing and exciting about tackling our own gardens with a little help.

Or, to put it in the words of British author John Beverley Nichols, "To dig one's own spade into one's own earth! Has life anything better to offer than this?" ■