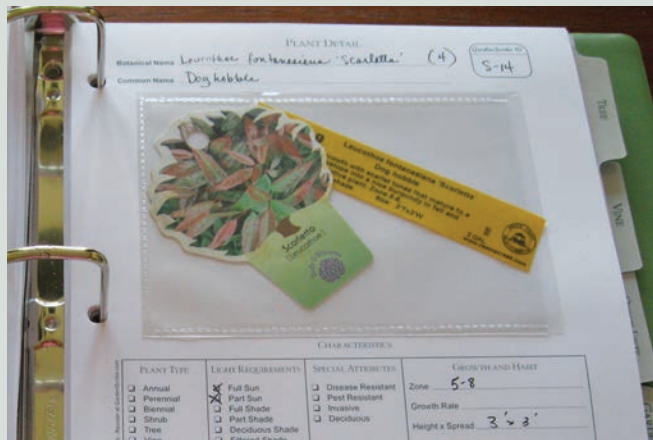


GREEN GARAGE® by Rita Pelczar

With so many tools and products to choose from, what's a gardener to do to select those that will make indoor and outdoor chores easier, safer, and more efficient? How about getting the scoop from another gardener? Contributing editor Rita Pelczar reports on products she has found useful or innovative in her garden, with an emphasis on earth-friendly products and supplies. Here are a few products you may want to stock in your own "green garage" or garden shed.

KEEPING TRACK OF YOUR GARDENS

Keeping better garden records was among my 2011 New Year's resolutions. I've learned the hard way that trusting my memory with the details of planting dates, cultivar names, plant sources, and fertilizer application dates is a big mistake. My habit heretofore has been to jot such information on a handy scrap of paper slipped into a pocket, which I usually remember after it has gone through the wash. Or I scribble notes on old seed packs that I stash along with plant labels in an empty flowerpot for later retrieval. These techniques are better than no records at all, but not by much.



Fortunately a few new products are helping me document my gardening efforts in a more orderly manner. The **GardenScribe Plant Organizer** (www.gardenscribe.com) is a three-ring binder with a mission. Each "plant detail page" includes spaces for botanical and common names, date planted, location, and source. Boxes can be marked to indicate plant characteristics and requirements, and space is provided for notes on maintenance, fertilization, pests, and diseases.

I find the four-by-six-inch photo sleeve into which you can slip a photo or a label, tag, or seed package particularly nifty. If I don't have time to record all the pertinent information while I'm working in the garden, I can slip the tag into the sleeve, jot down the date, and return to the page later to fill in the details. The GardenScribe also includes graph paper and a landscape design template tool, so you can develop garden designs or sketch your garden layouts.

The **Moleskine Gardening Journal** (www.moleskine.com) has a less detailed format than the GardenScribe, which will appeal to some gardeners. The compact journal is divided into five sections: plants; pots, tools, etc.; design; visits; and

garden log. Pages for each section suggest the kind of information you might want to record. Blank tabs and pages allow you to tailor the journal to meet your needs.



If you enjoy entering data into a computer after a day in the garden, you may prefer the **Garden Tracker** (www.gardentracker.com), a software system that helps you keep your records organized and accessible. You can also add photos and videos so you can observe your garden's progress over the years.

KEEPING TRACK OF RAINFALL

An accurate record of rainfall is important for determining when it's time to water. But I live in the mountains where rainfall varies widely within the area covered by my local paper and television stations. A rain gauge lets me know just how much rain falls in my garden.

The **Professional Rain Gauge** (www.windandweather.com) works in all kinds of weather and is the most accurate rain gauge I have used. It funnels rain into a central cylinder that measures the accumulation to the nearest 100th of an inch. The central cylinder only holds an inch of rain, so if your precipitation exceeds an inch at one time, the excess flows into the outer cylinder. To measure the total, simply empty the inch from the central cylinder, pour in the excess from the outer cylinder and add the amounts. In winter, use only the outer cylinder to collect freezing rain, snow, sleet, or hail and bring it indoors to melt. Then measure by pouring it into the central cylinder.

As with any rain gauge, mount it away from buildings and trees. Mine is anchored four feet high on a four-by-four-inch post, located, appropriately, in my rain garden.



A contributing editor for The American Gardener, Rita Pelczar lives in North Carolina. She is the editor-in-chief of the AHS's Homegrown Harvest (Mitchell Beazley/Octopus USA, 2010).