Make garden planning a priority during cold weather

Although the weather outside is chilly, gardening enthusiasts can make the most of this downtime by planning their spring and summer gardens.

As you look for plants to use in the landscape, the most important consideration in plant selection is to match the plant to your planting site. Take into account sun and wind exposure, soil type and nutrients, as well as soil moisture. All of these factors will influence the types of plants that will perform best at any given site.

Choosing plants adapted to the existing conditions will save gardeners time and money. Plants placed in a location that meets their needs usually grow well without a great deal of extra attention, while a poorly placed plant is more likely to be stressed and more vulnerable to pest problems. Poorly sited plants also are more likely to require replacement, which means gardeners will have to dig a little deeper in their pockets.

All plants have specific cultural needs, including the amount of sunlight required, moisture needs, drainage requirements and optimal soil pH. While some of these site characteristics can be altered, it’s best, and certainly easiest, to work with the existing conditions, as they are likely to recur over time.

For example, a tree canopy can be thinned to allow greater light penetration. However, the trees will re-grow and thinning will be required periodically over time. Another condition that is best worked with rather than altered, is soil pH. If you choose to alter soil pH, it’s more prudent to do that during bed preparation. Keep in mind, however, the site likely will require follow-up treatments. On the other hand, variation in pH in the landscape can provide opportunity to plant a larger assemblage of plant types.

Another important characteristic to consider is the USDA Hardiness Zone in which you live. The USDA Hardiness Zone Map is used to identify the average annual minimum temperature for your area. Plants are rated based on the lowest temperatures in which they can survive the winter. Most of Oklahoma falls within Hardiness Zones 6 and 7 with the southern part of McCurtain County falling into Zone 8. Check out the map at https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/.

So, while you’re snuggled under a blanket on the couch, it’s a great time to get a jump start on planning your spring garden. It won’t be long until you’re able to get out in the garden and get a little dirt under your nails.