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Joe Maple holds a mother of thousands plant at his home recently. Maple will be among the instructors for the Community Gardener 101 course that starts in February at Spartanburg Community College.

Garden prep

Use winter downtime to plan, learn more about plants

At the start of a new year, it is always a good time to sit down and take stock of what you are doing and where you are going.

Just as in life, sometimes it is good to map out a direction to take where the garden is concerned.

All the new plant and seed catalogs are making their way to your mailbox, so stack them up by your easy chair and wait for a cold, blustery day to plow through them. Remember to use some restraint. It is so easy to over order bunches of seed and plants. I know. Remind yourself that when these plants arrive, you must swing into action and start planting.

Make some notes as to what



Linda Cobb

Garden Cameos

you are going to do differently this year. Will you plant a new garden area? Or redo an existing garden bed with a new color scheme? Maybe it is time to try some of the heirloom tomatoes and grow them from seed. You decide. This is your garden space.

One thing is certain. We can always use more garden education. This winter the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club, along with its partner, Spartanburg Community College, is offering its Community Gardener 101 course. It is important to remember that you do not need to have any previous gardening experience to attend and complete this course. It is meant for you, the home gardener, the experts and the amateurs. One of the things the class will do is teach you how to read a seed catalog, and know how to select the plants that will grow well here.

Community Gardener 101 is an 11-week course that starts Feb. 7 and will continue until April 17. It

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meets once a week, from 6-8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, on the Spartanburg Community College campus, in the Tracey Gaines Building.

The fee for the class is \$155 and includes a one-year membership in the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club. To register, call 542-4406 or 877-592-4406. You can go online to register at www.GoneTo-Class.com, and then click on personal enrichment. Look for Community Gardener 101. The class size will be limited to 25 people.

The organizer of this course is local horticulture expert Joe Maple. Yes, just like the tree.

"People need to take this course to know about the environmental conditions that plants thrive in," he said. "My dad used to tell me to add lime to 'sweeten' the soil. He never knew why, though. In this class, we teach you why."

The course blends old standards with new science that leads to a fuller understanding. The course is being taught by the best teaching staff of any program in South Carolina.

Maple is busy selecting a textbook that he thinks gives you the very best information at the best price. Instructors include



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Joe Maple has special lights in his home so he can keep plants indoors during the colder months.

the SCC horticulture experts, Jason Bagwell, Kevin Parris and Jay Moore. In addition, Parris will lead a class through the campus to see pruning techniques. There is also a new propagation lab, where you will go into the greenhouse and learn.

There is no previous horticulture experience needed. You can show up as a blank slate and be ready to learn. This is an excellent place to go to sharpen your current skills and learn new ones. The course comes just at the right time, when winter is upon us.

Maple has been gardening all his life. He really got hooked in 1970 when he lived in Ohio and watched Jim Crockett's "Victory Garden" on PBS. That's when he figured out that there was more to

gardening than just turning the soil. Maple considers Crockett's "Victory Garden" to be the best gardening book ever written. It is very hard to find, though, but if you look at all the used bookstores, sometimes one will turn up. Maple was a mechanical engineer who designed tools used to manufacture auto parts and aircraft. In his off hours, Maple and his wife, Caroline, became dedicated gardeners who liked to grow their own vegetables.

When Maple moved to Spartanburg 22 years ago, he became an expert on what would grow well here. Since then, he has helped shape the horticulture community in Spartanburg. He says commercial growers have to learn how to grow cucumbers with tough skins for ship-

ping purposes. The home vegetable gardener needs to know what varieties he can grow here that are soft skinned and juicy because there is no need to ship them.

In this course, you will learn soil prep, feeding formulas, indoor house-plant care, simple botany to help you understand plant makeup, landscaping techniques and much more. In addition to Bagwell, Parris and Moore, the instructors include myself, George Gunter, Linda McHam, Ted Petoskey and Allen Mackensie.

There are no tests in this course, and at the end you will receive a certificate of completion.

If you have questions, reach Maple at 576-3319.

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