

SMARTGARDEN™ —Using Gardening Resources

A wealth of gardening information in various media is waiting to be tapped

As Phil Condit, chairman and chief executive officer of The Boeing Company says, "None of us is as smart as all of us." When you take the time to investigate the wide array of available gardening resources, tapping the knowledge of experts, and taking advantage of their experience, your efforts will be more successful and efficient. No matter what gardening topic interests you, there are resources available to address it.

The challenge is to sort through the seemingly limitless books, periodicals, Web sites, television and radio shows, organizations, and gardens to locate those that will be most helpful and relate most directly to you and your garden.

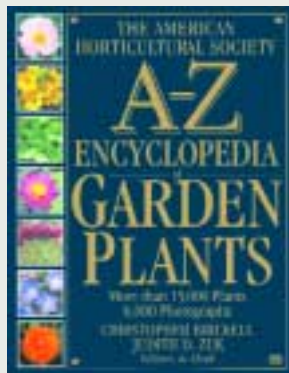
Two factors that should direct your initial investigation are: your specific gardening interests and your location. If you are investigating the possibility of developing a rock garden, for example, you can find books, magazines, and Web sites devoted to the subject. To apply the information you gather to your backyard, you can look to more regional resources, such as a nearby botanical garden, a local chapter of a rock garden society, your state's Cooperative Extension Service, local nurseries, and periodicals with a regional focus.

THE PRINTED WORD

Certain resources become like trusted friends—you return to them time after time for advice. Encyclopedic references that provide general information about garden plants are helpful because they are comprehensive and can provide an initial introduction to a plant or topic. *The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*, for example, provides descriptions and brief cultural notes of thousands of species and cultivars grown in gardens throughout the world. An updated edition of this book is scheduled for publication in fall 2004.

Some books have a regional perspective and can be quite helpful with specifics such as plant selection, planting times, and pest identification. Often such regional books will include other local resources—gardens, nurseries, regional societies—that you may want to contact.

Magazines and journals can inspire you with examples of what other gardeners are doing and keep you up to date



with advances in the horticultural field. There are periodicals for every level of gardening and for just about any specialty. Many plant societies, botanic gardens, and nurseries publish a newsletter. If you are considering subscribing to a gardening magazine or newsletter, ask a gardener who shares your interests for a recommendation.

Local and regional newspapers are another source of timely gardening information. Many run weekly gardening columns that offer growing tips based on local conditions. Newspapers may cover gardens worth visiting in your area, as well as local gardening programs and events.

THE INTERNET

A quick search on the Internet can uncover hundreds of articles about almost any gardening topic. Nearly every plant society and botanical garden, and many state Cooperative Extension Services and university horticulture departments now have Web sites that you can visit. Expert advice on almost any gardening subject is often only an e-mail or a mouse click away.

Some organizations have regional chapters with individual Web sites. These can be a helpful source of locally pertinent advice and can inform you of meetings, classes, and other events in your area. If you are looking for information on a specific plant—for example, daffodils or African violets, or a particular gardening topic such as wildlife gardening or bonsai—start with the appropriate national organization and go from there. National organizations usually provide links to regional sites.

The AHS Web site offers links to hundreds of national and regional gardening organizations, including state Master Gardener groups. Visit www.ahs.org and click on "Internet Community and Links" or "Master Gardeners."

JOIN A GROUP

Local gardening groups such as garden clubs and Master Gardeners are among the best resources for gardeners. By joining such groups, you can benefit from the members' collective wisdom and years of hands-on gardening experience.

Garden clubs are a wonderful way to meet gardeners from your region who share your passion for plants.



Some garden clubs are affiliated with national groups such as the Garden Club of America, the National Garden Clubs Inc., and The Gardeners of America/Men's Garden Clubs of America; others operate independently. Ask around in your neighborhood or check with a local botanical garden to learn what garden clubs are available near you.

There are also Master Gardener programs in every state, coordinated by the state's Cooperative Extension Service. Programs vary from one state to another, but in general, volunteers are selected and trained in plant identification, diagnosis of plant problems and appropriate recommendations for treatment, soil and fertilizer recommendations, lawn care, pesticide use and safety, organic gardening, ornamental gardening, and a variety of other topics.

In return for their training, Master Gardeners volunteer a certain number of hours in public service. They may participate in plant clinics, assist with soil test reports, answer horticultural hotlines, conduct garden tours, assist with developing school gardens, and other activities that are aimed at disseminating reliable gardening information to the public. They are an extremely valuable local resource for any gardener.

Many local radio and cable television stations are getting into the gardening act with shows that highlight local gardens, gardeners, and timely regional gardening information. Tune in and see what's new in your area.

FIRST-HAND INFORMATION

Information in books and online is valuable, but nothing is as enlightening as a visit to a real garden for inspiring you with ideas. Regional botanical gardens and arboreta afford visitors a chance to see plants in a growing situation. And horticultural experts are often available to answer your questions. Some public gardens offer handouts, classes, and workshops on a host of specific topics, and many also offer volunteer opportunities—a great way to work with trained gardening staff and learn garden techniques first hand.

When you're looking for ideas, don't overlook gardens around you. Within your neighborhood there may be landscapes that deserve a closer look. Most gardeners love to show off the fruits of their labor. And some of the best advice available to you may be from the person next door who shares both your growing conditions and your enthusiasm for gardening.

Observing the plants neighbors grow, how they grow them, and how they tackle problems that arise can provide insight and ideas for your own yard. A gardening acquaintance may alert you to the arrival of a pest or show you a new plant that is just the ticket for your perennial border. Putting your heads together to find a solution for a problem is a wonderful way to enhance your gardening wisdom.

Rita Pelczar, Associate Editor



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