

Welcome to the Green Garage®

by Rita Pelczar

AMERICAN GARDENERS make choices every day. Whether selecting equipment and tools, deliberating over cultural practices, or choosing plants, we are routinely afforded opportunities to make decisions that will lead us down an “earth friendly” path to a beautiful garden. Over the last decade, as awareness of the value of sustainable landscaping has increased, manufacturers of garden products have responded by focusing on development of more environmentally responsible supplies and tools.

The American Horticultural Society recently launched an innovative program called the Green Garage® to spread the word about garden products, supplies, techniques, and practices that are safe, smart, and environmentally friendly. Each upcoming issue of this magazine will cover a gardening topic showcasing current research, pertinent new products, and efficient strategies that reflect the earth friendly philosophy that was essential to the SMARTGARDEN™ program begun by the American Horticultural Society in 2000.

With the help of several sponsors, the AHS has created a traveling Green Garage® exhibit that will be unveiled at the Philadelphia Flower Show this spring (see article on page 8).

The prototype Green Garage® can be viewed at the AHS’s River Farm headquarters, where it has been set up for the past year. The garage is located beside the main visitor walkway, adjacent to the Garden Shop. Be sure to stop by the garage if you are at River Farm for any of the many events scheduled this year.

IDENTIFYING GREENER ALTERNATIVES

The aim of the Green Garage® is to encourage gardeners to take a look at their current practices, to give themselves a pat on the back for the good things they are already doing, and to consider alternatives that will help them enjoy their favorite hobby while working in harmony with nature. Studies at agricultural research stations and universities across the country have demonstrated that many new gardening products are both effective and environmentally friendly. Some traditional tools and techniques have

been improved, making them more efficient or easier to use. The new Green Garage® initiative will help you identify products and strategies that are appropriate for your gardening needs and suggest ways to integrate them into your gardening routine. Here are several goals of the program.

- Familiarize gardeners with available tools, equipment, and products that address specific gardening needs and understand the range of tasks to which each can be applied.
- Help gardeners identify the best tool for each job, the one that is the most efficient and effective and has the least negative environmental impact. For example, gardeners should consider using hand tools rather than power tools when the size or scope of a job is appropriate. (Remember

that one of the health benefits of gardening is physical activity.)

- Identify products and techniques that accomplish your goals without harming the environment. Example: killing weeds by solarizing soil rather than using chemical herbicides.
- Address the maintenance and repairs for tools and equipment as well as storage solutions that may extend their usable life span and assure their efficient operation.
- Provide information regarding safe storage of fertilizer and pesticide products, and advice on the safest way to dispose of unused chemicals or other hazardous materials.
- Offer strategies for keeping tools, equipment, seeds, soil, etc. organized and easy to locate when you need them, and how to increase the efficiency of your work area.



The Green Garage display at River Farm features earth-friendly tools and products.



The Green Garage® will help gardeners make informed choices about the products they use.

■ Develop a methodology for pesticide use to include first identifying the pest or disease and assessing its potential for damage. If the decision is made to use a pesticide, select the least toxic option and apply it safely, according to directions.

■ Promote recycling whenever possible. Consider composting, mulching with grass clippings or chopped leaves, and other practices that reduce waste or material that is sent to the landfill while accomplishing your gardening goals.

■ Advise gardeners about personal safety in the garden: use of protective gear, gloves, sunscreen, insect repellent, etc.

■ Provide resources to help gardeners select the plants most appropriate for their local climate and soil type. Selecting the right plants helps to reduce the need for supplemental water as well as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

DEFINING THE "GARAGE"

Wait a minute, you say, what if I don't have a garage? Not a problem. Remember this is as much a concept as a location. Your "green garage" may actually be a garden shed, a barn, a cabinet, or simply a shelf in your apartment. Think of the place you consider your gardening head-

quarters—where you store your gardening tools and supplies.

As you look around your storage area, assess how well your supplies meet the needs of your gardening chores and how well they ensure your safety while doing them. At the same time, consider how use of these products reflects your attitude toward the environment.

How Green is Your Garage?

Take a moment to log onto the AHS website and take the Green Garage® Self Assessment Quiz. Some of the questions may suggest simple ways you can increase your gardening efficiency while decreasing negative environmental impact. Just go to www.ahs.org and click on the link for this magazine issue. Select the Green Garage® quiz from the table of contents.

As part of the program, you can take a simple self-assessment quiz (see box, left) to help you determine how earth-friendly your current garage is. Picture your gardening headquarters and see how many "green" choices you can identify.

The Green Garage® is both a philosophy and a place. It's where we begin our gardening tasks, lining up the tools, products, and attitude that we will use to accomplish our goals. The choices we make reflect our awareness of the world around us. To someone who plans to work from a green garage, each choice will be weighed against its environmental impact. Like the physicians' Hippocratic Oath, the first and most important rule one should follow is to "do no harm"—to the environment. m

Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor for The American Gardener.

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