

Gardening on the Web

Willie Chance

UGA Extension Agent, Houston County

wchance@uga.edu

The way gardeners get information from UGA Extension has changed so much over the last few years. UGA Extension used to have big racks of publications in our offices, answered lots of phone questions and conducted on-site visits. Now most of our publications are online. We still answer phone questions but no longer have the staff to make home visits like we did. However, we now have several collections of common questions and answers online. Gardeners can answer their own questions! We also offer other online services for homeowners and commercial landscapers.

With all the information available, finding good information can still be difficult. The world wide web can be a good way to get gardening information, or a terrible way. How do you know what to believe? These suggestions may be helpful as you 'web garden'.

First, ask your self - Is the site selling something? If so, their major goal is generally sales - not education. They may believe something is true, but that does not make it so. This does not mean that their information is incorrect. Check the information they give with that from a university site.

Testimonials are a poor method of gathering information. 'It worked for me!' means that the person followed a course of reaction and got what they wanted. This does not mean that what they did actually caused the result. The result may have been a coincidence. Even if the product worked, will it work for you? This means that the information on chat rooms and blogs will have to be verified from another site. These information sources are unreliable. How do you find good reliable information?

Use University sites for the best quality information. Start with UGA sites since this information is specific for our area. Here are a few sites that may be helpful. When answering garden questions locally, start with the web sites at the top of the list and work your way down. As you go farther down the list, the information is likely to become less reliable or pertinent for our area.

University related sites generally provide the most reliable information!

The Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture site (www.gaurbanag.org/) has sections for home gardeners and the commercial landscape industry. Get answers to more than 500 common garden questions by looking under the 'Home & Garden' section – 'Garden Q&As' We also have more than 200 fact sheets under 'Lawn & Garden Tips'.

We also have a bimonthly, email newsletter for home gardeners, ***The Garden Bench***. To subscribe email tberry1@alltel.net.

For the commercial landscape industry, we offer a quarterly email newsletter, ***The Landscape Line***. To subscribe, email me at wchance@uga.edu and ask to be added to The Landscape Line list. You can also see the newsletter at the Center for Urban Ag site (www.gaurbanag.org) under 'Industry' and 'Landscape Line'

Look through **UGA Extension publications** by subject or search our publications at www.caes.uga.edu/publications/ . Also see the local Houston County extension website at www.ugaextension.org/houston and look under ‘Agriculture and Natural Resources’ for more publications.

Though not actually a UGA site, *Gardening in Georgia* star Walter Reeves has a great site with lots of good information. – www.gardeningingeorgia.com/ He answers a lot of gardening questions and archives his answers there.

If you cannot find what you want at these sites, you can search **University publications** from across the U.S. at www.plantfacts.osu.edu/web. This search engine will allow you to limit the search to universities in the southeastern U.S. This should give you information from universities like Clemson, Auburn and University of Florida. These sources may vary some what on planning dates but often supply helpful information.

Some university-related sites are useful for specific purposes. For snake and reptile identification see www.uga.edu/srelherp/ and for wildlife control visit this site - <http://icwdm.org/Default.asp>.

Information from Non-University sites is not generally as reliable!

Sites like these may be helpful to find photos, plant descriptions or other general information. They may be helpful but we cannot recommend them with the same assurance that we would a University sponsored site.

The Ortho Garden Problem Solver may help you to identify garden problems – www.ortho.com/. Another interesting site is found at Garden Net – www.gardennet.com/

Search engines are easy to use but . . .

Finally, if you cannot find the information anywhere else – you may use one of the web search engines. This is an excellent way to see what people put online about your topic but remember that **most of the material online is garbage. Be careful!**

One way to glean out some of the good from the bad is to **limit your search to educational sites**. On Google for instance (www.google.com), go to Advanced Search, and look for ‘Domain’. Set the domain to ‘.edu’ and you should get better, though not perfect, results.

In this information age, gardeners and landscapers want information at their fingertips. Limiting web searches to university sites that are close to home is a big help in obtaining the un-biased, research-based information we need to improve our landscapes. Starting with University sites closer to home and then moving to the other sites should help supply better gardening information.