

## Gardening on the internet

“Where can I find the best gardening information?” When trying to grow anything, especially when confronting the gardening challenges of the Mojave Desert, this is not a casual question, but a critical one. I have many reference books, but they may not be the best places to find the immediate, practical material necessary get something in the ground and keep it alive. There are times when books, whether texts or written for the home gardener, do not have the answers. And you might not have access to the Master Gardener help line, for instance on a weekend, or if you lost your phone.

When attending a national meeting of horticulturists, I learned that a big topic of conversation was getting information on the web. The thinking was that putting a whole range of horticultural materials on the web would eliminate duplication, and increase access to good, research-based data. I regularly search for horticultural materials on the internet.

Just because something is on the internet does not mean it has been screened for accuracy. Even when information is correct, it might not be useful. The internet is a cosmopolitan tool. Guidance that can assist gardeners in Minneapolis, or Miami, or Manila, might be of no help in the desert southwest.

Because sifting through the internet can feel like a superhuman task, we should think about using the web to find appropriate gardening info.

There are millions of gardening sites. Many are from England, which has a terrific horticultural tradition: wonderful gardens and the world’s premier flower show. It also has over 40” of rainfall every year, with temperatures rarely exceeding 80°. Much of the country has soil you can actually dig in, and that soil tends to be acidic. Does that sound even remotely like the Las Vegas Valley, Caliente or Mesquite? What might be very useful to someone in one environment could be useless here.

Commercial horticulture sites often have very good gardening information, but some are more interested in selling a product than in educating the general public. This only makes sense; these are businesses. Use your own good common sense to avoid making a gospel out of an advertisement. The best information on the internet is usually research-based, which is where good commercial sites and garden clubs get their materials.

When searching for something specific, try some of the more popular plants and flowers that have societies with websites. Even then, it can be overwhelming. Search for “begonia society” and you get 462,000 hits!

When you enter your search criteria, be as limited as you can otherwise you get 246,000,000 hits for “gardening” and 533,000,000 for “gardens.” Look for sites that are from universities in the general southwest area. Not to say ignore the others, but the information from the “.edu” sites is more likely to be based on actual research and have been peer-reviewed.



When the weather - hot, cold, windy or wet - keeps us out of the garden, it is possible to use our computers to prepare for better days.

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