

Notes

A Web Site for Urban Horticulture: Meeting Increasing Demands with Decreasing Resources

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ADDITIONAL INDEX WORDS. web site, World Wide Web, urban horticulture

SUMMARY. The Univ. of Arizona Cooperative Extension home horticulture World Wide Web site for Maricopa County, "Environmentally responsible gardening and landscaping in the low desert," provides the public with timely, research-based, regionally appropriate information. This delivery method enables self-service access to prepared text information and high-quality images that could not be economically distributed via traditional print methods, and interactive opportunities for submitting questions.

Cooperative extension must provide cutting-edge information and state-of-the art presentations via telephone, mail, computer, fax, or in person. As budgets shrink and needs escalate, more efficient and creative distribution strategies are critical. Horticultural information is increasingly available via electronic delivery systems including the World Wide Web (WWW) (Davis et al., 1996; Lightner, 1996). Advantages of delivering information via the WWW include quick asynchronous access by users, the inexpensive use of high-resolution digitized images, and the ability to package information in a module format (Davis et al., 1996). Maricopa County, Ariz. (includes the Phoenix metropolitan area), has developed a home horticulture web site (<http://ag.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/>) that allows direct public access and interactive list-serves. The site is also a reference tool for volunteer Master Gardeners working at the cooperative extension office.

Description

The sixteen key components to date are as follows.

- 1) **TIMELY TIPS** contains monthly tips, climate information, task lists, and strategies for managing plant problems during the year (based on an analysis of 20,000 calls from the home horticulture help line in 1996).
- 2) **CALENDAR** provides a listing of upcoming classes, conferences, plant sales, and events.
- 3) **PUBLICATIONS** contains information on ordering and downloading, information for county and state horticulture publications, books, CD ROMs, and web sites.
- 4) **PLANTS** has indexed links to landscape plant profiles and pictures.
- 5) **MASTER GARDENER** is an overview of the Maricopa County Program.
- 6) **YOUTH GARDENS** lists references, sources for funding, materials, technical and educational assistance, Internet connections, events, and examples.

- 7) **COMMUNITY GARDENS** provides references, funding sources, materials, technical and educational assistance, Internet connections, events, and examples.
- 8) **GARDEN CLUBS** contains a listing of 42 garden clubs in the county with contact and meeting information.
- 9) **PROFESSIONALS** provides an overview of professional certification programs in the horticulture industry and job opportunities.
- 10) **FUNDING** describes grant opportunities, fundraising strategies, and awards available for garden projects.
- 11) **WEATHER** links to current weather forecast, historical climate information (average and record temperatures and rainfall by month), and first and last frost dates.
- 12) **LIBRARY** lists references on many topics including insect identification and management; landscape design, installation, and management; identification and selection of landscape plants; vegetable and herb gardening; weed identification; and attracting wildlife while preventing and managing damage to the garden.
- 13) **ASK A QUESTION** enables the viewer to join or send a question to three e-mail list-serves (school_garden, arid_gardener, community_garden).
- 14) **SITE SEEING** links to web sites in gardening in the southwest, horticulture adventures, cooperative extension horticulture information, general gardening, youth gardens, community gardens, insects and their relatives, weather, volunteer management and leadership, funding, computer tools, and fun information.
- 15) **INDEX** is a cross-referenced alphabetical listing of information in the site with hypertext links to the appropriate web page.
- 16) **SEARCH** enables the user to search the site, the Univ. of Arizona College of Agriculture site, or the entire WWW.

Funding

The Arizona Nursery Association provided partial funding for the site through by purchasing a computer and digital camera equipment to support site development. Several companies have requested advertising on the site. These inquiries have stimulated the university to develop a policy (<http://www.Arizona.EDU/uainfo/policies/policies2.html>) about appropriate acknowledgment of contributors on web sites, which will open the door to other funding opportunities.

Maintenance

The site was created and is maintained by the Maricopa County Urban Horticulture Agent and Administrative Secretary. About 8 h/week are dedicated to site maintenance. In addition, Master Gardener volunteers are participating in advanced training in WWW to enable them to assist with maintaining and expanding the site, and providing training to the public on using the WWW.

Benefits

The web site allows for

- 1) Self-service, accurate, up-to-date information on demand 24 h a day.
- 2) Distribution of high-quality images and publications at no charge to the consumer.
- 3) Organization of a tremendous amount of information in an easily accessible format.
- 4) Volunteer Master Gardeners who staff the help desks to quickly access university-approved recommendations on a variety of topics.

Literature cited

- Lightner, G.A. 1996. Scientific home pages on the world wide web. *HortTechnology* 6:263-265.
- Davis, G.L., E.F. Gilman, and H.W. Beck. 1996. An electronically based horticulture information retrieval system. *HortTechnology* 6:332-336.

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