

Tips for finding gardening information on the internet.

The internet holds a plethora of horticultural information at your soil-stained fingertips. With so much information available, how can you sort the appropriate information apart from what should be left on the electronic compost pile?

As a Master Gardener Volunteer, you have committed yourself to the mission of providing unbiased, university researched-based information to the public. From this point of view, consider these tips when “Googling” for information:

In the search field, add “university” or “extension” to your keyword query. This will more than likely connect you to land grant institutions that offer publications on-line for you to peruse. Selecting materials from the surrounding states is suggested in order for it to be pertinent to our climate.

Select websites which end in .gov and .edu. These government and education sites are likely to be affiliated with a state department of natural resources, department of agriculture or university. You may have to be careful with sites ending in .org or .com. These organizational and commercial sites may or may not offer you appropriate information; determine if they reference unbiased, research based information before you utilize the materials found on them.

Many plant enthusiast sites may offer you hard to find information about the culture of exotic plants. Adding the word “society” to your keyword search often leads you to these groups. Be careful with information posted to these sites as it may anecdotal and not from an appropriate source.

When delivering information to the public, it may be useful to note your source. Even when utilizing the information found on the web from other extension sites, out of date information or opposing recommendations can be found. If such a case arises, contact your county educator in order to clarify the conflicts.

And, of course, if the website is offering to sell you something, question its bias and usefulness of information. Product labels for pesticides, however, can be readily found from the manufacturer’s website.

Mike Maddox
Horticulture Educator
Rock County UW-Extension