

## **eXtension and eXtension Master Gardeners**

The discussions about providing web resources for Master Gardeners got me to wondering about what is available on the national level through extension. Turns out that there is a larger picture developing for extension and for master gardeners, as well as new ways to access those resources by both Master Gardeners and the public.

You can tap into that resource if you have an online connection and at least a beginning knowledge of how to use the internet.

What is the resource, what does it offer and how do I use it?



**eXtension** is an educational partnership of more than 70 universities to help you improve your life every day with access to objective, research-based information and educational opportunities. (from the website)

- eXtension provides information to you any time, any place, any format and on any Internet-ready device.
- eXtension is available to you 24/7/365, whenever you need to make decisions to improve your life, to answer life questions, or to learn more about any topic available.
- eXtension has the national shared strength of the Land Grant University System customized to focus on your needs where you live.
- eXtension's content is dynamic and evolving, offering you timely information on topics that matter to you.
- eXtension complements and enhances the community-based Cooperative Extension System of the land-grant universities, a resource you now have at your fingertips.

You can only grasp the full extent of this by going to the website and exploring it for yourself. I found it easy to navigate, extremely useful, as well as always available. But, is it local or regional and does it serve the Master Gardener population as well as the public? The answer is both yes and no. It is regionalized at the extension office and staff level, but not well integrated into local MG groups. I think the mechanisms are in place to integrate the local MG groups into this effort, depending on the interest and participation by individual Master Gardeners and extension agents. It appears that state coordinators play a key role in connecting local groups to the national level.

The section of the website that serves our particular interests is Garden, Lawns and Landscapes (link). The section is divided into categories by subject each containing further divisions, including one for Master Gardeners. I have searched several of the categories and found them all rich in content and easily explored. Accessing New Mexico information is more difficult, but you can link to our State Master Gardener Coordinator, and get the monthly calendar for Albuquerque Master Gardeners.

I tested out the “Ask An Expert” function with a question regarding specific information about local sources of compost, and received a personalized answer from Daniel Culbert, Okeechobee County Extension Horticulture Agent, IFAS/ University of Florida. He wrote a general answer and referred me to one of NMSU Hort. Publications about compost as well as two other references. So, you too can get your most complex questions answered by an expert. The first level of response is to search their database for relevant answers, but if there is none; questions are referred through their response protocol.

The “Ask An Expert” service is set up to serve the public, and designed to include Master Gardeners as the “Experts” within their local area of knowledge. It would have been most exciting if the answer to my question came from a Dona Ana Co. Master Gardener.

You can get daily information sent to you through the web by using the RSS feed subscription service of the website. I subscribe to the Gardens, Lawns and Landscapes RSS feed and receive new additions to that section every day. The content is relevant and an excellent way to continue learning. There is also a section of the website called “Self Learning” which is intended to serve as an online-extended learning portal for the eXtension service. At present, it ranges from “no content”, in Gardens, Lawns and Landscapes to full content in “Horses”. There are plans to use this function to facilitate some Master Gardener training at the national level.

So, if you want to easily access the resources of 70 land grant universities, have new information delivered to you daily and have an expert answer your most pressing gardening questions then link up with the new [eXtension](http://www.extension.org/). (<http://www.extension.org/>)

Till next time,

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