

How does your garden grow?

Website cultivates growth in gardening

My mother had deep roots in gardening, and she kept our house and yard filled with greenery and living color all year round. My wife is a budding gardener who brings in a healthy harvest of tomatoes, pumpkins and other produce every year. And my own involvement in gardening has blossomed over the last couple of years. I've planted some wildflowers, ground cover and berry bushes around my property, and my interest continues to grow.

As winter leaves us and spring blooms, the time is ripe to start planning for your seasonal garden. Whether your thumb is already stained green, or you're considering digging into gardening for the first time, **Garden.org** has bushels of useful information.



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InSites

The site is the online branch of the National Gardening Association (NGA), a nonprofit group devoted to sustaining the connection between people, plants and the environment. In addition to the website, the NGA's tendrils extend into providing curriculum materials for schools, supporting community gardens, publishing plant-related educational material, working with corporations on environmental issues, conducting research on issues related to gardening and more.

Fertile ground

There are different sections devoted to a wide variety of planting subjects. Whether you're just interested in maintaining your lawn, or you want to start growing your own food, NGA has information you can use.

One of the features I found useful is the Plant Finder, which is nested under the Expert Advice section. If there's a specific niche you're looking to fill in your garden, this tool can help you find the right plant to do it. For instance, I want to put in some ground cover around several large trees in my yard. I entered information about the type of plant I was looking for, the light level in the area I want to plant in, the moisture level of the soil, my geographic loca-

tion, the height I want the plant to grow to, the color and season of bloom and whether I wanted native or exotic plants. The Plant Finder generated a list of several suitable plants. Clicking on a name in the list brings up a picture and information on the species.

Also under Expert Advice are Weed Library, Gardening Articles, Q&A Library, How-To Projects, How-To Videos and more. There's a Reference section with subsections that help you find the plant "hardiness" zone you live in, calculate the amounts of fertilizer and other chemicals you may need, list upcoming events, locate public gardens and define gardening terms. The Community section allows users to swap seeds, exchange e-cards, post messages and download wallpaper.

Planting a seed

One of the NGA's goals is to germinate an interest in gardening among children. The Kids Gardening section has numerous features cultivated for future greenthumbs. There are projects for home and school, garden-themed books, grants and awards. The Kids Shop has books, tools, teacher resources and other products for sale.

The site — which features the slogan "when you garden, you grow" in the pagetop banner — is serious about its mission. The design is very conservative, with a business-like look. Most of the content is organized in a three-column grid, with a muted green color palette and sans-serif type. The exceptions are the pages devoted to gardening for kids, where the colors get brighter and the layout loosens up a little.

The articles are informative and well-written, but the editing needs to be tightened up a little. I came across typos in almost every piece I read, which takes away a little from the professionalism of the site. Other than that, **Garden.org** is a well-done website that offers lots of valuable information for anyone interested in getting their hands dirty. It's a good site to bookmark so you can visit it throughout the growing season.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timesshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.