



Greenware

App has fertile ideas for gardening

This wonderfully warm, early spring weather we've been having has many people's thoughts turning to the great outdoors. I spent a good portion of last weekend doing yard work in preparation for the coming bloom. Unfortunately, in my garden, the bloom is less than spectacular.

My mother was a gifted gardener who filled the house and yard with greenery and blossoms year round. I, on the other hand, have a hard time growing dandelions. The apple definitely fell far from the tree.



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InSites

Fortunately, there's an app that can help nourish my growth as a gardener.

Gardening How-To — available at Apple's App Store for the iPad, and also at Google Play for Android devices — is a free app, ripe with juicy tidbits for beginning and experienced gardeners.

New growth

The app is actually an electronic version of the National Home Gardening Club's magazine. It's a fairly new venture for the organization, with only four electronic issues published so far. The publishers did a nice job with it, producing an attractive, intuitive product. Visually, it looks just like the magazine, but it includes lots of extras made possible by electronic tablet technology.

Interactive slideshows of photo galleries permit the display of more images than would be feasible in the printed version. Having such photogenic subject matter adds greatly to the appeal of this app. It's full of richly colored photos of flowers, fruits, vegetables and other flora and fauna from the garden.

Videos of certified green thumbs explaining various gardening techniques are strategically planted throughout the app. There are also scrollable info boxes, lists and how-to demonstrations accompanying many of the articles. Links to Web resources and blogs allow readers to find more information, or offer comments, on articles of interest.

Branching out

The National Home Gardening Club also has a website at **GardeningClub.com**. The same content available in the app is offered on the website, along with lots of additional features and information.

The website is more useful than the

app because it contains information not limited to a single magazine issue. You can research specific topics, such as spring or fall planting, in different areas of the site. Even if you have all of the issues published to the app, there's no easy way to search the content. A digital version of the magazine that can be viewed on desktop computers is available to registered members of the site. A searchable archive of back issues allows you to look for articles going back to January 2008.

Both the app and website are well designed, but they could use more visual unity. Different fonts, color palettes and even a different name are used, making it harder for users to connect both products with the same organization.

Room to grow

While the producers of *Gardening How-To* did a nice job of implementing some of the advantages available in an electronic format, they neglected to include a few obvious ones.

The most noticeable omission is the lack of automatic page rotation. The app can only be viewed in the vertical orientation, except for the videos, which can be viewed either vertically or horizontally. This causes some images to be cropped awkwardly when viewing a two-page spread. It also prevents some tablet owners from using the built-in stands on their tablet cases that only support horizontal viewing.

Another missing feature is the ability to zoom in on parts of a page. It appears as though the pages in the app are images taken directly from the print product, rather than custom built for electronic viewing. Even though the type is all big enough to read, some of the font choices have thin strokes that work better in print than on the screen. It would be nice to be able to zoom in on some of the images, too.

Planting the seed

If you already have roots in gardening, or would like to cultivate an interest, *Gardening How-To* and *GardeningClub.com* both can help you blossom. They're well designed and easy to use, with lots of good information, images and resources to help you reap the rewards of getting closer to the soil.

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