

Let it Grow



Site cultivates gardening skills

That blue you see above your head is the sky, and that bright light up there is the sun. That means it's safe to leave your den and venture into the great outdoors at last. The winter from hell finally appears to be over. Robins are abundant, the ice is off the lake, and the first green shoots have appeared in the garden.

Spring is the season gardeners wait for all year. Many already have started planting in pots and egg cartons indoors, while others have been planning their planting as they waited for the weather to break.

It doesn't matter if you're a novice or a seasoned pro, all gardeners can use some guidance from time to time. One place to look for advice on the Internet is **FineGardening.com**. The site is the electronic version of *Fine Gardening* magazine, a publication of Taunton Press. The company specializes in publications, both for print and screen, that support creative activities, such as woodworking, sewing and gardening.

Acorns and oaks

Although *FineGardening* is geared more toward those with a serious green thumb, even beginners will find it helpful. The site assumes a familiarity with horticultural terminology and the names of plant species. This can be a little daunting to those of us who aren't particularly knowledgeable in this area, but it's information that should be learned if you want to become a more successful gardener.

To help in this area, the site has a guide with photos, scientific and common names, hardiness zones and descriptions of many plants. The guide is categorized by type, season and other characteristics to help viewers navigate through the vast number of plant species. A glossary of terminology would also be helpful, but unfortunately I wasn't able to find one on the site.

I looked at a handful of gardening sites before I decided to review this one.

I was hoping to find a resource that not only had good information but also was aesthetically pleasing. I assumed this would be easy considering the natural beauty of the subject matter, but I was surprised at how many sites were visually uninspiring. *FineGardening* does a good job of providing useful information and displaying good photographs of flowers and other plants to create an inviting space. There are advertisements on the pages, but they're not as distracting as on many sites.

A rose by any other name

The design, typography and color palette are all well done, creating an organized, unified-looking site that is easy to navigate. A series of tabs under the title banner at the top of the page organizes the content into related sections. Most of them have drop-down menus to help you refine your browsing even more.

In addition to the plant guide mentioned earlier, there's also a design section with lots of articles and pictures that will help you plan the look of the different areas of your landscape. Next to that is a how-to section with detailed instructions, diagrams and videos of many types of gardening projects. The other links take you to blogs, photo galleries, videos and more.

The home page has a large photo carousel of featured topics as the main art element. Clicking on a photo while it's being displayed takes you to the article. Below that are more photographs and text blurbs promoting other content on the website. The promos get less prominent as you move down the page.

The website is full of good information on a wide range of gardening topics. The articles I read were well written, and the authors seem knowledgeable about their subjects. The quality of the photos and videos is also good. The blogs and forums I skimmed appeared to be written by well-informed enthusiasts. If you're interested in digging in the dirt and helping things grow, then add *FineGardening* to your collection of gardening tools.

Kevin O'Neill is a staff artist for *The Times-Tribune*. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with your favorite websites or apps.



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites