

Elvenia J. Slosson Endowment Fund
Final Report for work performed from July 2004 through June 2005

Title: Ensuring that the California Backyard Orchard web site remains a reliable and dependable resource for California's home gardeners and UCCE Master Gardeners

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Introduction

The UC Fruit & Nut Research and Information Center (FNRIC), with major funding from an Elvinia J. Slosson Ornamental Horticulture Research Endowment grant and in cooperation with project PIs, developed the California Backyard Orchard web site (<http://homeorchard.ucdavis.edu>) which came on-line in September 2001.

The site provides extensive horticultural information for the home gardener on 20 fruit and nut tree crops, plus a number of vine crops such as grapes, berries and kiwifruit. Content was developed by more than 30 UC contributors. The site was designed and developed to be user-friendly — employing easily understandable and consistent terminology, and implementing consistent navigation tools throughout the site. The site is also a valuable resource for the California Master Gardeners.

Site statistics have been compiled since February 2002, but the site itself has received only minimal updating since coming online. The Backyard Orchard web site includes 50 html files, 53 pdf files, and 353 links. A link checker software program run on the site before this grant was awarded, showed that 50 links were broken or being redirected to another location. This happens due to the nature of the Internet, as web sites over time, evolve and change. When an undue number of links are broken a site loses it's reliability and will no longer be considered a valuable resource.

A site map is a convention used to assist Americans with disabilities and other users in finding information on a site. It is usually a text-only page (no graphics) outlining the structure and linking to all top-level pages of the site. It's good practice to include a site map on a web site. The Backyard Orchard web site did not include a site map before this grant was awarded.

An ANR on-line database-driven guestbook was added to only the home page in February 2002. During 21 months in 2002 and 2003 the site received 93 comments or questions to the guestbook. In 42 of those responses, we provided a link to a county Master Gardener web site and recommended that the user seek advice from their local Master Gardener.

More people are using search engines to quickly find information on the Internet, and one can no longer assume that users enter a site from the home page. Since the link to the guestbook was only on the home page, we proposed that it be added to the side navigation bar of each html file/page.

Goals and Objectives:

Keep the current California Backyard Orchard web site a trusted resource, by:

- Adding a link to a "site map" from each html page
- Running a link checking program on the site and analyzing the data
- Correcting all broken and redirected links
- Providing monthly site statistics
- Adding a link to the guestbook from each html page
- Promptly responding to on-line guestbook questions

Discussion

A site map page was created and a link added to the home page and to the navigation bar of each page. Statistics show that it has been accessed consistently since its implementation.



All broken and redirected links were periodically analyzed, corrected, and files uploaded to the server.

During the funding cycle of July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005 the site received 322,641 hits, averaging 26,877 hits a month. Site statistics, shown below, were run periodically and indicate a steady increase in activity with fluctuations.

Month	2005	2004	2003	2002
December		22,354	20,883	13,117
November		26,165	14,130	13,869
October		24,285	N/A	14,375
September		22,818	N/A	15,442
August		21,844	18,752	15,002
July	25,165	22,450	20,478	13,259
June	25,043	21,812	21,939	12,305
May	29,726	23,334	24,064	13,378
April	30,596	23,934	23,472	15,542
March	33,848	26,908	19,797	14,263
February	32,244	24,220	17,904	12,489
January	31,268	30,131	16,447	

Table 1: California Backyard Orchard web site statistics, showing "http requests" and/or "page views," excluding all requests from the central UCD campus and files with the extension gif, jpg, jpeg, and png.

A link to the guestbook has been added to the navigation bar of each page, thereby increasing the outreach function of the site.

There were 139 questions or comments and responses to the guestbook from July 5, 2004 through June 28, 2005. Depending on the question, some responses received more than one link. A breakdown of frequent responses is shown below:

Responses linked to:	Number of responses
Specific County Master Gardener site	34
General Master Gardener site	30
Other CE or US Land Grant sites	13
California Nursery Database	35

The guestbook continues to serve as a vehicle for: educating the California home gardener about Master Gardener resources at their county level; walking users through steps to find information on the site; and as a resource to learn how the site impacts home gardeners.

The guestbook received 13 comments expressing a benefit from the site, e.g., "What a great resource to have as Master Gardener's who work the phone desk and the farmer markets. Thanks for making this resource available. Our experience in Sonoma is that the public increasingly uses the internet to ask questions and receive replies. You offer lots of specific information which will help us answer questions for the public, and also, it is good to refer them directly to your website if they want to print out information. Thanks again for making this information available."

Another guest book user wrote, "Your website is spectacular. Appreciate the specific fertilizing guidelines and calendar for each type of fruit tree. Over the past 5 years, I have planted 20 stone fruit trees. So far, so good. The babcock peaches are the most successful in my clay-soil-on-a-hill orchard."

In the September 1, 2004 issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Katherine Grace Endicott wrote in her gardening article, "The site homeorchard.ucdavis.edu is an encyclopedia on growing fruit in Northern California.

Providing a site summary and additional guestbook links, correcting broken or redirected links, and continuing timely responses to the guestbook helped to ensure the integrity of the Backyard Orchard web site as a reliable and dependable resource for California's home gardeners and UCCE Master Gardeners.