

Master Gardener Information Network

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The University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program(s) lacked statewide access to the internet. As one of the major public education programs in horticulture, easy access to educational information on the internet seemed to be a logical goal. A review of county Master Gardener Web pages in the State revealed a few Web sites, but they were limited by Cooperative Extension Regional office structures for Web pages or were operating at a cost to the individual Master Gardener program through a private Web page provider.

Cooperative Extension Master Gardener programs in other states have major Web pages operated by the State Administration (Arizona, Indiana, Ohio, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia). They are a source of gardening and horticulture information to the gardening public and to Master Gardener volunteers.

While a few Master Gardener programs in the State had developed Web pages, most lacked the funding, computer software and expertise to generate Web page information useful to the public and to their own membership. To be useful, this Web network would have to be simple and versatile enough to accommodate existing Web pages while allowing volunteers to develop new Web pages in counties lacking any support for such activities.

The University and the Slosson Research Committee wished to support a Web page network for the Master Gardener program, but there was a concern that there might be duplication between Web pages at Research and Information Centers (primarily at UC Davis) and other Slosson fund proposals using internet access. This concern was addressed by meeting with or corresponding with all project leaders and research and information center coordinators at UC Davis. Discussions with the Cooperative Extension advisors responsible for county Master Gardener programs focused on this site as a central "clearing-house" for public access to UC information relating to horticulture and home gardening issues, including pest management, ornamental horticulture, and backyard vegetable and fruit tree culture.

Generally, the Master Gardener volunteers and

Cooperative Extension advisors have indicated a strong interest in this new educational delivery method. A number of administrative hurdles have been addressed and some still remain, but the project is operational and provides basic access for individual county Master Gardener programs to develop and maintain dynamic Web pages for their programs. The site provides regional and statewide sections for information delivery appropriate for the wider home horticulture audience in California.

Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of this project was to establish a Web page network for the seventeen individual county-based Master Gardener programs in the University of California Cooperative Extension system. Another objective was to provide wider audience access through regional and state-wide pages that house in-depth articles and information of interest to home gardeners throughout the State.

To accomplish these goals a computer server housed in a campus environment and accessible through the University computer interface was set up. This allows for no-cost Web page development by all Master Gardener programs that wish to participate. It also provides a basic level of campus/department provided computer monitoring and security.

The content of the site was developed with the goals of making it possible for a Master Gardener volunteer program to develop and publish a free Web site with no local computer expert or special software or computer equipment. The inclusion of established Master Gardener Web sites was accomplished by offering a means of moving Web pages to the University computer (via File Transfer Protocol or FTP) or by linking to an established Web page on another computer if the county wished to keep their Web page where it was.

Discussion

I. Accomplishments:

Hardware and Internet Access. The computer equipment and connection to the University of California Davis computer network was accomplished through the support of the Department of Environmental Horticulture at UC Davis. This location and level of internal computer support and expertise was found to be the most beneficial for this project within the University of California system.

Web page Network Development. College

The "front" page of the site is the first image the viewer sees. The State is divided up into regions. The viewer clicks on the Region to get a list of the Counties with Master Gardener programs.

Information about the Master Gardener program in the State is available by clicking on the "hot" images in the far right-hand column.

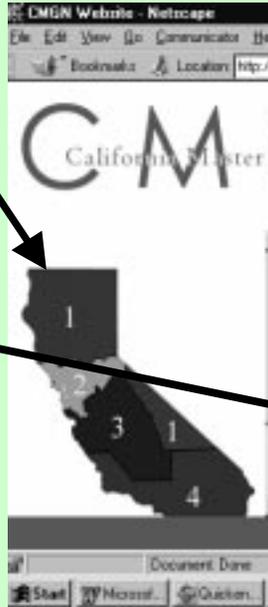


Figure 1. Pages from the California Master Gardener Network Web site (<http://cmgn.ucdavis.edu>) showing how to access information about Master Gardener programs in individual California counties.

individual from each county for that county Web page. The person can be the advisor or a staff employee or a volunteer designated by the Advisor. Password protection assures that the content of the individual county Web pages is limited to those articles approved by the horticulture advisor in that county.

Material to be placed on the regional or state pages is held before publishing on the internet until the Network "Webmaster" approves the material. Confirmation via e-mail from the advisor supervising the author or peer review by three horticulture advisors in the State is required before material is published on these pages.

II. Future Developments and Goals:

Searchable Database. This aspect of the Web page network is a future development that is dependent on the level of interest in the Division and the ability to volunteers are not likely to have the time needed to develop and maintain such a major offering. This section could possibly be linked to other UC Web pages, but this level of coordination and time commitment would most likely require a paid, part-time position. At this stage a number of possible sources for this position

include securing off-campus funds through grants or donations, adding to the duties of Davis campus to the site is the ongoing goal now that it is operational. With support from volunteers and advisors in the State, the site will grow to provide a level of internet access for the gardening public and to become a resource for Master Gardeners as well.

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