

Got a gardening problem?

By Kym Pokorny
OSU Extension

When you've got a gardening question, try tapping out a local phone number for a customized answer instead of delving into the impersonal Internet.

The one-to-one contact could mean the difference between success and failure.

At the other end of the phone line in 28 counties sit Oregon State University Extension Service Master Gardeners poised to solve your gardening problems – or help keep them from happening in the first place.

More than 3,000 volunteers have graduated from 66 hours of intensive training in topics from insect identification to vegetable gardening. They pick up phones prepared to listen, investigate and furnish information that's been scientifically vetted, according to Gail Langellotto, statewide master gardener coordinator.

"Our tagline is 'reliable, reachable, relevant,'" she said. "We get to know your gardening situation and provide customized advice

based on your location, your preferences and your goals."

Going to the Internet to identify a plant or insect can be problematic, Langellotto noted. A gardener may notice an insect that's red and black, search those parameters and come up with a different insect.

"You may not be able to distinguish differences in the shape of the wing or type of antenna," she said. "If the insect is misidentified, it could lead to applying a pesticide on something that's not a pest. Or you may kill something beneficial for the garden. You need the correct ID to solve your problem."

Wading through plant descriptions online can be onerous, too, said Brooke Edmunds, an Extension horticulturist. Websites sometimes contradict each other, and some offer only the most basic or vague information. Growing a plant correctly depends on knowing its needs.

Does it do best in sun or shade, moist soil or dry? How much fertilizer does it need?

How and when should you prune it? Will it grow too big for the planned space or send out roots to disturb the sidewalk? What about cold and heat hardiness? There are so many questions.

By calling Extension master gardeners and horticulturists like Edmunds, you'll get personalized information based on your particular problems and needs, all answered with a one-on-one phone call instead of time-consuming visits to multiple websites.

"In my mind, that's a really important place master gardeners come into play," she said. "They stop and really figure out the situation."

Edmunds pointed out that the research-based information is appropriate for all gardeners' viewpoints.

"All options are presented," she said. "We're showing everything that works. People can choose what fits best into how they like to garden."

Check with your county Extension office (www.extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes) or call 541-548-6088 for more information.



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