



Without a doubt we saw an increase in the interest in gardening and landscaping over the previous year. In the past, you had to know who to ask or what book to look in to find information on how to garden. Today the places to find information are endless. Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter and the internet all have gardening information that is easily shared among friends and followers alike. Sometimes these ideas are tried and true while others are more “too good to be true.” I might not be the first to say it, but you can’t believe everything you read on the internet.

When searching online, it can be difficult to figure out the source of the information. Sometimes the information comes handed down or it comes from unreliable information observed by one or a handful of individuals. Other times the information comes from groups or individuals with an agenda for or against a certain thing. Whenever you see something online, be sure to do a little research before you add the practice to your own garden.

Through my job with Nebraska Extension, I educate people using science-based information that comes from research. This ensures the information that I give out has been researched by numerous people and has been found to be consistent in a number of settings and conditions.

Land-grant universities are good sources of information. To make sure you get science-based gardening information, you can find university extension resources online. The easiest way to find university information while you are searching online is to add the command “site:.edu” or “AND extension” to your search.

One of the most common sources for misinformation is with homemade pesticide options. Be sure to research the safety and efficacy of these products before applying in the landscape or garden. Epsom salts, a common homemade pesticide ingredient, should be used indoors instead of the landscape. Epsom salts are magnesium sulfate. In slightly alkaline pH soils, like in most of Nebraska, magnesium is readily available. A soil test should be performed prior to applying any product to make sure the soil is deficient in magnesium. Epsom salts in the landscape is not recommended because it leaches easily from the soil and can act as a potential water contaminant.

Vinegar, the wonder substance of the internet. It can multitask so well in the house; it must be useful outdoors too. There are many homemade recipes that use vinegar as a cure-all for one thing or another in the landscape. Vinegar is an effective weed killer, but not the household type. Household white vinegar is about 5% acetic acid. Household vinegar will burn the top back on the weeds, but has a difficult time killing the roots on larger plants. The weed killing vinegar, or horticulture vinegar, is 20% acetic acid. It works much faster, but also has a tough time killing the roots on larger plants. Caution has to be used with the 20% acetic acid. Vinegar is also not very effective to prevent or cure disease problems; it can burn back good plants just like weeds. It is not a good fertilizer either. Acetic acid only contains hydrogen and oxygen, elements the plant can get from the air. The only thing vinegar is really good for in the landscape is killing very young weeds.

‘Research it before you apply it’ should be the new motto to follow. Check reputable resources to make sure what you are reading is safe and tested for that particular problem. A little research upfront can save you from applying a mixture that won’t fix your problem. Save your vinegar for making pickles instead of applying it to the landscape.

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