



Q & A

Who Can Answer My Gardening Questions?

Even the most experienced gardeners need growing guidance sometimes. The good news? Help is often closer than you think, if you know where to look. Here is a list of trusted resources to consult.

ASK EXTENSION PANEL

As a member of this group, I see firsthand the expertise and helpfulness master gardeners offer. Visit ask2extension.org, submit a gardening question and we will answer it to the best of our ability. Panelists research, consult one another and reach out to horticulture professors and professionals as needed. Or, search the site's recently submitted questions—oftentimes someone else has faced your conundrum and received helpful advice.

LOCAL MASTER GARDENER HOTLINES

Some of the best advice comes from people living closest to you. Many county master gardeners will answer your questions—to find them, search keywords “master gardeners” and “extension” along with your question and the name of your state. In Minnesota, you'll find a website listing phone numbers for each county and the option to ask questions virtually. Call your county's number, leave your information and a local master gardener will return your call with answers.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA LANDSCAPE ARBORETUM

Staffed by master gardener volunteers, the Arboretum's Yard and Garden Line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call (612) 301-7590.

SOIL TESTING LABS

To learn about the quality of your soil, contact your state's soil testing lab. Search “soil test” and “edu” to find one near you. Your lab will provide directions for getting a sample and sending it to them. This service usually costs \$15 to \$20 and is a useful way to unearth any nutrient deficiencies in your soil.

PLANT DISEASE CLINICS

Most state universities also have a laboratory that will test for bacterial, fungal, viral and other plant issues. When an easy answer isn't surfacing during your research, this can be a lifeline. Search “plant disease clinic” and the name of your state.



Master gardeners from many counties staff local garden markets.

ONLINE SUPPORT

Sleuthing on your own before reaching out for answers? Be wary of amateur advice and the many sites serving up inaccurate tips. For information you can trust, include “edu” in your internet search—state university extension sites offer reliable professional advice on a variety of topics. The University of Minnesota Extension site covers many topics, from lawn care to growing guides, and offers a plant search function. Subscribe to e-newsletters, such as its Yard and Garden News, for timely and regional horticultural information, and try the University of Minnesota's diagnostic tools to identify weeds, insects and plant issues.

ASK THE EXPERT COLUMN

Look no further! Let us know what challenges you're facing in the garden, and we'll find answers and maybe even share in *Northern Gardener*. This column appears in each quarterly issue of the magazine and addresses your questions about growing in USDA Hardiness Zones 3, 4 and 5. Contact us at info@northerngardener.org.