



The sheer volume of free information available makes the Internet a resource that cannot be ignored.

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For fast answers, the Internet is the place to be. The Internet is a good place to start whether it is to solve an insect problem, order a mower part or check out recommended seed vari-

eties. Even more important than the Web sites listed below may be the many links from these sites to other key URLs.

A warning with using the Internet: don't fall into the "familiarity breeds contempt" trap. Local university and turfgrass experts still have the best handle on the local agronomic situation. The University of Florida's site is a good example of a great resource. It's a mistake to think that just because someone has an Internet site or is located far away, they know more than the local experts.

However, when the local dealer can't locate a part or where you want to find out "how the other guy does it," the Internet is a great vehicle. There are even some "fun" sites which will help eat up hours on rainy days or can be referenced in your customer newsletter.

The Internet is a solid-waste dump of information. Considered on the whole, there is precious little organization and fewer quality sites than poor ones. Yet the sheer volume of free information available makes it a resource that cannot be ignored. Search engines help. But all they really do is narrow the field by creating sometimes-giant lists of sites that contain words specified in initial search terms.

What follows is a listing of what we consider to be some of the better lawn care and turfgrass sites on the World Wide Web. How did we find them? We began by using search engines—primarily AltaVista, Hotbot, Infoseek

and Excite. Later, we simply followed links from pages we'd already found in search of other promising material.

The sites we've listed here tend to be the most information-rich sites we could find. We also put a premium on pages that were easiest to navigate. A good example of this is floridaturf. This page features a very slick design that loads quickly. Cyberlawn is another page that is easy to navigate, though it does take a while to load.

If a design award were to accompany this article, the homepages of the now-defunct Lawn Institute (<http://www.lawninstitute.com>) would win it hands down. It is clean, elegant and very simple. Get there, if you can, before it is taken down.

Some sites really wowed us with content. Others had cool tools from which turfgrass and lawn care professionals could genuinely profit. We tended to bypass sites that simply listed abstracts or even full text publications.

A pro's guide to 'surfin' turf



Even with the find features most web browsers have, these sites can be very difficult to search. Others sites not included in this list were those that charged an access fee, such as the Turfgrass Information Center at Michigan State University. Though it is widely praised and was temporarily available, free-of-charge, while the MSU library tested its new interface, the connect fee was to be replaced well before press time.

Irrigation Association

<http://www.irri-gate.com/>

Everyone knows the way to find information on the Web is to use a search engine. But everyone who has used a search engine knows that even if you're a power user familiar with Boolean logic, field or phrase searching, the results you get are nine-tenths junk. David Zoldoske, director of the Center of Irrigation Technology at California State University, Fresno, has an answer for anyone interested in surfing up irrigation info. Irri-gate.com is a slick little search engine developed by the Irrigation Association.

Billed as an "irrigation-specific" engine, slick is the operant word here. It features a pretty good variety of search options ranging from standard keyword searching to field, title and URL searching and even relevancy ranking.

It also features a variety of non-standard search features, such as "What's New," "What's Popular," sounds-like and synonym searching. All this is available in a handy user template that allows visitors to pick search options from two pull-down menus.

Laura Dorsey, IA's Webmaster, said they use two bots to scan the Internet every 90 days and also collect Web sites via an automatic URL submit-site function. In operation for 1.5 years, Dorsey estimates the engine database has 60,000 pages.

USGA Green Section

<http://www.usga.org/green/>

Staying current in the golf course construction and maintenance game means keeping up with what's new with the U.S. Golf Association. The best place to do that, according to Charles Mancino, Penn State Extension turfgrass management specialist, is the Green Section of the USGA site.

This Web page could serve as a model for organization. It uses a file folder design metaphor to direct visitors to areas of interest. Some of the featured areas offer services like USGA's Turf Advisory Service and its Construction and Environmental Education Programs.

The site also lists all the research USGA is funding and has a download section containing a baker's dozen of articles on golf course construction and maintenance.

Lofts Seed Inc.

<http://www.turf.com/>

An outfit with a URL like this one either beats everybody in the turf industry to the Web, or paid top-dollar to one of those outfits that buys up all the good domain names and resells them to people who really want them.

Either way, they topped this great Web address with a well done, consistent design that includes a modest amount

of animation. This site proves, once again, you can project a conservative, professional image without looking stodgy.

It begins with a consistent background of (guess what!) grass with overlaid pictures used as links to pages deeper within the site. The design also incorporates a judicious use of frames for those less inclined toward visual navigation.

But what really sets this site apart from many others in the industry is that someone taught the Lofts people about the value of creating a virtual com-



munity around their product lines. Instead of just posting pictures about their products, Lofts created a virtual place to stop and learn about what they sell and, even more importantly, who they are.

Got a lawn care question? Click on "Ask the Experts" and email your question to one of their product specialists. Want to know at which trade show you can find them next? Click on their calendar. Want to know more about Lofts than what kind of seed they sell? Check out their press releases. The company history is here, too, if you want to read it. But

perhaps one of the more interesting parts of this site is their testimonial area. You know the famous places that use our seed? Our favorite was the one about the Pentagon.

Cyberlawn

<http://opei.mow.org/>

Anyone who has ever had to crunch out a newsletter for customers knows how difficult it can be to find worthwhile material to include.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's Cyberlawn site is packed with lots of easy-to-digest information on lawn-mower repair, maintenance

and safety topics. One of the neatest parts of this site is its Kids Section. It features a number of mower safety-related coloring pages that can be printed out easily. Of course, you'll need to get permission from OPEI to use these in your newsletters. There are also some interactive activities for children that are also safety-related.

Be sure to log in to the Mower Repair Shop section for information on engine tune-up, seasonal maintenance and fuel handling tips. There is also a collection of equipment service listings.

One other section worthy of note is a seasonal safety and maintenance calendar for a wide variety of outdoor power equipment.

EXTOXNET

<http://ace.orst.edu/info/extoxnet/>

EXTOXNET is an acronym for the Extension Toxicology

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Network. It's not pretty, but it works. This searchable database is designed to explain toxicological risk from pesticides in laymen's terms. The engine is being constructed by Extension toxicologists from the University of California at Davis, Cornell University, Oregon State University (it is housed on their servers), University of Idaho and Michigan State University.

You won't need a doctorate in soil science or toxicology to figure out the results of your searches on this engine. Plug in a simple brand name, such as Dyfonate, and EXTTOXNET returns a page listing the active ingredient. Click on the ingredient (fonofos, in this example) and you get a page with brand names, labeled uses, chemical class, formulation, regulatory status, toxicological and ecological effects, environmental fate, physical properties, manufacturer's contact information--all in plain English.

Other useful information on this site includes pesticide information profiles and toxicology information in brief, written in simple language.

Texas Plant Disease Handbook
<http://cygnus.tamu.edu/Texlab/Lawns/lawq.html>

If you want to confirm that spot on the lawn you are working on is indeed brown patch, or if you just need a lawn and turfgrass disease refresher, look no further than the Texas Plant Disease Handbook. Part of a much larger index that also covers farm crops, ornamentals and trees, the Texas Plant Disease Handbook is the work of Texas A&M University.

Beginning on the left side of the page, users select the grass

(or host) species from a list of 10 warm- and cool-season grasses. They then select a causal agent, such as algal, fungal or nematodes, from a list of seven disease agents. There is also a keyword descriptor box for search terms, such as "root rot" or "wilt" on the far right.

The engine chugs a little bit and kicks out a page that has the name, a picture of what the disease looks like, a short text covering symptoms in both warm- and cool-season grasses and management/control techniques.

Weed Science Society of America

<http://ext.agn.uiuc.edu/wssa/>

We always knew there was a trade group for nearly everyone, right? Well, weed scientists have one now, and it is Weed Science Society of America.

"Members include academia and industry personnel from North America primarily and secondarily from around the world," said David Pike, WSSA's Webmaster. "We sponsor an annual meeting to promote research and scholarship in this area."

Maintained on the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana Extension Service Web server, WSSA's Web site is a virtual compendium of information about weeds and weed control.

WSSA's Web site has a photo database of more than 200 weeds, links to the federal noxious weed site, information about chemicals and various

search engines useful for identifying weeds.

One of the more interesting parts of this site is a genealogy chart for 18 weed control chemical



manufacturers. Even if you were never curious about who was merged and acquired to create such agri-industry giants as AgrEvo, this page will show you what happened to old vanished chemical giants like Mobay, Pennwalt and Ciba-Geigy.

Useful? Not really. Interesting maybe.

These folks have have pretty comprehensive links to pesticide safety pages, a list of herbicides and their chemical names and a page with links to federal agencies that regulate pesticide use. It also has a page listing Web sites for most of the herbicide manufacturers in the world.

floridaturf
<http://www.floridaturf.com/>

Here's a site that is essentially a huge library of information on warm-season turfgrasses. Designed, built and maintained by Dr. Philip Busey, an associate professor of

environmental horticulture at the University of Florida at Fort Lauderdale, it was originally put up as a classroom site.

Busey, who has more than 20 years experience as a turfgrass researcher, said he created the site in late 1997. "After using two University servers to distribute class materials, I found it too difficult to post materials in a timely manner and (use a variety of Web tools)," he said.

He also never liked the length of the URLs he was assigned. So, he bought his distinctive domain name and pays \$20 a month to host it.

A small part of Busey's site is dedicated to showcasing Florida's turfgrass science program and projects at the Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center. Students can find the curriculum, links to other classes, study guides at other universities and even old exams there.

The site features in-depth sections covering Bahia, St. Augustine, Bermuda and zoysia grasses. It also has a gigantic list of links, filed in intuitive, easy-to-follow categories.

Look for additional Web sites of interest to landscape and grounds professionals in future issues of Landscape Management. If you have one that you would like to see featured in LM's "Surfin' Turf, please let us know at (440) 891-2636; fax, (440) 891-2683; e-mail, rhall@advanstar.com