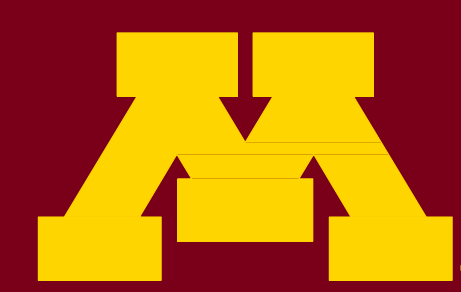


Minnesota Yard & Garden Ask an Expert Builds Relevancy and Value Answering Questions

Julie Weisenhorn, Extension Educator, Horticulture

Jackie Froemming, Extension Educator, Master Gardener Volunteer Program



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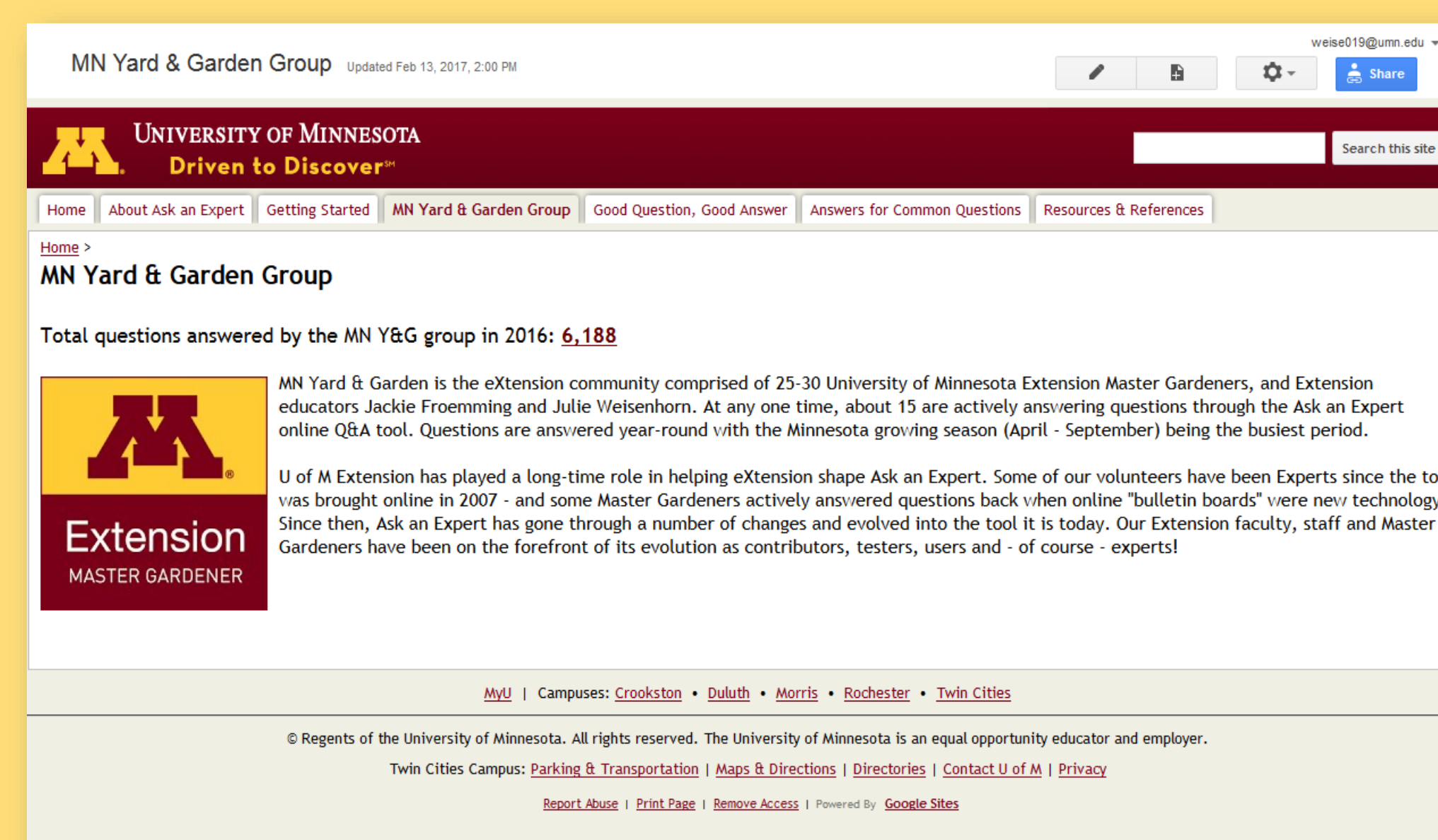


Presenting Issue

Changes in technology, information culture and individuals' expectations have required Extension to provide answers in ways that fit current lifestyles. **Ask an Expert** (AaE) is an online question-answer tool hosted and supported by National Cooperative Extension (eXtension.org) and state university Extension colleges. On the surface, AaE serves as an efficient way for Extension to help citizens get answers to their problems. Citizens may submit questions on their own time and attach photos to their submission improving response accuracy and speed especially with plant identification and diagnosis. On a deeper level, AaE provides a powerful tool that strengthens Extension's relevancy and value to a certain audience segment, connecting them to their land grant university, its research, and its people.

Extension's Programmatic Response

The **Minnesota Yard & Garden Ask an Expert** is led by horticulture Extension educators and is a volunteer activity available to Master Gardener volunteers (MG). It is part of the larger eXtension.org Horticulture community of practice. Minnesota has been a leader in online Q&A since 2001 and AaE since 2007. MG are introduced to AaE at annual core course training.



An AaE MN Google site provides resources and instructions. Volunteers receive questions via their email, research solutions, and respond directly to the submitter via AaE. Individuals may field as many questions as they wish, opting out as needed. Topics range from basic plant ID to more complex explanations of landscape best practices to invasive species. Volunteers are mentored by experienced colleagues and Extension educators. Group members assist each other with challenging questions via a private listserv. To-date (2017), MG have answered 5,141 questions from Minnesotans.

Target Audiences

Target audiences are traditional Extension users. User demographics note the average user (91.3% of respondents) is female, white, college graduate, and age 50-64. Approximately 8.7% of respondents identified as non-white. (Source: <https://ask.extension.org/expert/data/demo-graphics>)

Why Extension?

People see Extension as a valuable resource for horticulture information as evidenced by the 8.2 million visits to the Extension Garden webpage and the extensive outreach achieved by our network of 2,380 Master Gardener volunteers. The AaE technology combined with knowledgeable volunteers enables Extension to reach people in various ways and help them solve their gardening questions.

Behavior and Action Outcomes

Per an exit survey from eXtension.org, the AaE user experience is positive: 80% of 6,872 respondents indicate they are "satisfied" or "completely satisfied" with the answer they received from members of the Minnesota Yard & Garden group. Behavior change is also anticipated based on advice from the Minnesota Yard & Garden group: (Source: https://z.umn.edu/AaE_MNYG)

To what extent have you changed a practice or behavior based on the answer you received?	
Overall Response rate	20.0% (51,564 / 257,787)
No extent, I have not changed a practice or behavior	19640 (38.1%)
Some extent, I'm considering changing a practice or behavior	8823 (17.1%)
Moderate extent, I'm in the planning stages for changing a practice or behavior	12349 (23.9%)
Great extent, I have changed a practice or behavior	10752 (20.9%)

Of the "experts" that were also surveyed, 72% of respondents ranked the experience of answering questions as a 4 or higher on a scale of 1-5, 5 being best. 54.8% felt they received the right number of questions. (Source: https://z.umn.edu/AaE_MiscData)

Broader Impacts

Partnerships: MN Department of Agriculture, MN Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association. MG Bob Bystrom positively identified a new infestation of black swallow-wort from pictures submitted by a homeowner. Bob connected the homeowner via AaE system with the MDA Arrest-the-Pest program.

Connections: Extension, agencies, resources, research. People submitting questions will often reply to the experts with follow up questions, with questions prompted after reading the suggested Extension materials, or simply to say "Thank you for your help!".

Support for Poster Creation



The Master Gardener Volunteer Program is growing with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.