

# Online gardener

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## The Computer Gardener

The computer will never do for gardening anything like what it has done for the office for one simple reason. The large majority of gardeners do not think of themselves as information consumers. Those sources of information that gardeners do use--seed catalogs, gardening magazines, county extension agents, advice from nurseryman and fellow gardeners--are deeply rooted in the very ritual of gardening itself. That is, the backyard gardener will turn to any of these traditional sources of information without ever considering how the computer could meet his or her gardening information needs. This is only natural and it will likely remain this way for the large majority of gardeners.

Those of us who use computers, however, recognize other possibilities. A garden software developer that I spoke to recently told me of his initial vision of computers in nurseries and garden centers all over the country. Customers with gardening problems could use these systems for interactive computer assistance. His vision was not an unreasonable one, but it has not come to pass. Whether this is due to a shortage of garden software, the expense of computers, or a public that has not yet accepted the computer is difficult to say. Undoubtedly it is a combination of these and other such factors.

Yet clearly the computer can do a great deal as evidenced by the phenomenal growth of computers in agriculture. The difference is that farmers are clearly information consumers and the profitability of their operation often depends on an intelligent handling of information--whether it be their own budgets and accounts, their livestock feed schedules and ratios, or fertilizer computations.

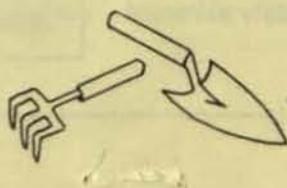
In gardening the situation is different. Those who garden love gardening and are seldom motivated by profits and losses. The computer gardener is clearly an anomaly, but with good reason. The backyard gardener does not have to be a professional to appreciate the potential of the computer.

At present the computer gardener has a very limited amount of software from which to choose. Fortunately new programs are being released all the time. We can only hope that with these new products will come greater power, sophistication, and versatility. The real benefit that the computer offers the backyard gardener is the

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## Tracking Insect Activity Using a Home Computer

*The following article is an excerpt from the forthcoming book: 60 Minute Flower Garden by Charles Cresson and Jeff Ball.*

Many gardeners don't realize that insects appear or emerge in their flower and vegetable gardens about the same time every year, year in and year out. The differences from year to year are in days not weeks. Their emergence is dependent on temperature, moisture, and the availability of food, and those conditions occur in your garden pretty predictably each year, plus or minus a few days.

If you know when the bad guys will be arriving in your garden, then you are in a much better position to do something about repelling or controlling them. One of the benefits of using a home computer for managing the garden is the ease in keeping track of insect emergence

times each year. I know when my Japanese beetles emerge every year. It is a few days on either side of June 2nd. So I have my Japanese beetle bug bag all mounted and primed with fresh attractant, so as those voracious bugs emerge from my lawn, a large percentage of them are immediately trapped and killed. I have few problems with Japanese beetles because I no longer have to wait until they become a serious problem before I begin my control activities.

Soon you will be able to buy a computer program for your home computer that will help you predict the emergence of various garden pest insects. [See new product announcement for the "Garden Manager" --Editor] Such a program is now available (called "Bugtimer") for controlling certain insects in the agricultural industry, so it will not be long before such a program is available to the homeowner.

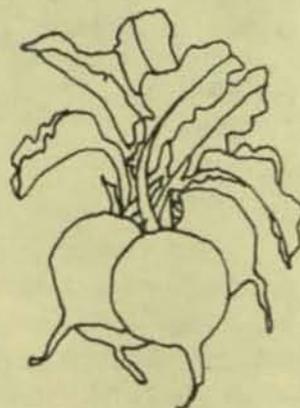
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ability to interact with a program in ways not possible with conventional print information. Garden planning programs now offer such interaction, though some programs also result in a loss of choices and flexibility. Garden databases likewise need to offer flexible and useful retrieval capabilities. In short software developers should not underestimate the whims of the gardener. It is in preserving these choices that garden software will fulfill its potential.

To take full advantage of the computer, garden software developers need to do far more than merely repackage print information to be viewed onscreen. Nor can ease of use be sacrificed. As these needs are addressed and as garden software becomes increasingly more useful, more people will find a place for it in their garden planning. In addition to these concerns a number of problems need to be addressed. Currently garden software is unavailable for a number of popular home computers. Likewise some aspects of gardening, such as insect control and treatment, have not been adequately addressed despite great potential.

When I began *The Online Gardener* I had some concern that there would not be enough information to justify a newsletter with such a narrow focus. What I have found in the past year is that there is in fact much being done and the gardener has good reason to hope for ever improving software--even if the vision of a computer in every home have not been realized.



*The Mother Earth News* spring "Green Thumbs and Blue Ribbons" issue (No. 15) includes an article on gardening software that will be of interest to *Online Gardener* readers.

# Letters To the Editor

## DISAPPOINTMENT WITH ORTHO

"The Ortho program is a great disappointment. The plant list is far too limited and there is no way to add other plants. . . . Having to start with DOS and then if one uses the calendar and notepad, to have to exchange disks in drive A -- Too much struggling. . . . Ortho's program might be OK for a strictly beginning gardener who doesn't know a poppy from a petunia, does not read the good seed and nursery catalogs, and doesn't mind the diskette switching."

-- Mrs. Frisoe Mullins  
Warwick, Bermuda

Dear Mrs. Mullins:

*Thank you for sharing your impressions with us. One feature that Ortho is rumored to be working on for the next version of their Computerized Gardening is the ability to add additional plants. As for the calendar and notepad components of the program--you are right. These do not really add anything to the program. Ortho would do better to drop these two features and use the extra disk space for additional plants or a more substantial database.*

-- The Editor

## GARDEN PLANNING AND APPLE

"Our garden is based on the square-foot method from the book and television series by that name. Initially we thought the computer program CompuGarden was just what we needed. To our dismay it is for IBM and compatibles. We own a 512K Macintosh and an Apple IIe. Help--can you suggest an alternative or modified program?"

-- Ann Wilson  
Fort Bragg, North Carolina

Dear Ann:

*You are right in that CompuGarden is only available for the IBM PC and IBM compatibles. Two alternatives (available for your Apple IIe) would be Plantin' Pal (Home & Hobby Software, 4936 Morgan Ave. South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55409) or The Gardener's Assistant (Shannon Software, 2912 Pine Spring Rd., Falls Church, Virginia 22042). Plantin' Pal is designed to accomodate 20" wide rows, while The Gardener's Assistant can also be adjusted for wide row planting.*

-- The Editor

## ATARI & TRS-80 IN THE GARDEN

"I would like to know if I could get the vegetable garden planning program for home computers. I have an Atari and a Radio Shack Model 4 computer. If you don't have the program could you tell me where I could get a program like that for my computers? I want to get the most out of my computers and I enjoy gardening."

-- Alan Dock  
New Bremen, Ohio

Dear Alan:

*There are three different garden planning programs available for home computer owners, but unfortunately none for either Atari or Radio Shack computers. In lieu of such a program for your micro, you may consider the CompuGarden service "A Blueprint for Your Green Thumb." CompuGarden will produce a computer-generated garden plan according to your specifications. The service is quite thorough including planting schedules and fertilizer recommendations. CompuGarden charges \$29.95 for the service. For more information write CompuGarden, 725 Richmond Ave., Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.*

-- The Editor

# CompuGarden: Software Success

By Jeff Luck

CompuGarden is the sole software produced by the company of the same name located in Silver Spring, Maryland. The program tailors a garden plan based on a set of criteria provided by the operator; the company, in fact, offers a service for individual gardens which appears to be based on the CompuGarden program.

The program can be thought of as two parallel programs consisting of a planning disk and a database disk. After a sequence of disk formatting operations, the user draws the garden onscreen and "fills" the appropriate planting areas. The program also allows for labeling of obstructions around the garden, such as well-houses, driveways, etc. The program supports a maximum garden size of 10,000 square feet, although only a fraction of the garden is displayed at any one time. The

entire garden can be viewed by using the cursor to display different "fields" of the garden.

After the dimensions of the garden have been outlined, CompuGarden moves into the second planning phase: planting. Through a series of inquiry screens,

**"Overall, CompuGarden is a most impressive program which can be recommended without reservation."**

CompuGarden outlines the desired vegetables and the type of soil (determined by the user's ZIP code) for the garden plan. Subsequently, the program covers the types of fertilizer and pH modifiers (organic vs. synthetic) to be used by the gardener. The program allows for considerable flexibility: at every stage, the user can modify the plan before saving it. CompuGarden also allows a "companion plant" option which calculates companion herbs and flowers to complement vegetables in the garden. It might be pointed out, as CompuGarden's documentation does, that the theory of companion plants has not been scientifically supported.

CompuGarden's analysis of the garden (on an IBM-PC with two disk drives) was the slowest part of the process, although the program keeps a running tab of what function it is performing at a particular instant. The result is a garden plan which can be modified and which the program can rotate in future planting seasons.

A database containing 80 vegetables, herbs and flowers forms the basis for the program and can be expanded to 100 vegetables and 25 herbs and flowers. The information provided for each plant is exhaustive, including physical, planting and nutritive specifics. Gardeners can access the database independently of the garden planning program.

## CompuGarden

CompuGarden  
725 Richmond Avenue  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
(301) 587-7995

Available for the IBM PC and PC compatibles.  
Requires 192K RAM (two disk drives recommended).

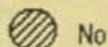
\$69.95  
(Through May 9th members of the National Gardening Association can take advantage of a \$59.95 discount.)



One disk . . . . .	Poor
Two disks . . . . .	Fair
Three disks . . . . .	Good
Four disks . . . . .	Excellent



Garden Planning Programs A Comparison of Features	CompuGarden	Gardener's Assistant	Plantin' Pal
Computer	IBM PC	Commodore Apple, IBM	Commodore Apple, IBM
Memory Required	192K	48K	48K
Other Requirements	None	None	Graphics Adapter
Price	\$69.95	\$29.95 - \$45.00	\$29.95
Number of Vegetables	80 <sup>1</sup>	55	40
User May Add More Plants	50	50	0
Wide Row Planting	●	●	●
Single Row Planting	●	●	◐
Calculates Amounts to Plant	●	●	●
Adjust Amounts to Plant	●	●	●
Displays Garden Onscreen	●	●	●
Adjust Plant Positions	◐	●	◐
Companion Planting Option	●	◐	●
Calculates Succession Planting	●	◐	◐
Crop Rotation Option	●	◐ <sup>2</sup>	◐ <sup>2</sup>
Calculates Fertilizer Needs	●	◐	◐
Save & Edit Garden Plan	●	●	◐
Print Garden Layout & Schedule	●	●	●

<sup>1</sup> Includes herbs and flowers<sup>2</sup> May be done manually**Number of Vegetables**

Basic plant data supplied with program

**User May Add More Plants**

Number of additional vegetables that can be accommodated by the program

**Wide Row Planting**

Program allows for at least 20 inch wide row planting

**Single Row Planting**

Program supports standard single row planting

**Calculates Amount to Plant**

Program estimates plant to yield ratio

**Adjust Amounts to Plant**

User can modify program recommendations

**Displays Garden Onscreen**

Garden layout may be viewed onscreen

**Adjust Plant Positions**

User may modify onscreen layout

**Companion Planting Option**

Program supports companion planting

**Calculates Succession Planting**

Program supports progressive spring, summer, fall, and winter planting schedules

**Crop Rotation Option**

Program automatically tracks season-to-season crop rotation

**Calculates Fertilizer Needs**

Program recommends organic or commercial chemical needs

**Save & Edit Garden Plan**

User can save garden plan and recall for editing

**Print Garden Layout & Schedule**

Program provides printed garden map with schedule

## New Products & Services

### Taxonomic Computer Research Releases New Database

Taxonomic Computer Research has released its Plant Database Library for the IBM PC and compatibles. The library includes database modules that are used in conjunction with the popular PC-File shareware program or dBase II or III. Three modules are available now: Woody Plant Module, Herbaceous Perennials Module, and Ornamental Conifers Module. (A Tropical/House Plant Module is scheduled for release in August.)

The database library contains information on over 2,000 plants. In addition the user can add up to 1,000 records of his or her own choosing. The Online Gardener will review the program fully in the near future. Each module sells for \$30. For more information write Taxonomic Computer Research, Box 5747, Raleigh, North Carolina 27605-5747.

### Keeping Up With the Bugs

Suburban Homesteaders plans to release their "Garden Manager" in the next "month or so." The program will help the home gardener track and predict pest activity in your garden. See related story on page two.

We do not yet have information on the program's price and system requirements. We will pass that on to you as soon as we can. In the mean time those needing more information can write Suburban Homesteaders, 17 Greenhill Road, Springfield, PA 19064.

### Ortho Delays Mac Program

Ortho Information Services has postponed release of the Macintosh version of their Computerized Gardening program "due to programming difficulties." "We are now planning to have the package ready by October" they write.

### Review Reprints Available

The Online Gardener offers review reprints to those of you who may have missed earlier program reviews. Those available include Plantin' Pal, The Gardener's Assistant, Ortho Computerized Gardening, DaVinci Landscapes, and Design Your Own Home Landscape. Copies of these reviews are available for a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (Please specify which reviews you would like.)

### Don't Let Your Subscription to The Online Gardener Expire !

The Online Gardener is the only publication of its kind and the only publication regularly reviewing garden software.

To renew your subscription complete the below form and return with a check for \$8 to: The Online Gardener, P.O. Box 803, Watkinsville, Georgia 30677.

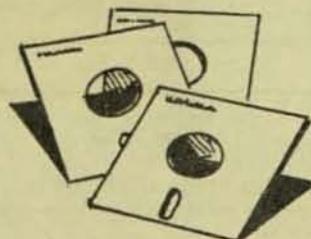
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_



The Online Gardener (ISSN 8756-7490) is published four times a year in the winter, spring, summer, and fall. The quarterly newsletter is not system-specific, but instead covers many different computers and applications in the yard and garden. Readers are encouraged to contribute articles, reviews, news, and suggestions. Subscriptions are \$8 a year and all correspondence should be addressed to:

**The Online Gardener**

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