How to Research an Inquiry

Sources for Helpline research:

BOOKS
ELECTRONIC ROLODEX
INTERNET
HELPLINE HAPPENINGS
HELPLINE FORMS BINDER
ELECTRONIC LOGBOOK DATA
FELLOW MASTER GARDENERS AND OFFICE PROFESSIONALS

In all cases, while conducting your research, use only information that is strictly science-based and up to date. **Additionally, it is particularly important to consult several trusted sources for answers and not rely on only the first source for the resolution of a question.**

BOOKS:

- Books are arranged on shelves numerically within color-coded subject areas.
- Some information in books is timeless but some can be out of date. Check the publication date and evaluate the information. Cross-check it against other trusted sources for verification.

ELECTRONIC ROLODEX

- Rolodex icon is found on the home screen of the computers.
- The rolodex includes Rutgers fact sheets as well as other vetted documents.
- Use the search feature to look for publications related to your problem. You must be exact in your choice of words as the Rolodex is unable to guess at misspelled or inaccurate words.
- Links to fact sheets and pdfs will show up highlighted within the text of each listing. Click the links to open the references.
- While the material contained in the Rolodex is checked periodically for accuracy, always cross-check against other trusted sources.

INTERNET SEARCH:

- Google icon is on the home screen of the computers.
- Type in the search words for the case and then type in site:edu; site:gov; or site:org at the end of your search phrase. This suffix in the search phrase directs the search to particular classes of websites for review
  - site:edu will yield education (university) program websites
  - site:gov will yield government (such as the USDA) websites
  - site:org will yield organization (botanical gardens, non-profit, etc.) websites.
- Vet the information found in a .org site as not all non-profits and organizations are created equal.
- To access Cooperative Extension articles, type the word *extension* or the abbreviation *ext* after the search phrase. This will yield extension articles. However, do not just rely on them in your

research as many are very out of date. Cross-check these articles against .edu, .gov, and .org articles for verification of accuracy.

- Web sources can only be quoted from .edu, .gov, or .org sites. Do not rely on a .com (commercial) website or blog for your research. The information on these sites can be anecdotal or based on limited observations and not on rigorous scientific experimentation. Information from .com sites must **never** be shared with the public.
- If researching an inquiry that is regional in nature, use resources based more local to Mercer County, NJ, such as Rutgers, Cornell, Penn State, and Maryland. If the inquiry is more general, feel free to use general information from sources around the country if solutions given are not specific to that location.
- A time saver while searching is to right click on the computer mouse on a listing on the search page and click on the directive "open link in new tab." After perusing the whole search page and opening each interesting link in a new tab, all the targeted articles will be present across the top menu bar each with their own tab. Arranged as such it is easy to toggle among them while reading and choosing what to include in the inquiry response.

HELPLINE HAPPENINGS:

- Hanging on a ring on the Office bulletin board, on the MGofMC website under the Helpline tab in the Members Only section, and in the Helpline Happenings folder on the computer desktop.
- Topics are cases that commonly have been seen on Helpline in the past.
- Articles are written using current science-based research.

HELPLINE FORMS BINDER:

- White binder on the front counter in the Office.
- The same question as the current one at hand may have come in recently and already been researched and filed in the binder.

ELECTRONIC LOGBOOK DATA

- A folder has been added to the desktop giving access to the electronic logbook data. This is searchable so past questions can be referenced to avoid duplicating work. Please note this is current to the previous month only.

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- Work as a team when tackling a question. Perhaps another MG on the shift has some knowledge about the topic at hand and can start, or even finish, the question.
- Similarly, if the County Horticulturist or Agricultural Agent is available, they may be able to contribute to the research of a particularly difficult case.