

Judging Reliability & Credibility of Websites

Some tips to help you evaluate web pages

If you've ever used a search engine on the Internet, you may have had the feeling that you could very well drown in the thousands of pages it retrieved.

Then, too, with the ease on online access, anyone can put something on the Internet, can say anything that comes to mind, and can keep the "information" available indefinitely or pull it without notice or explanation.

So, each time you go to the Internet to research a topic, consider at least a few of these points to help judge the reliability and credibility of the websites you visit:

- Check the domain name; sites ending in .edu, .gov, .us, and .mil are generally considered more credible than are .org, .com, or .net.
- Check the author's background and credits to determine reliability.
- Check the publishing date; pages with more recent dates may be more credible.
- Determine the focus: Research-based, popular wisdom or personal opinion?
- Determine the content of the information: Qualified and impartial, or biased?
- Determine the sponsor and motives for the site: Educational, promotional, or sales?
- If the information goes against what you know, or if it's new to you, research it further to verify, or not.

The bottom lines:

- **Maintain a high-suspicion index**
 - **Think critically about every page you find**
 - **Realize that nothing is foolproof**
 - **Always verify that the information is appropriate for the PNW**
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For additional information:

- A Critical Guide to What You See on the Web
<http://www.ithaca.edu/library/training/think.html>
 - Evaluating Web Pages (University of California, Berkeley) – an extensive tutorial
<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html>
 - Website Evaluation Criteria (University of Idaho)
<http://www.lib.uidaho.edu/classes/websiteeval.html>
 - Evaluating Web Sites, with links to other similar sites
<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/webeval.html>
 - Criteria for Website Evaluation (University of Michigan)
<http://guides.lib.umich.edu/content.php?pid=30524>
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Note:

For an annotated list of reliable books and websites useful for Metro Master Gardeners, see *Books & Websites* (Tab L) elsewhere in this handbook.