Ask an Expert “How To”

What is Ask an Expert?

From the Public’s point of view:
- An online system for asking questions and receiving expert answers quickly on a broad range of subjects for which extension has expertise.

From the Extension Professional’s point of view:
- An efficient and modern way to apply research-based knowledge to meet the immediate needs of our clientele.
- An effective way to strengthen the visibility and reputation of Extension as a national, state, and local resource bringing knowledge to bear on current issues of everyday life.

Step-By-Step to Becoming an Ask an Expert Responder

Set Your Preferences
1. Go to http://ask.extension.org and Sign in with your eXtension ID. (Don’t have an eXtension ID? Can’t remember your password? Check the section at the end of this How To.)
2. Next to your name in the upper right hand corner, click on the drop down arrow and select My Settings, which takes you to the General settings page.
   - Complete a brief bio about yourself in About Me, add an avatar or photo, and Save changes.
   - Click the Locations menu tab. Set your state(s) and county(ies) (if appropriate). This includes any specific states for which you’re willing to be automatically assigned questions.
   - Click the Tags menu tab. Enter some words to describe your areas of expertise (e.g. horticulture, lawns, forestry).
   - Click the Answering menu tab. Complete an email signature that will be automatically attached to each of your answers. Include your title, position, and your institutional affiliation.

When you are Assigned a Question...
1. If you are assigned a question, you will get an email notification. Click on the link in the email to View the question.
2. Add tags for the question.
3. Within 24 hours, type your answer in the Send an Answer box. Review spelling, grammar and formatting, then click Send Response.
   - You can use the Search box near the top of the page to find previous answers to related questions.
   - If you decide you cannot answer this question, Reassign it to someone else or to a Question Wrangler, who will reassign it.
   - Use the following guidelines to help you.
Ask an Expert Question Response Guidelines

Always respond. If you need more time to provide a reply, if it is an inconvenient time for you, or if the question is not in your areas of expertise, please reassign the question by using the “Reassign” button on the Ask an Expert question page. If you don't know who to assign it to, click “Assign to a Question Wrangler.”

Respond quickly. The goal is to have every question answered in less than 48 hours.

Be brief and precise. Answers should be concise, with the exact answer in the first two sentences, if possible. Include links to articles and websites as appropriate, and provide source information for quotes or references. Indicate any specific differences due to geographic location or other conditions. Use language that is broadly understood, and define all scientific terminology. Avoid jargon terms or phrases.

Public vs. Private questions. When a person submits a question, they may have the option to make it public. If the question is public, you’ll see a green indicator on the question page. If you are responding to a Public question and through search, find a Public Ask an Expert answer that is applicable... link to it in your answer. It's much better to link to a good answer than to copy and paste it. If the question you’re answering is Private, it’s still good to link to a public answer, as you would any other online resource.

Omit opinion. Responders should embrace their role as educators. As faculty and staff of land grant institutions, our role is to help others learn by providing them with unbiased, research based, peer-reviewed information. If individuals have all the facts or information at their disposal, they can make educated decisions for their specific situations.

Use spell check. Verify that your responses are both grammatically correct and spelled correctly. Firefox 2.0 and higher has a built in spell checker. If you are using Internet Explorer, you can download a spell checker plug in at, http://www.iespell.com/download.php.

When a question is broad, vague, or esoteric: Don't just ignore the question. You can ask for more information or clarification, or you may decide to refer them to additional sources so they can find their own answer. e.g., “Your question requires an answer beyond the scope of the space provided for this interaction, but here are a few links or articles that might provide you with related information you have requested.”

Forgot your ID or password, OR don’t have an eXtension ID?

1. Go to the login page at http://people.extension.org, click “Forgot your password?” You’ll be asked to enter your eXtension ID OR the email you used to register with when you first signed up. You’ll be emailed directions for resetting your password.

2. If you haven't signed up, or you don't know what email address you used to sign up with, go to the sign up page at https://www.extension.org/people/signup and proceed as if you are signing up for the first time (and maybe you are). If you use the same email you used before, you’ll be alerted that you are already a member. Then you can go back to step one and enter in your email in order to reset your password.

Questions? Click the “Contact Us” link at the bottom of any Ask an Expert page.