

HOME & GARDEN

Gardening by the App

By KATE MURPHY APRIL 4, 2012

MANY gardeners may prefer digging in the dirt to fiddling with a mobile device. But an increasing number of gardening apps now available might change that attitude, by helping with tasks like designing plots and choosing crops, and perhaps improving yields. The apps range in price from free to about \$10 — although a higher price doesn't guarantee a better or more sophisticated program. Here are 10 of the freshest picks for iOS and Android devices.

GARDEN TRACKER FOR IPAD (\$3.99) AND IPHONE (99 CENTS)

This app allows you to design rectangular gardens of up to 2,500 square feet: enter the desired number of rows and columns to create a grid with a series of boxes, each one representing a square foot. Click inside each box and choose the crop you'll plant there from a list of about 65 plants typically found in kitchen gardens.

The program tells you how many of your chosen plants each square foot of your garden will accommodate. It also gives general care information including watering needs, ideal soil temperature and planting depth, and tells which plants are incompatible — say, pole beans and cabbage.

Registers for recording a variety of information (the date you planted seeds or seedlings, when you last watered and fertilized, your anticipated harvest date and which plants did the best) allow the app to function as a garden logbook. And a

handy reference list of garden pests helps identify troubling bugs and blight, with advice on eradicating them. There is a great lunar-phase feature, in case you like to garden in sync with the moon.

HOME OUTSIDE FOR IPHONE AND IPAD (\$2.99)

While Garden Tracker is limited to rectangular plots, Home Outside allows you to create intricate and varied landscapes. Five starter templates can be manipulated in myriad ways to suit your tastes and imagination: add and subtract shrubbery, trees, water features, pathways, lounge furniture, fire pits, compost bins and even laundry lines. You can also change the color palette of the graphics, which recall architectural renderings, to suit your mood. And when you're finished designing your yard or indulging in a little dreamscaping, you can e-mail results to friends.

LANDSCAPER'S COMPANION FOR IPHONE AND IPAD AND ANDROID DEVICES (\$5.99)

This app has no design capabilities, but it is a handy reference tool with information on a variety of plants, including trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, vegetables and herbs — about 20,000 varieties in all, most with accompanying images. And unlike many reference apps, it allows you to search by category, common name, scientific name, sun exposure, United States Department of Agriculture zone, water requirements, color, height and width. You can also save plants you like and upload your pictures to create an album of favorites.

IVEGGIEGARDEN FOR IPHONE AND IPAD (\$9.99)

This is great for garden geeks more interested in obsessively tracking every aspect of the growing season than designing a plot. You create a garden using the simple, uncluttered interface, then add plants from an index of 50 vegetable types and 500 varieties. For each plant, there are growing tips tailored to your U.S.D.A. zone and pictures of common pests. Also useful is the notes section, a form for recording key dates like when seeds were planted, when they sprouted, when seedlings were thinned, when plants flowered and when they were harvested.

DIG MY GARDEN FOR IPHONE AND IPAD (\$2.99)

Like many of the other apps, this one lets you create gardens in various shapes and sizes, and choose plants. But the graphics are cartoonish: strange shapes that bear little resemblance to the plants selected, instead of photographs or drawings (a dogwood tree looks like a spade, for example). Still, if you tap on the shape, the app reminds you which plant it is and when you planted it.

There is also a journal where you can enter notes and check boxes to document the dates you watered, mulched, harvested or noticed an insect invader. One original feature is the Bloom Bar, an icon that resembles a garden gate: dragging it back and forth along a little hedge alters the coloration of the plants to reflect the seasonal changes happening in your garden.

GARDENING FOR IPHONE AND IPAD (99 CENTS)

This is a basic app, useful for tracking your garden's progress. And it's a good value. There's no design feature, but it provides 50 plant options, along with decent growing and care instructions and alerts to common problems. The Wikipedia entry for each plant is included, which links you to all sorts of additional information online. There's a place to record the date you planted seeds, and the app automatically calculates the number of days until harvest (not much help if you plant seedlings). There's also a journal tab with a blank page to add more information.

GROW BUDDY FOR ANDROID (\$3.57)

Developed for medical marijuana growers, this sophisticated app is probably better suited to commercial container-crop operations than home gardens. But it's worth mentioning because of its impressive tracking and charting capabilities: It allows you to record and graphically view feeding schedules, soil pH levels, blooming and harvest dates, yields and your inventory of growing supplies. (There's a free version, but it doesn't have any of these cool graphs or charts.) The app also allows you to upload pictures and take notes.

GARDENATE FOR IPHONE (\$1.99), IPAD (\$3.99) AND ANDROID DEVICES (99 CENTS)

Despite the various price points, this basic planning and tracking app does

pretty much the same thing on every platform. The most useful feature is its Planting Now tab, which displays only plants appropriate for the current season in your U.S.D.A. zone. The All Plants tab shows about 100 common kitchen garden plants for planning what you might like to grow in other seasons. The interface is easy, and the graphics are very nice.

LEAFSNAP FOR IPHONE (FREE)

Developed by researchers at Columbia, the University of Maryland and the Smithsonian Institution, it helps identify trees when users snap pictures of the leaves. It also contains countless photos of bark, blooms, flowers, fruit and seeds uploaded by users. And the photographs are geotagged, which means you can see where the picture was taken and find the specimen for yourself — that is, if you're in New York City or Washington. At the moment, the app doesn't include trees from other areas, but eventually the developers plan to cover the entire United States.

RAIN HARVEST FOR IPHONE AND IPAD (FREE)

Interesting and useful, particularly for gardeners in drought-prone areas, this app calculates how many gallons of water you can obtain per square foot from a catchment area (your roof, for example). Enter the square footage, the inches of rainfall and the number of collection points, and voilà: the app tells you how much water you can expect to harvest for your garden.

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