

MEDIA MASTERCLASS



WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr

Blogging

 with Catherine Stewart

What is a blog?

A blog (short for 'weblog') is an online journal about a blogger's personal events, hopes and dreams, crises and crusades. Blogs have a long history on the internet, with many dating from around 10 years ago. Some bloggers, such as Julie Powell of *'Julie and Julia'* found fame through blogging.

I like blogging because it's immediate, delivering today's news and discoveries today, not three months down the track like a magazine. Unlike other instant media such as TV and radio, it's under my control. I can visit a garden show in the morning, take photos, record a short interview or video on my smart phone, and then publish my own ideas in a multi-media story on my blog that afternoon.

I like to read others' blogs because they're personal, funny, visually exciting, controversial and provocative. I'm not limited by what an editor thinks I'd like to read, or by the country I'm in. Blogs open up many new gardening worlds.

Blogging as a business tool

Why would someone in the horticultural media write a blog? First - be clear that it's very unlikely that anyone is going to pay you to write a blog in 2013. There may come a day when internet publishing can be monetised to allow that but certainly not yet. You need other rewards for your time.

- **Build yourself up as an expert:** Blogging multiplies your portfolio of published work. If you want to show that you can write about a niche subject or widen your field, blogging is your opportunity.
- **Build your personal brand:** Garden media professionals use blogging to build their personal brand. It can help them move beyond their current contracts into other media, or get noticed by companies looking for a paid brand ambassador for their products. A successful blog that delivers a ready-made audience, interested in gardening products, is an attractive proposition for any company.
- **Show different media skills:** On a blog you can publish your own fabulous photographs, audio interviews and home-made videos, as well as show you're au fait with digital media.

- **Show you're a self-starter:** There's no editor commissioning your work or setting your deadlines; it's all your own idea and produced under your own initiative. James Beattie, a blogger on *GardenDrum* but otherwise unpublished, found that it helped him get a position as a researcher with *Gardening Australia TV*.
- **Blogging is not one-way:** With traditional media, there's little feedback. With blogging, you're building a community where you encourage comments, questions – even from those who disagree with you. It's a more vibrant, exciting way to publish, and also self-educate.

Beginning, and building an audience

WordPress, Blogger, and Tumblr all have templates and tutorials that put you instantly online. You'll need an avatar (head shot), a bio and a first story with lots of great photos to entice people to read.

Blogging is a part of social media, which indicates how you promote your blog - by being sociable. That means following and commenting on other people's blogs too. If you include your blog's url on your comment, it leaves an inlink that adds to your blog's ranking with search engines.

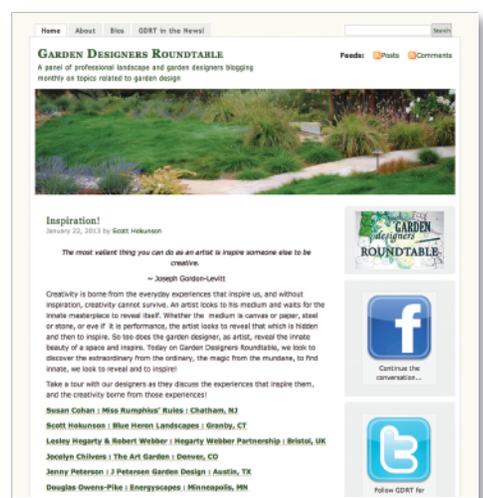
You can also find blog listings and ask to include your blog on them, or apply to be a part of a group blogging site (like *GardenDrum*, *Garden Rant* or *Garden Designer's Round Table*). Integrate your blog with your other social media platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest and YouTube.

Incentives can encourage people to sign up for an email or RSS feed each time you post. Book prizes and nursery vouchers can cover a geographically diverse community.

Blogs can be a slog

First, it takes persistence and many months to build an audience. Blogs have to be regular (at least once per fortnight) and you'll need lots of photos. People don't read long screeds of script.

Some of blogging's bad points are the flip side of its good points. When you blog, you don't have an editor making you write to a deadline, telling you what to write, dictating how long it should be, or changing what you've written. I like that. But you also don't have an editor making you get it done by the deadline,



giving you ideas about good things to write, requiring you to be succinct and to the point, encouraging and supporting you, or correcting your grammar, spelling and syntax.

You also don't have the support of a publisher if you decide you're going to attack something controversial. Bloggers need to be aware that the laws of defamation apply online.

Catherine edits *GardenDrum* (gardendrum.com); a blog with 14,000 unique visits per month 35,000 page views and a growth rate of 30% per month since relaunch in June 2012