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PREVIEW

Tele-Garden

words Jenny Shears

Probably both the smallest and largest community garden in the world, the **Tele-Garden** allows internet users to nurture a remote patch of living plants by directing a robot arm. First planted at USC, the actual garden is a 6-ft diameter plot now residing at Austria's Ars Electronica Center. What started "as a blend of research and art" demonstrates the unpredictability of an intersection between technology and nature: insects infest, mechanisms break, flowers bloom and members mingle. Users are able to exchange gardening tips by entering the 'village square' (chat room). Averaging around 15,000 hits per day, the Tele-Garden is an experimental oasis "where surfers can slow down and take a rest and reduce the lonely feeling of browsing the Web." As in a real community, it's become necessary to impose a social order: After initial disasters of flooding and overplanting, users may now only plant their first seed after a week's membership and 100 hits. Its creators admit to a latent goal—that frustrated users opt to log off, step out of their offices and go experience the real thing. <http://telegarden.aec.at>*



Screen Acres:
Internet users
water, plant &
weed a remote
6-ft garden
by directing a
robotic arm