



Walled Gardens

What are they?

Walled gardens are services that offer subscribers access to collections of pre-selected websites. Walled gardens offer the highest form of control and protection against users intentionally or inadvertently accessing inappropriate material. There are a number of commercial Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and Local Education Authorities (LEAs) who offer this service to both the education and home markets.

How do they work?

Walled gardens comprise a collection of websites that have been selected, vetted and approved for access by children. Users can only access these particular sites, as opposed to the principle used by many filtering products (see the 'Internet Filtering Systems' sheet for further information) whereby users are allowed access to every site except those blocked by the filter. Users can usually choose whether to view sites that have not been rated.

Some ISPs undertake all the selection and vetting of sites, while others allow subscribers to supplement or amend the 'allow' list themselves. Several ISPs are also now offering subscribers the ability to create an additional 'deny' list of sites that they wish to have blocked. Some ISPs also provide password access to the Internet, allowing password holders to 'jump over' the wall. All ISPs provide facilities for reporting inappropriate sites.

What are the pros and cons of walled gardens?

There are considerable numbers of people who find walled gardens helpful and just as many who do not.

Pros

- Walled gardens provide an extremely safe environment for children to 'surf the Web'.
- They do not have to rely on individuals, either at school or at home, implementing filtering software for their success.
- They can save time if someone has pre-selected curriculum-specific sites.
- Some can be tailored to meet specific tasks or topics.

Cons

- As with any information source, children should learn to search the Web responsibly.
- Pre-selected sites will not suit all pupils; for example, Year 5 (10-year-olds) and Year 12 pupils (17-year-olds) require very different content.
- Issues of censorship: who selects the sites to be included and on what criteria?
- Perfectly safe and useful sites can fall outside the walled garden if they have not been selected.
- Walled garden links need to be regularly checked and updated.

What can't walled gardens protect against?

Walled gardens have traditionally dealt with promoting safe access to websites and possibly newsgroups and chat lines. They have not generally dealt with e-mail and search engines.

Many schools have taken the step of blocking e-mail, particularly Web-based e-mail, because of potential difficulties in controlling use of the system. At home, parents need to be vigilant in their children's use of e-mail, reminding them particularly that they must not divulge any personal or credit card details in their e-mails. Parents also need to be especially aware that computer viruses are often carried by e-mail.

An increasing number of ISPs are addressing the area of e-mail, as more children are provided with their own e-mail addresses. Some ISPs currently do offer e-mail control mechanisms that check the sender's and receiver's addresses and check message content for elements such as offensive language and credit card details. More ISPs plan to do so in the near future.





Search engines (systems that collect and index vast numbers of Web pages and which enable users to find information by inputting keywords and phrases) are difficult and costly to screen. Consequently, they generally fall outside the protection of a walled garden and so potentially allow access to inappropriate sites. Several ISPs are considering this issue and it is probable that context-sensitive filtering will become more widespread. A growing number of search engines state that they provide links only to sites that are safe for children.

Further information

Organisations

The following selection of organisations offer controlled access to the Internet and/or controlled content:

AngliaCampus

Content service developed from AngliaInteractive and CampusWorld services. <http://www.angliacampus.com>

BT Connect

Offers SafeNet walled garden service to schools. <http://www.btconnect.com/>

BT Talk21e

Offers a free Web-based service tailored for the schools market. <http://www.talk21e.com>

Edex

ISP that offers controlled access to the Internet. <http://www.edex.net.uk/>

ICL

Content management system that includes e-mail control. <http://www.icles.com/education/index.htm>

EduWeb

EduWeb is an Internet service for use by teachers and pupils, containing education resources and links. <http://www.eduweb.co.uk>

RM EasyMail Plus

Educational e-mail package with built-in security measures. <http://www.ifl.net/easymail/index.html>

Search engines

The following search engines are among those that state they provide links only to sites that are safe for children:

AOL Net Find Kids Only

Committed to providing a safe, age-appropriate environment for children. Uses 'parental controls' to offer flexible walled garden access for different age groups. <http://www.aol.co.uk/channels/kids/netfind/>

Ask Jeeves for Kids

Users enter a question and Ask Jeeves tries to point them to appropriate websites. <http://www.ajkids.com/>

Awesome Library

Web search for children by librarians. Organises 14,000 reviewed resources. <http://www.awesomelibrary.org/>

Education World

More than 50,000 sites of interest to education. <http://www.education-world.com/>

Family Web Files

A directory of websites, presented in both English and Spanish. <http://www.familywebfiles.com/>

KidsClick

Web search for children by librarians. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick/>

KidsNook

When searches are performed but fail to retrieve relevant results, KidsNook expands its database to provide useful results within 48 hours. <http://www.kidsnook.com>

Kids Search Tools

Provides access to searches on several 'kid safe' search engines. <http://www.rcls.org/ksearch.htm>

SmartZones

Collection of seven million teacher reviewed Web pages. <http://www.edview.com>

Super-Kids

More than 4,000 reviewed sites together with links to thousands of school websites. <http://super-kids.com/>

Super Snooper

Reviews every site before adding it to its database. <http://supersnooper.com/>

Webkeys Prowler

World's biggest search engine for kids. <http://webkeys.com/kidfavorites.htm>

Yahooligans!

Web guide for kids. <http://yahooligans.com/>

