



WASHINGTON STATE
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EXTENSION

BENTON- FRANKLIN MASTER GARDENER

Community Gardening and Plant a Row for the Hungry

BY THE NUMBERS

In the first half of 2016:

- 80 Master Gardeners participated.
- 1,098 MG volunteer hours were donated.
- \$18,312 in grants and cash donations were obtained.
- About 800 people participated in the Plant a Row for the Hungry program.
- PAR distributed 12,000 seed packets and 4,000 transplants.
- 9 new projects were completed.
- 37 food gardens and about 550 food gardeners were mentored.
- 12 food gardening classes/events/presentations were held.



2016

ISSUE

USDA indicates that food insecurity is a lack of “access to enough food for an active, healthy life,” with 1 in 7 Americans living in food insecure households. It is estimated that 16 million children in our country consistently face hunger or unhealthy diets that can impair their cognitive and physical development, as well as their academic achievement. This is not just a national problem; 12.6% of Benton County and 10.1% of Franklin County residents are food insecure.

RESPONSE

In 2011, Americorps volunteer Nathan Finch worked with the WSU Extension Benton-Franklin Master Gardeners to provide coordination, leadership, and technical assistance to local community gardening efforts and to promote the Plant-A-Row Program (PAR) that encourages home gardeners to donate produce to local food banks. When Finch left the area, Master Gardener Bill Dixon took over leadership of the Food Gardening Team.

Since assuming leadership, Dixon annually has contacted local nurseries and garden centers to get donations of garden seed often disposed of at the end of the gardening season. He also has contacted local high school Future Farmers of America clubs to ask for donations of transplants left over after their plant sales.

With the support of Marianne Ophardt, Benton County WSU Extension director and Benton-Franklin Master Gardener program director, the Food Gardening Team has focused its efforts on helping those families most in need. This has included working with garden sponsors to build gardens in the lowest-income and highest-population density neighborhoods in the two counties. The team works with local cities, schools, service groups, and churches that already have community gardens or want to establish new ones. Team members provide information on community garden construction, organization, and management, plus mentor community gardeners throughout the area to help teach people how to garden.

Benton-Franklin Master Gardeners continue to make a difference in their communities. Starting in 2015, they launched the “Food Garden Drive” that raised nearly \$13,000 through grants and corporate and individual donations to support food gardens for low-income and disadvantaged persons. Additionally, they received a United Way grant through Second Harvest for up to \$20,000 over the next two years for the “Build A Bed to Feed A Family” Program to help build new food gardens for low-income and disadvantaged families (up to 100) or individuals (up to 400).



QUOTES

"Planting and growing stuff helps me breathe the fresh air around me and think about what I'm going to do with my life, where I'm at now in my life, and how I'm going to change it. Because like the plants, I'm still growing and the more sunlight and water (motivation, confidence, and positive thinking) I absorb, the more I grow. - Teen incarcerated at the Juvenile Justice Center

"The gardeners here are low-income and there are no grocery stores with fresh produce within walking distance. The vegetables these gardeners grow have expanded their diets and saved them money. The garden has helped them to work together as families and neighbors, improved their neighborhood, decreased their stress, and given them hope and motivation." - Bill Dixon, Master Gardener, WSU Benton County Extension

From teenage gardeners at Lakeview Mobile Homes Park community garden regarding what they liked best about the community garden:

- "Our community bonds more."
- "We were the ones who built it and people got good things out of it."

New projects in 2016 include helping the Benton-Franklin Juvenile Justice Center establish an indoor grow area for incarcerated youth, and development of the largest food garden in Benton and Franklins Counties at the new Tierra Vida Park, which eventually will allow up to 60 families to grow some of their own food.

IMPACTS

More than 50,000 pounds of fresh garden produce, worth more than \$100,000, is being provided annually from food gardens to low-income and disadvantaged populations.

Our first survey of food gardeners showed:

- 46% of the gardeners were new to growing vegetables.
- The average knowledge level increased over the growing season from "a little," to between "some" and "a lot."
- All gardeners learned new gardening tips and techniques.
- 94% saved money by growing their own food, averaging from \$100 to \$250.
- 82% of the gardeners worked with others in the garden, primarily children.
- 86% found the Master Gardeners to be helpful.
- All gardeners plan to participate next year.
- Other reported benefits of food gardening included:
 - Improved my community: 88%
 - Relieved stress: 82%
 - Provided physical activity: 80%
 - Provided a healthier diet: 76%



Master Gardener Program

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