



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



EXTENSION GARDENING TEAM

BY THE NUMBERS

- 62 publications produced in 5 years
- 1 web site developed
- 1 listserv created
- 1 blog administered
- 16 counties representing 60% of Washington's population (2010 census)



2016

ISSUE

Anyone with an Internet connection and a computer can post gardening information. The problem is that much of it is anecdotal. In 2011, Washington State University (WSU) administrators identified a lack of current, relevant, and peer-reviewed information available to home gardeners. Due to earlier budget cuts, the number of statewide discipline experts writing such content had fallen sharply. At best, county-based educators could step in to fill gaps; otherwise, lead authors for specific subject matter areas were lost. Although the symptom was a dearth of science-based gardening information, the real issue was lack of a structure through which Extension educators could identify content gaps, fill those gaps, and put resulting information out to gardeners.

RESPONSE

With such a large information gap to fill, WSU formed an interdisciplinary group, the Garden Team, to strategically address the problem. The goal of the Garden Team (GTeam) is to provide current, relevant, and peer-reviewed information for WSU Master Gardeners and home gardeners **online**. To equitably disperse workload, three faculty members co-chair the effort. In addition to writing content, the co-chairs also recruited Extension specialists, educators, and other faculty experts to form a trans-disciplinary team. Where appropriate, last-stage and recently matriculated graduate students were also recruited.

By 2015, active team members represented 16 of 39 Washington counties and three of the four WSU research and Extension centers, which collectively represent the state's major population centers.



QUOTES

"I have become a productive publisher of Extension materials. I've developed several beneficial collaborations with other team members, so have felt less isolated and more valued."

"I have learned how to write peer-reviewed publications and am increasing my personal knowledge of content matter through the research I do to develop these publications."

"Meeting other committee members and interacting with them makes it easier to make connections on topics other than my own discipline, which allows me to fill gaps."

IMPACTS

Active membership in the GTeam increased the number of new collaborations, which resulted in new partnerships, grants, and recognition awards. Peer-reviewed content on gardening.wsu.edu increased, resulting in better support for Extension Master Gardener volunteers and better information for Washington home gardeners.

Many GTeam members oversee local Extension Master Gardener communities; thus, providing better content doesn't just generate a sense of satisfaction, it also directly assists team members in their work outside the team. Members reported receiving unexpected but significant value in professional development and advancement through increased opportunity for collaboration on grants and publications, from working in a synergistic atmosphere to in-house training on new techniques and educational tools.

Sharing content from the GTeam's work increased local Master Gardeners' awareness of WSU's ongoing effort to bring research-based information to home gardeners. An unanticipated benefit has been to build morale among the Master Gardeners who see it as an investment in providing them with the tools they need to more effectively assist their clients. They see it as a vote of confidence that the university values public outreach and their work.

The website also serves as a repository of peer-reviewed information for Washington gardeners who are not Master Gardeners, but want science-based information. They learn about the website through seminars, blogs, and Facebook groups managed by members of the GTeam. This includes the Garden Professors, whose more than 7,000 Facebook members receive links to new publications generated by team members.

Impacts of GTeam formation include a stronger esprit de corps among team members and a sharp rise in peer-reviewed publication numbers.