



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



MASTER GARDENER

2016

BY THE NUMBERS

- More than 53 tons of fresh produce donated to food banks from gardens with MG leadership.
- 3,330 certified Master Gardener volunteers.
- 505 new Master Gardener volunteers trained.
- 223,865 MG volunteer hours reported.
- 1,270 classes and hands-on demonstrations offered to the public by Master Gardener volunteers.
- Taught 15,351 first-time vegetable gardeners.
- Taught 3,420 residents to use Integrated Pest Management methods.
- Taught 5,886 residents how to conserve water and protect water quality.
- Taught 6,573 residents proper tree planting and maintenance practices.

Vegetable gardening: food security, healthy choices, and community well-being

ISSUE

According to USDA statistics, 49 million people lived in food-insecure households in the United States in 2013. This means the quality, variety or the desirability of the foods eaten were less than typical. (USDA Economic Research Service). From 2010 to 2014 the USDA Economic Research Service reported an increase of 46,453 households in Washington State who participated on a monthly basis in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program. This program is the nation's largest domestic food and nutrition assistance program for low-income Americans. Despite the ongoing recovery to our economy from the Great Recession, 1 out of 7 Washington heads of household could not afford enough food for their household in 2015.

Statistics continue to show a need to supplement food banks with fresh and healthful produce, and many people are venturing into vegetable gardening for the first time to save money on groceries and increase the amount of fresh produce their families eat. This is evident through the documented increase in community gardens throughout the state and the increase in food gardening questions Master Gardener (MG) volunteers receive from the public.

RESPONSE

Public education programs on fruit and vegetable gardening, led by Master Gardener volunteers, were developed in Washington. For instance, hundreds of workshops were geared toward the beginning food gardener. In addition, Master Gardeners received specialized training (known as continuing education) on the topic to educate the general public and community gardeners on current research-based gardening practices to increase the gardeners' chances of successful harvests.

Master Gardener volunteers taught in 162 community gardens and 61 schools. They worked with 22,458 youth in school gardens, Master Gardener demonstration gardens, and community gardens. Master Gardeners hosted 4,540 plant diagnostic clinics where they answered 10,048 vegetable gardening questions using research-based information. Vegetable gardens were installed, planted, and harvested under the leadership of Master Gardeners in low-income communities, juvenile justice centers, a shelter for homeless teens, and a housing project for adults with intellectual and other disabilities. Master Gardeners also offer leadership to Hilltop Urban Gardens (HUG), a gardening program in a low-income community in Tacoma that was created to develop systems for food sovereignty and create racial and economic justice.



QUOTES

One incarcerated woman who works in the vegetable gardens with Master Gardeners at Washington Corrections Center for Women stated:

“The gardens have given me a sense of normalcy. ... I have learned techniques that I will use not only today, but for the many tomorrows, as well. I look forward to a program that has given me back my sense of self, respect, and integrity that I had lost along the way.”



IMPACTS

Research shows that the more involved people are with growing their own food, the more likely they are to eat it. Studies show that community gardens foster increased community involvement and pride among residents, increased neighborhood safety, increased activity and sense of well-being, and less isolation among residents. Community gardens also help people save money, preserve green space, and contribute to the urban food system. Additionally, community gardens bridge ethnic, economic, and age differences. Youth who participate in vegetable gardening are more likely to increase their intake of fresh produce and possibly reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases later in life. Youth also are inclined to share their newfound knowledge with their parents, possibly having a positive influence on the family’s food choices.

In 2010, WSU Master Gardeners in Pierce County established vegetable gardens with incarcerated women at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. The program continues to grow in size and participation, and in 2015, 27 women grew 14,500 pounds of fresh produce, which were used in the cafeteria, under the guidance of Master Gardeners. A total of more than 56,500 pounds of produce have been used by the cafeteria since the program began, increasing the amount of fresh vegetables the women eat and reducing food costs for the center. This program teaches participants horticultural skills that can prepare them for jobs in the horticulture industry upon release from prison. In fact, two former project participants started work in the horticulture industry after their release. Beyond that, recent studies have shown a direct correlation between prison gardening programs and improved self-esteem, decreased effects of mental illness, reduced anxiety, increased patience, and a better understanding of delayed gratification (Sandel, 2004).

In Benton-Franklin County, WSU Master Gardeners work with youth offenders at the Juvenile Justice Center. The youth are rewarded for good behavior by being allowed to participate in the gardening program. Studies show the multiple benefits of nature and horticulture therapy, from stress relief to gaining a new identity and status, such as being referred to as a gardener as opposed to an offender (Sempik et al., 2005). These youth are treated with respect and learn how to interact with adult mentors, something they may normally be intimidated by, shy away from, or have little opportunity for. Through caring for the garden, the youth are given a sense of value because they see the results of their efforts in the form of healthy plants. They also feel a sense of belonging and learn the feeling of pride through giving back to their community by donating all of the produce grown to the local foodbank.



Master Gardener Program

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