

IMPACT



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Master Gardener Plant Clinic Benefits Twin Falls County Gardeners and Extension Office

The Situation

Twin Falls County has experienced significant population growth in the past 10 years. The U.S. Census Bureau reported a 20 percent increase between 1990 and 2000. As growth continues, so does the number of yards and gardens that homeowners need to manage. Furthermore, there is an influx of new residents who are to some degree unaware of how to garden in their new environment. The increase in home gardeners creates a higher demand on the gardening assistance sought by those experiencing problems and uncertainties in their gardens. The county Extension office is being contacted more and more for reliable gardening information. This growing demand creates additional challenges for Extension educators and office staff to satisfy these inquiries while continuing to plan and deliver needed Extension programs.

Our Response

The Master Gardener Program is conducted annually in Twin Falls. Over the last three years, the Twin Falls County Master gardener Program has averaged 21 new students each year. Furthermore, there has been better retention of master gardeners and a substantial increase in the number of volunteer hours served by master gardeners. In 1997, there were 6 active master gardeners who provided approximately 60 hours of volunteer service that year. In 2001, there were 26 active master gardeners that provided a total 627 hours of service.

One of the several opportunities for master gardeners to serve volunteer hours is through the plant clinic. The plant clinic is staffed with trained master gardeners, and it serves as a resource and information center to satisfy the home gardening needs of the general public. Master gardeners working in the plant clinic are provided with resources such as various garden problem solving books, a set of disease compendiums, Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbooks, multiple identification guides, the Internet, and The Master Gardener Handbook, just to name a few.

The plant clinic begins operations in May and continues through the growing season to the end of September. Two master gardeners regularly staff the clinic on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 1 to 3 p.m. Additional hours may be worked to accommodate high demands and special situations, such as the occasional house call. The clinic was publicized through local newspapers, radio, and television, including an interview on the "Southern Idaho This Morning" show.

Program Outcomes

Last year, the master gardener plant clinic provided 336 hours of gardening support to local gardeners. The clinic assisted over 100 home gardeners on a one-on-one basis throughout the season. These 336 hours translate into \$4,704 of services (\$14/hour) provided through the Extension office.

Master gardeners in the clinic embrace the opportunity to not only assist home gardeners, but to educate them as well. Those who have sought assistance from the plant clinic receive information to solve their problems, and gain a greater appreciation and understanding of gardening, natural resources, and Mother Nature.

The clinic also benefits the master gardeners. Working in the clinic provides master gardeners with an opportunity to exercise the knowledge and skills that they learned from the training received in class. They also gain gardening knowledge working in the clinic by researching and answering a multitude of specific questions. Furthermore, the clinic helps them improve their problem solving and people skills. All in all, these benefits build confidence in master gardeners, which makes them an asset to the surrounding communities and the Extension office.

The Extension office benefits from the numerous volunteer hours provided. The hours that are provided to home gardeners through the clinic are hours that the Extension Educator and office staff can use to develop educational materials, deliver educational programs, and conduct field trials that are needed in other areas of their responsibilities.

The master gardener plant clinic will continue providing services in the future. As the Twin Falls area population continues to grow, the clinic will be increasingly sought after to provide reliable, scientific-based information. This service will continue to benefit gardeners and the Extension office.

For More Information

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