

IMPACT



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Canyon County Master Gardeners Meet Local Gardening Needs

The Situation

Between 1990 and 1999 Canyon County, Idaho experienced a 45.9 percent growth rate, one of the highest in the state. In terms of population, Canyon County is the second largest county in Idaho. Many new Canyon County residents have moved from other areas of the country and are not familiar with gardening in Idaho. They need information on important issues such as landscape watering, environmentally sensitive insect, weed and fertilizer applications, and plant disease control. University of Idaho (UI) County Extension offices, through the Master Gardeners (MG), provide reliable, research based gardening information to the public. In recent years contacts to Cooperative Extension for horticulture assistance have increased while staffing and funding have not kept up with growth. UI Cooperative Extension increasingly relies on volunteer MGs to answer gardening questions.

Our Response

University of Idaho MG programs throughout Idaho offer training to volunteers to meet local horticulture needs. The first Idaho MG programs, including Canyon County's, began in 1976. The MG program is now in 32 of the 44 Idaho counties.

The UI College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Horticulture Programming Topic Team implements MG programs, which are organized and supervised primarily by UI County Extension faculty. There is no statewide coordinator or organizational structure for the MG program. However, 12 counties, including Canyon County have full or part-time MG Coordinators. Each geographical region and county situa-

tion brings a unique framework to the title "Master Gardener."

The Idaho MG Handbook, first published in 1993, was written and reviewed by UI Cooperative Extension faculty. The 23-chapter handbook, now in its eighth edition is available on CD and at the UI MG website (<http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu>). The manual is the basis for class curriculum and a valuable reference for MGs. Also used as curriculum materials are UI and Utah State University publications, horticulture texts, and the Oregon and Washington Master Gardener Handbooks.

Across Idaho, MG classes are organized, with MG input, by the Extension Educator (70%), the Educator and MG Program Coordinator (10%), MGs and Extension Educators (10%) or solely by the MG Program Coordinator (10%). In Canyon County, the MG program is organized and implemented by the MG Program Coordinator. Sessions are taught by Extension Educators, UI Specialists, MG Program Coordinators, Advanced Master Gardeners, Green Industry Professionals, and UI researchers or retired Extension Educators.

Master Gardener classes in Canyon County are held one evening a week for three hours. Local program guidelines require a minimum of 30 hours of class time and 30 hours of volunteer time answering the public's gardening questions. The cost for the program is \$55.00, which includes the handbook. The Canyon County class includes periodic quizzes and a take-home, open-book final exam. Over the last five years, 168 people have completed the local training or about 35 people each year.

Program Outcomes

One of the primary purposes of the local Master Gardener program is to provide a mechanism for local residents to receive training and then assist the Canyon County Extension office by working with the Master Gardener Coordinator to answer the public's horticultural questions. In 2004, 37 local residents completed the MG training program. In 2005, 31 people participated in the program. The 2004 MG class answered 504 requests for assistance from the public that came in to the Canyon County Extension office. They also operated an educational booth each Saturday morning at the Nampa Farmers Market. Approximately 250 questions were answered by the MGs during the Farmers Market season. In addition, the Canyon County Master Gardener Coordinator has organized and staffed a major home, garden and landscape educational booth for the past eight years at the Canyon County Home and Garden show. The MGs have answered thousands of questions at that venue. During the course of answering all these questions, the 2004 class alone donated 1,100 hours of volunteer time. At \$10.00 per hour the 2004 class's effort is valued at \$11,000. Over the last five years, the Canyon County MGs have volunteered 5,250 hours to make their communities a more beautiful place to live.

The MGs receive a wide variety of horticultural questions from the public. In 2004, 42 percent of the questions were related to trees, 38 percent were related to gardens and home pests, and 20 percent were related to weed identification. The most common samples brought in to the Extension office are related to insect, spider and weed identification. Specific examples of common problems the MGs address are related to blossom end rot in tomatoes, improper tree and lawn watering, leafhoppers in tomatoes, and borers and aphids in trees.

The Future

The Master Gardeners are an indispensable component of the Canyon County Extension office's educational service to the public. As our local population grows the demand for MG services will increase. To keep the MG program effective, Canyon County will require additional MGs, more multi-county approaches to solving problems, and more reliance on paid MG Coordinators.



Canyon County Master Gardener Coordinator
Ron Galloway inspects local resident's raspberries.

For More Information

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