IMPACT
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Symposium helps southern Idaho gardeners create "green gardens"

The Situation

In Idaho, pesticides reaching the groundwater are a concern. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that "homeowners use up to 10 times more chemical pesticides per acre on lawns than farmers use on crops" (www.ehhi.org/reports/lcpesticides/summary.shtml). A program developed by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the American Society of Landscape Architects and the U.S. Botanic Garden has guidelines and technical benchmarks to help professionals design, build and maintain "greener" landscapes (www.sustainablesites.org). A green landscape uses sustainable practices like efficient use of irrigation water, appropriate plants that maintain their health using less fertilizer, less water and fewer toxic pesticides and other integrated pest management (IPM) practices. Their research has shown that a sustainable native garden used 77% less water, produced 66% less waste and cost 68% less to maintain. In arid southern Idaho, homeowners can develop "green gardens" in their yards using similar techniques with the same environmental and economic benefits.

Our Response

The University of Idaho Jerome County Extension Office with the Magic Valley and the Mini-Cassia Master Gardener (MG) Clubs developed the "Going Green in the Garden Symposium." This reasonably priced symposium consisted of one day of presentations and was open to the public. Speakers were Extension Educators/Specialists and Green industry professionals. After an introduction to "green" gardening concepts, the following presentations were given: 1) Controlling garden problems with organic methods and soft garden chemicals, 2) Using beneficial insects, soft chemicals, and integrated pest management (IPM) practices to control insect problems, 3) Having disease-free plants with good cultural and management practices (IPM), 4) Types of irrigation equipment for more efficiency and 5) Using native plants for a more sustainable landscape.

Program Outcomes

Sixty (60) of the 84 participants returned a questionnaire at the end of the symposium. Of those, 40 had taken the MG training (MGs) and 20 had not (non-MGs). One year later, a similar questionnaire was returned by 20 MGs and 7 non-MGs (response rate of 50% of the MGs and 33% of the non-MGs).

The participants were asked to assess increases in awareness and knowledge, by indicating whether they" strongly agreed," "agreed," were "neutral," "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the following statements:

A. I increased my awareness of what is meant by "green gardening."

B. I increased my awareness of the importance of considering new management options for my garden.

C. I increased my knowledge of what chemicals I can use and how.

D. I increased my knowledge of how to water my garden.

E. I increased my knowledge of how to determine if the insects in my garden are a problem.

F. I increased my knowledge of how and where to use native plants.

G. I increased my knowledge of integrated pest management (IPM).

The response to these questions was very high immediately after the conference (Table 1). The symposium achieved awareness and knowledge increases. Agree-

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ment was higher for most statements for the non-MGs. Additionally, the non-MGs tended to "strongly agree" more than "agree" on most subjects suggesting non-MGs were more enlightened by the symposium than the more knowledgeable MGs who predominately "agreed."

Table 1. Percent of questionnaire responses immediately after the symposium to statements A through G.

	Percent responding "strongly agree" or "agree"	
Green garden parameter	**Master Gardeners**	**Non-Master Gardeners**
A – Green concepts	86	94
B – New management	93	100
C – Chemicals	97	90
D – Water use	65	90
E – Problem insects	79	100
F – Native plants	87	94
G – IPM	87	100

One year later, percent increase in awareness for knowledge parameters C, E and G were lower than immediately after the conference for MGs (Table 2).

Table 2. Percent of questionnaire responses after one year to statements A through G.

	Percent responding "strongly agree" or "agree"	
Green garden parameter	**Master Gardeners**	**Non-Master Gardeners**
A – Green concepts	94	100
B – New management	89	86
C – Chemicals	73	57
D – Water use	74	85
E – Problem insects	73	100
F – Native plants	85	100
G – IPM	33	71

Parameter D (water use) actually increased (74%). The non-MGs were lower only in parameters C and G. All participants tended only to "agree" rather than "strongly agree." This indicated a good retention of awareness and knowledge in most of the parameters. However, more work is needed in chemical use and IPM knowledge.

The response to questions regarding plans to adopt (immediately after the symposium) or actual (one year later) adoption of four garden practices showed a good adoption rate in both groups for planting native plants (Table 3). The MGs also felt they had developed a healthy garden.

Table 3. Percent practice adoption rate before and after attending the horticulture symposium.

	Percent planning to adopt or adopting practice			
Practice	**Master Gardeners**		**Non-Master Gardeners**	
	A	B	A	B
Plant native plants	64	75	53	86
Adopt one new irrigation method	66	70	83	71
Use "green" chemicals	59	53	83	29
Develop a healthy garden	63	80	68	67

A = Immediately after conference, B = One year later.

The technique with the lowest actual adoption was the increased use of "green" chemicals (Table 3). The percent of attendees implementing some sustainable "green" techniques was high.

This University of Idaho Extension program heightened the knowledge and awareness of the participants regarding sustainable gardening. Furthermore, they adopted the 4 sustainable garden techniques measured after one year's time. These techniques will help save water, reduce maintenance and reduce the amount of toxic chemicals used in these home landscapes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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