



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



MASTER GARDENER

2014

BY THE NUMBERS

- More than 93 tons of fresh produce donated to food banks from gardens with MG leadership.
- More than 7,000 pounds of produce donated from school and youth gardens with MG leadership.
- 3,305 certified Master Gardener volunteers.
- 599 new Master Gardener volunteers trained.
- 222,579 MG volunteer hours reported.
- 989 programs offered to the public by Master Gardener volunteers.
- Taught 8,719 first-time vegetable gardeners.
- Taught 5,294 residents to use Integrated Pest Management methods.
- Taught 5,813 residents how to conserve water and protect water quality.
- Taught 3,575 residents proper tree planting and maintenance practices.

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

ISSUE

According to USDA statistics, 49.1 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.

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 State. 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 208 community gardens and 84 schools. They worked with 27,730 youth in school gardens, Master Gardener demonstration gardens, and community gardens. Master Gardeners hosted 4,657 plant diagnostic clinics where they answered the public's 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. This correlates to a diet consisting of more fruits and vegetables, and evidence shows that gardeners eat more fresh produce than non-gardeners. Studies of community gardens and their participants show more benefits to neighborhoods than just better access to fresh food and nutrition. 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. It is known that 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.

As a result of Master Gardeners working with incarcerated women at the Washington Corrections Center for Women on how to food garden, more than 11,895 pounds of fresh produce were used in the cafeteria in 2014. The cafeteria has used more than 42,000 pounds of produce since the program began in 2010, increasing the amount of fresh vegetables the women eat and reducing food costs. This program also teaches the women horticultural skills and teamwork, preparing them for re-entry into society.

Master Gardeners who partnered with one local county health department on a community garden program helped families save an estimated total of \$2,000 on groceries. They increased their physical fitness levels by an average of 13% and decreased stress levels an average of 13%. In addition, recent research shows that on average community gardeners save \$435 on groceries per garden plot over the course of a growing season. Therefore, it can be estimated that the guidance provided by Master Gardeners in one community to develop 90 additional garden plots has helped those community gardeners save a total of \$39,150 on groceries.

Master Gardeners’ involvement in community, youth, and school gardens continues to grow. Through teaching low-cost and sustainable gardening techniques, WSU Master Gardeners educate new and novice gardeners on how to save money, live healthier, and engage in their communities through food gardening, all of which improves the lives and well-being of Washington residents.

