



Missouri Master Gardeners: “Greening Up Communities”

The University of Missouri Extension Master Gardener program provides life-enhancing skills to 259,960 participants through educational workshops and seminars; gardening demonstrations and community gardening events; and technical assistance to add value to communities in almost every Missouri county with **minimal** cost to the state.

The Master Gardener program offers in-depth horticultural training to individuals, who then apply their learning as volunteers -- carrying out community service projects and teaching others about gardening and the environment. To become certified as a Master Gardener, an individual must attend a 30-hour training course taught by an MU Extension specialist. Then the trainee is required to give back 30 hours of volunteer service. To maintain certification, Master Gardeners are asked to donate a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service per year. In 2007, 1,826 volunteers statewide gave 135,113 hours of service, valued at \$2.3 million (at Missouri rate of \$17/hour). If an equivalent sum were invested in professional employee salaries, the \$2.3 million would fund 36 full-time specialists.

The Master Gardener program is largely self-supporting (see appendix). Fees for the 74 active county programs are set locally and range from \$85-\$225. These fees are used for training resources and room rentals. In addition, local volunteer groups hold fund-raisers, such as garden tours, to provide supplemental funds. Some groups charge membership dues or provide a community speaker’s bureau for a small fee. Local dollars fund local programs. Of the \$85-\$225 registration fee, \$40 is used at the University for program promotion and evaluation.

State dollars support a small percentage of the salaries and benefits for 40 Extension field specialists and the program coordinator, who teach the Master Gardener training courses, among many other duties. Federal funds support the rest of the salary and benefit costs.

The state’s total investment is SMALL in comparison with the state’s RETURN on INVESTMENT:

Total State Dollars Invested	
For .5 FTE salary/benefits of director and portion of regional faculty salaries =	\$51,223
Funds Leveraged from Other Sources, (Participant fees, federal funds) =	\$477,085
Return on State’s Investment =	9.3:1

Benefits of the Master Gardener Program are Significant:

Participants:

- Improve their home gardening skills and as a result:
 - Improve nutrition through use of fresh produce
 - Increase exercise and physical health, thus reducing the need for costly doctors' visits and medications
 - Enjoy well-being, thanks to a healthy lifestyle.

Community Members:

- Experience better environmental quality as the yard and garden practices taught use less water, reduce runoff into storm sewers and harm the soil less than other techniques
- Appreciate city beautification efforts, such as green spaces, street trees, flowers and landscaping in public areas -- all advanced through donated volunteer time
- Experience lower utility costs as environmental practices reduce yard waste in landfills and public waste sites
- Add value to the local economy as their increased interest in plants and ecosystems spur them to purchase more plants from retail centers
- Benefit from donations of large quantities of produce to food pantries and food banks through the "Plant a Row for the Hungry" program.

Demand from the general public for horticultural information has increased exponentially. In 2007, Web hits for MU Extension Ag Guides increased from 2.77 to 3.15 million (13 percent increase). Horticulture guides represented the largest category, with the number of hits increasing from 1.0 to 1.2 million (17 percent increase). Master Gardeners respond to public demand through workshops and short courses; hotlines and answer services; and booths at farmer's markets, home shows and county fairs.

Prime Examples of Community Enhancement Through the Master Gardener Program:

Educational Outreach

In 2007, southwest Master Gardeners expanded their educational outreach to participate in teaching all the horticulture courses at Gibson Tech in Reeds Spring. The Gardening 101 series included 10 classes for 82 residents taught by Master Gardeners.

Also in southwest Missouri, five Master Gardeners participated in the "Adventures in Gardening" series with the Church Army program based in Hollister. This program aids people recovering from addictions in learning skills to help get their lives on track. About 50 participants learned gardening skills through this effort.

In Springfield, about 18,000 people are reached by Master Gardener programming through media (newspaper column, TV, radio) weekly.

Urban Outreach

Kansas City has a large Master Gardener program with 224 active volunteers reaching over 12,800 people through more than 16,126 contact hours. The program includes a hotline to answer questions; speaker's bureau; displays at major flower, lawn and garden shows; annual garden tours; and many other gardening projects and activities. The program multiplies the efforts of faculty in educating the public.

The **St. Louis** Master Gardener program was established in 1983 in partnership with the Missouri Botanical Garden. The partners continue to coordinate the program with the help of a Master Gardener advisory committee.

Knowledgeable Master Gardeners, who have completed a presentation skills course and extensive horticultural training by MU Extension specialists and the Botanical Garden, present high-quality horticultural information to such groups as garden clubs, schools, businesses, churches, and neighborhood and civic organizations. The 262 active Master Gardeners respond via phone, email and regular mail to 30,500 plant and insect questions through their Horticulture Answer Service and Plant Doctor Desk. During 2008, the Master Gardeners logged more than 29,400 hours of service to St. Louis residents.

Prison Outreach

Master Gardeners in corrections (MaGiC) hold meetings and classes at the Women's Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correction Center (WERDCC) in Vandalia. Nineteen women graduated from the class that ended January 2007. Graduates plan to use their gardening skills to find jobs and enrich their lives upon leaving the prison system. A past graduate and parolee has used her Master Gardener knowledge to get a job in a Jefferson City nursery. Prison gardens supervised by Master Gardeners grew just over 2,000 pounds of produce, donated to the community.

Youth Outreach

The Missouri Garden 'n Grow Program is a summer volunteer gardening program developed for 9- to 13-year-old youths. Along with learning vegetable gardening, the young people "cultivate" other science, math and language arts skills. Vegetables harvested from the gardens are for home use and donation to local food agencies. A Buchanan County group donated 60 pounds of produce to a local food pantry.

The Garden 'n Grow program is used with youth at risk in other locations, including Turn Around Ranch in Joplin, Coyote Hills in Columbia, and the Juvenile Detention Center in Boone County. The Garden 'n Grow program also is used as a summer-school curriculum through the home school network and several public school systems.

Cooperation with City and County Government

In Rolla (Phelps County), Master Gardeners are saving the city thousands of dollars by landscaping the Recreation Center and Welcome Center. The display gardens installed serve as educational tools with signage offering information about caring for the beds and inviting questions, which are answered by the Master Gardener group. Additionally, MU Extension's curriculum, "Healthy Yards for Clear Streams," is being used by Master Gardeners to assist the City of Rolla in doing community outreach. MU Extension has a contract with the city to conduct six educational programs in the Spring and Fall, including tours of local watersheds. These educational sessions will meet the EPA mandate of watershed management education for homeowners in communities with impaired water systems.

In 2008, 39 Master Gardeners in Cape Girardeau County contributed 4,107 hours of volunteer service to 8,224 citizens. They also donated over 2,250 pounds of fresh produce to the food pantry and the elderly. Their activities -- which save the city and county money for public landscaping -- included beautification in locations such as Cape Girardeau County Park, Jackson Police Department, Jackson Post Office, Litz Park and Jackson City Park. They also maintain landscaping for the historic gardens of Oliver House, where the Master Gardeners teach about heirloom gardening.

Beautification

Master Gardeners maintain plantings throughout the year at the Dewey Short Visitor's Center, located on the Taney and Stone County border. The Corps of Engineers recognized the Master Gardeners for their efforts this year by prominently displaying a plaque at the entrance.

Testimonial Quotes from Master Gardener students:

"I believe the additional knowledge about gardening can empower me to not only improve the quality of my personal health, but to improve my community to enhance the warmth and welcoming atmosphere of our community."

"I work with a number of Mennonite and self-sustaining farmers as well as retired people who farm to provide additional income – this course will help me help them grow better thus have a better life. I also hope others begin growing their own vegetables."

4/6/2009