



Extension Master Gardener volunteers complete rigorous training and spend at least 25 hours each year teaching communities how to garden and get the most out of the nutritious food they produce.

Teaching in the garden

Positive outcomes of Extension’s Master Gardener program extend well beyond growing season in communities and homes across Minnesota

Every year, Minnesotans benefit from the efforts of more than 2,300 University-trained Master Gardener volunteers, who give more than 130,000 hours of service to make their communities more sustainable.

It’s an exciting time for Extension’s Master Gardener Volunteer Program. The program’s ability to get people outside for hands-on education is at an all-time high.

Since the national program came to Minnesota in the 1970s, the University-trained volunteers have covered everything from soil preparation to rain gardens, and have reached everyone from retirees to budding young growers.

“Extension offers a chance to learn, network and give back to our communities,” says Denise Moen, a Master Gardener intern in Scott County. “Together we can turn the next generation on to the wonders of the garden.”

Growing partnerships

One shining example of success is the teaching gardens in many parts of the state, where communities gather for regular learning opportunities relevant to local needs and interests.

For instance, Evenings in the Garden is an annual series sponsored by the Carver-Scott Extension Master Gardeners offering summer classes in the teaching garden on the Scott County fairgrounds in Jordan.

Recently, a group of teens attended from the Scott County Juvenile Alternative Facility. “These young people came from homes where life, in one way or another, was complicated at best,” says Deb Tomczyk, a Master Gardener who developed Evenings in the Garden. “They worked hard to be selected to attend.”

Tomczyk recalls one young man who initially sat on the fence and watched a tree planting demonstration, but he slowly became more engaged. Soon, he was asking the session leader about jobs in landscaping. “He left the

session thinking about applying for that work the very next day,” says Tomczyk.

Extension Master Gardeners nurture partnerships with dozens of community and government entities, and work with University faculty to create a research-based curriculum. This is all part of Extension’s overall effort to deliver high-quality learning experiences with local relevance.

One such partnership is with the Scott County Clean Water Education Fund. “Because of our partnership, both of our organizations can do more, reach more, and have a powerful, lasting and cost-effective impact,” says Diane Hrabe, coordinator with the Scott County program.

Reaching the next generation

Getting people outside for hands-on education through partnerships with schools, farmers markets and community groups is key to program success. Case in point: the Colorful Growers project, part of a Winona County nonprofit called Project FINE.

Colorful Growers provides youth with a unique entrepreneurial experience. Participants plant and tend a plot at the Stone Point Park community gardens, and then sell their crops at local venues.

“We reached out to a local Master Gardener volunteer for expertise,” explains Fatima Said, Project FINE director. “The youth gained knowledge of the time and care necessary to grow food and a greater appreciation for fresh local produce. They’re also developing leadership skills and confidence.”

“We’re empowering volunteers to share research and best practices,” says Tim Kenny, statewide director of the program. “In the process, we’re promoting healthy people, healthy plants and a healthy planet.”

Plans are underway to build a new physical home for Master Gardeners at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, according to Kenny. There, volunteers will develop new educational opportunities, and build on projects that have already proven successful.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Education that builds community. That’s one of many benefits Extension’s Master Gardener program provides. And it’s one of the main reasons Pam Hartley created an educational endowment fund.

“I’ve learned so much, so starting an educational fund was a way to give back,” says Hartley, who has served as a Master Gardener in Anoka and Ramsey counties.

Hartley’s fund supports programming across the region, such as the Master Gardener presence at the Minnesota State Fair. “Thousands of people visit our booth, bringing in samples and photos of problems from their yards,” notes Hartley. “They value the University information we share with them.”



Minnesotans like Pam Hartley, Master Gardener volunteer and donor, are inspired to give time and money to help grow more gardening education.

Want to help Master Gardeners continue to thrive and grow? Look for “Master Gardener Fund” at www.extension.umn.edu/donate

MIX IT UP!

Summer brings on the impulse to grow something beautiful. Consider varieties that, combined in containers, provide food for both you and pollinators.



FOR YOU

BRIGHT LIGHTS CHARD has edible leaves that can be cooked like spinach or added to salads and sandwiches.

GENOVESE BASIL is easy to grow—harvest the top part of the plant and it will regrow from the stem all summer long.

FLAT-LEAF PARSLEY is a good plant to tuck into the edges of a container.



FOR POLLINATORS

PERSIAN CARPET ZINNIA attracts pollinators with vibrant blooms of yellow, orange and red.

VERBENA BONARIENSIS is covered with small, purple, nectar-filled flowers.

DILL FLOWERS offer nectar and pollen to visitors, as well as dill seed for your pickles in the fall.