

Extension Master Gardener 2018 Search for Excellence

Search for Excellence recognizes outstanding Extension Master Gardener volunteer educational, group projects that result in significant learning. Applause and appreciation go to the following EMGV groups for their efforts to address local issues, find solutions for gardening problems, and share sustainable, research-based gardening information in their communities.

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Community Service Category



Chowan-Gates-Perquimans Counties Grow to Eat

Target Audience

Families of Chowan, Gates, and Perquimans counties who require the services of their local food pantry to assist in putting food on their table

Goals

1. Teach easy, safe, and productive methods of growing vegetables and herbs
2. Initiate a functional knowledge between diet and health
3. Help participants develop an appreciation for quality produce and its base of origin

Implementation

Planning Process

- Information was gathered from organizations that had previously addressed the issue using community gardens
- After discussing the pros and cons, we decided that for the geographical challenges of our area, a self-grow solution would be more advantageous than community gardens

Implementation Process

- Year 1: Requests were sent to seed companies for donations of “last years’ seeds”

- Detailed information on successful vegetable growing was compiled
- Directors of each area county food pantry were contacted for permission to approach their clientele with the project
- Extension Master Gardener volunteers reviewed educational information with each client when passing out the seed packets
- A telephone survey conducted two months later collected data to assess the program
- Year 2: Realizing the challenges of starting plants from seed, EMGVs grew seedlings that were distributed to participants

Results

1. In the two years of the program's existence, more clients have been willing to consider participating in the program and more seeds are actually planted resulting in a bigger harvest
2. There has been significant learning on behalf of the EMGVs involved, especially in regards to the difficulties that underserved communities have in growing their own home garden
3. As a result of the feedback, in 2018, we are now providing small easy-to-grow plants making it more likely participants will see success in their efforts

Learn more:

Contact Katy Shook, horticulture Extension agent, Chowan-Gates-Perquimans Counties
[\(252\) 482-6585](tel:2524826585), katy_shook@ncsu.edu

This project funded in part by a grant received from Vidant Health Foundation:
<https://foundation.vidanthealth.com/Communities>

Demonstration Garden Category



Guilford County Crevice Garden

Target Audience

Residents of Guilford County and visitors to the Demonstration Garden

Goals

1. Create an attractive, xeriscape garden in a compacted, dry, sunny area where little else will grow
2. Plan, design, install, plant, and maintain a crevice garden at the entrance to the Demonstration Garden
3. Demonstrate how to create a crevice garden as an attractive, low-maintenance alternative for hot, dry, non-irrigated locations
4. Demonstrate how to grow plants that require good drainage in a crevice garden setting

Implementation

Planning Process

- The team met early in the year to plan the approach and researched crevice gardens using the book, "Rock Gardening: Reimagining a Classic Style," by Joseph Tychonievich for a better understanding of how a crevice garden differs from a rock garden.

- We reviewed the designated area, created an outline of the final shape and estimated the amount of stone we would need. The amount, shape, and size of the stones would influence the rest of the garden design and needs. To avoid sharp edges, we planned to use more rounded stones.
- Identified potential plants suitable for the location and growing conditions

Implementation Process

- Stones were selected for their interesting shapes and pleasing colors
- The area was cleared of the few plants located there
- Stones were arranged and secured in the garden in a way that was visually interesting and that would support the larger stones
- After the larger stone structure was completed other stones were placed to create an organic, flowing design that complemented the space and created interesting angles and shapes from all directions
- Soil was mixed and mounded between and around stones
- Larger plants were placed first and then creeping plants were placed around the edges
- A brochure for the Crevice Garden was created for visitors that included a summary of the construction process and a plant list

Results

1. A weedy, dry area at the entrance to our Demonstration Garden was beautified. The garden is creative and innovative and offers a unique structure and layout to a classic crevice garden
2. The crevice garden provides us with the opportunity to educate the community on succulents, xeric landscaping, and plantings in a dry area
3. There was significant learning among the team that can be passed along to visitors to the Demonstration Garden. The project reinforced the need for planning before building and “right plant for the right place”
4. Guilford EMGVs plan to offer a class for the public on crevice gardens in the coming year

Learn More:

- Contact Hanna Smith, horticulture Extension agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension – Guilford County Center, (336) 641-2407, hanna.smith@ncsu.edu
- Visit the garden, located at the N.C. Cooperative Extension – Guilford County Center: <https://guilford.ces.ncsu.edu>
- Visit the Guilford EMGV facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/GuilfordMasterGardener>

Innovative Project Category



Buncombe County EMGV Blog

Target Audience

The gardening public in Western North Carolina whose interests center on residential landscapes, vegetable gardens, and native mountain plants.

Goals

1. Educate the public about gardening and promote the programs of Extension Master Gardener Volunteers of Buncombe County
2. Regularly publish blog articles that are professionally written, content-rich, fact-based, and aligned with NCSU Cooperative Extension research
3. Establish an annual blog calendar
4. Define a repeatable process to identify readers' needs, write, edit, and publish relevant articles

Implementation

Improve blog usefulness and fill gaps

- Completely redefined blog categories to match common gardening topics
- Identified Content Gaps and viewer needs
- Created blog calendar

Improve quality of articles

- Elevated importance of the editing role and created standard procedures for ensuring adherence to NCSU horticultural research
- Developed training for writers
- Created a *Blog Style and Proofreading Guide*

Define and standardize process

- Developed BCEMG Blog Process document that details the end-to-end blog process
- Defined seven blog jobs or roles
- Developed monthly Blog Statistical Report to track and analyze subscribers, viewers, and top 50 blog page visits

Results

1. Blog subscribers increased 174.5% over the two-year period from 765 to 2100
2. Several blogs re-posted to Facebook pages by the National Master Gardener Association and NCSU Extension received several thousand hits
3. We publish 6-8 blog posts and event announcements each month
4. We create a blog calendar each fall that includes topics, events, writers, and upcoming publication dates so we hit the ground running in January of each year

Learn More:

Contact Alison Arnold, horticulture Extension agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension – Buncombe County Center

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Visit the blog: <https://www.buncombemastergardener.org>



Union County Heritage Festival

Target Audience

Residents of and visitors to Union County, NC.

Goals

1. Educate the people of Union County about our natural, cultural, and historical heritage
2. Educate visitors on EMGV's work and mission in the community
3. Bring together programs, people, and organizations who work to make our county a better place to live and grow and who align with our mission
4. Offer a fun, free, family-centered event that is open and accessible to all Union County residents

Implementation

Planning Process

- Committee met monthly starting in June 2016
- Tasks were divided into Vendors, Sponsors, Raffle, 5K Race, Logistics, Children's Activities, Volunteers, Speakers/Chefs, Entertainment, Household Hazardous Waste Collection
- Applied and accepted as a North Carolina Science Festival event

Organizing and Outreach

- Six months potential sponsors were sent a sponsorship proposal package and a call for vendors went out via press release
- Speakers, chefs, and entertainment were considered and contacted
- Flyers and posters were designed and distributed to libraries, health & fitness centers, etc., and the website was kept current with updates

- Ads were placed in the Union County weekly newspaper, two FM radio stations and one AM radio station, and a one-hour radio show hosted by EMGVs dedicated a full show to the festival
- Volunteers recruited among Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and the general public

Week of the Event

- Committee marked off vendor spaces and set out tables and chairs
- EMGVs beautified the teaching garden and Heritage Trail
- Coordinated timing of vendor and exhibitor access
- Teams greeted cars and counted attendees, manned information booths, tended to requirements of vendors and exhibitors, managed the entire event, EMGVs created and hosted craft event booth for kids

Results

1. More than 1000 attendees between the Wild Turkey 5K in the morning and the full day of the Heritage Festival
2. The North Carolina Science Festival which was held inside the Agricultural Center where some vendors and exhibitors were located, surveyed attendees who rated the event 4.6 out of 5.0 indicating they had fun with STEM, learned something new, and felt inspired
3. Children were given an activity card with 12 suggested activities to complete including a craft activity, Atomz Lab Birds of Flight interactive activity, and learning from exhibitors like the NC Forestry Service, Union County Master Gardeners, Union County Soil and Water Conservation, and many others
4. Speakers presented on topics like: “Top Ten Tips for Terrific Tomatoes,” “Creating the Perfect Container Garden,” “Seasonal Cooking with Locally Grown Produce and meats,” and “Garden of the Waxhaws - a Conversation about Local History”

Learn More:

Contact Debbie Dillion, horticulture Extension agent, N.C. Cooperative Extension – Union County Center
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Learn more about the Union County Heritage Festival:

<http://www.mastergardenersunioncountync.org/heritage-festival.html>

Research Category



Dare County Kokedama Research Project

Target Audience

Dare Extension Master Gardener volunteers wished to offer simple, hands-on workshops to introduce the public to gardening. One option was teaching a workshop on Kokedama, a ball of soil covered with moss, on which an ornamental plant grows. To offer the workshop, EMGVs first needed an inexpensive and locally available soil mixture that would support Kokedama.

Goal

1. Through research and experimentation, we would find an inexpensive and locally available soil mixture that would support a plant
2. To offer hands-on Kokedama classes to the public at minimal cost

Implementation

Planning Process

- Twelve Master Gardeners created Kokedama using 6 different soil mixtures
- Research project was designed using the scientific method

Implementation Process

- Participants picked their formulas randomly from a hat. Two participants for each formula. All equipment and buckets were sterilized prior to beginning. After mixing the soil, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water was added. More water was added to enable a ball to form. Those using Akedama were encouraged to crush the mixture and let it sit to absorb the water.

- Balls were formed, and participants instructed to form a hole deep enough for the roots of the fern plant. All ferns were healthy and had been well watered the day before
- Sphagnum peat moss had been soaking in water and each ball was wrapped in the moss. Waxed cord was then used to secure the sphagnum peat moss around the ball. The balls were placed on plates
- Participants were given verbal and written instructions on the care of the Kokedama balls. A calendar was provided to record watering, misting, and any other changes or problems. We agreed to meet in one month to compare the survival and growth of the fern

Results

1. The potting soil for containers produced the same results as the other 5 soil mixtures after one month
2. Signs of new growth was evident in all the Kokedama on visual inspection
3. The Kokedama that was created out of container potting soil also needed the least amount of watering. The experiment was a success with a suitable soil mixture consisting of container potting soil which can be used to replace the other more expensive mixtures

Learn More:

Contact Shannon Brooks, County Extension Director, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Dare County Center, (252) 473-4290, shannon_brooks@ncsu.edu

Workshop or Presentation Category



Dare County Speakers Bureau

Target Audience

The Speakers Bureau was created several years ago to provide much needed continuing education for Master Gardener volunteers in Dare County. Presentations are open to the public for anyone to come and learn, and to recruit new Master Gardener volunteers

Goals

1. Educate Master Gardener volunteers and the public on gardening in our coastal environment
2. Use the Arboretum and Teaching Garden for hands-on demonstrations and workshops
3. Use of the NCSU Intranet for videos, presentations, and research materials
4. Offer hands-on workshops on relevant topics that also have a make and take item

Implementation

Planning Process

- Recruit Master Gardeners who were willing to speak in public and on camera; those willing to do research on topics that interested them and create Powerpoint presentations; and those willing to provide support by putting together handouts, set up equipment for presentations, and previewing presentations

- After identifying several relevant topics and volunteers that wanted to create presentations on those topics, the Speakers Bureau's next step was to meet once a month to review and vet presentations

Implementation Process

- The Library Garden Series was the first of this project's implementations at Kill Devil Hills Library and the Fessenden Center on Hatteras Island
- From 2015 through 2016, the Speakers Bureau partnered with Dare County Government TV to create three useful videos on *The Challenges of Gardening on the Outer Banks*; *Gardening with Deer Nearby*; and *Composting*. These currently rotate and are played several times each day
- In 2016, the Speakers Bureau began work on using the NC State University master Gardener intranet for posting videos, presentations, and research materials. This information is available for use by all Master Gardeners
- In 2017, the Speakers Bureau collaborated with Greenline (Ask a Master Gardener) to provide five hands-on topics at the Arboretum and Teaching Garden each Wednesday.
- In 2017, the Speakers Bureau began teaching several workshops at the Thomas A. Baum Senior Center and at the Cooperative Extension Center

Results

1. The number of Extension Master Gardener volunteers who complete the required 12 hours of continuing education per year has increased from an average of 65% to 95%
2. In 2016 the program had 299 participants with a 31% increase to 391 participants in 2017
3. There are 143 subscribers to the videos on Dare Government TV and our videos have hundreds of views on YouTube. Watch the videos:
 - Gardening with deer nearby:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF_6zVstW6I
 - Composting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDq8jZdrBmU>
 - Gardening on the Outer Banks :
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3WPm4Pugac>

Learn More:

Contact Shannon Brooks, County Extension Director, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Dare County Center, (252) 473-4290, shannon_brooks@ncsu.edu



Dare, Currituck, and Pasquotank Counties Tri-County Home and Community Garden Workshop

Target Audience

Residents of Dare, Currituck, and Pasquotank Counties

Goal

1. To offer a variety of free, one-hour or less sessions or mini courses on topics of interest to gardeners, landscapers, and beginner gardeners by drawing on the particular interests and expertise of Extension Master Gardeners, Extension Agents, and local gardening experts

Implementation

Planning Process

- The Tri-County Home and Community Garden Workshop Committee generated a list of topics and then finds speakers to address each topic
- Once the presenters and the agenda have been set, each county advertises to the public on websites, Facebook, and newspapers

Implementation Process

- Workshops are planned for a Saturday in March in the Currituck County Extension building
- Six to eight courses are offered, and all materials and lunch are paid for by a cooperative effort among the Extension offices and Master Gardeners
- Past presentations include Vegetable Gardening, Garden Irrigation, Home Fruit Production, Plant Propagation, Soil Health, Controlling Nematodes,

Composting, Greenhouse Making, Bee Keeping, Vermiculture, using Internet Research

- Topics for 2018 include Climate Change and Plants, Things We Do To Our Trees, Pollinators and Native Plants, Rain Gardens-Rain Barrels and Cisterns, Butterfly Gardens, Sustainable Landscape Design

Results

1. Attendance has grown from 30 to 101 pre-registered in 2018
2. Each year evaluation forms are distributed to participants, with an average of 80% return rate. Seventy percent graded the workshop “very useful,” and 30% felt the workshop was useful. No participants selected “Not useful”

Learn More:

Contact Shannon Brooks, County Extension Director, N.C. Cooperative Extension, Dare County Center, (252) 473-4290, shannon_brooks@ncsu.edu

Youth Category



Carteret County Edible Plant Parts

Target Audience

While this activity is suitable for many age groups, this project was completed with a third grade class and based on North Carolina state standards for the third grade curriculum

Goals

1. Students will learn about roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds as well as fruits vs. vegetables
2. Students will learn about the roles of each of the plant parts, how they function, plant growth, and reproduction
3. Students will learn the importance of each plant part and which part can be eaten on various plants by showing examples of things they may find in their grocery store, farmer's market, or farm stand

Implementation

Planning Process

- An outline was developed to review the roles of soils, sunlight, air, and water that had been discussed in previous lessons
- A variety of fruits and vegetables were purchased so we could demonstrate samples of edible plant parts
- A worksheet was designed to accompany the lesson and to encourage students to think about edible plant parts on their own

Implementation Process

- This lesson was taught to the K-5th students in a classroom setting
- We had a discussion of plant parts in the classroom. As each plant part was discussed, examples of vegetables and fruits representing each plant part were introduced to the class
- At the end of the class, students were given the worksheet and asked to list fruits and vegetables under the plant part they represent

Results

1. Students worked in groups to complete their worksheet on edible plant parts. Most students were able to correctly list several answers in all categories. Many students had very creative answers such as various types of herbs or sunflower seeds
2. Teachers were surveyed to find out the effectiveness of this lesson. One teacher said that the lesson had students talking and thinking about the plants they could eat
3. All 6 teachers reported they believe students improved their knowledge of edible plant parts during a follow-up discussion in the classroom

Learn More:

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