

## Laramie County Master Gardeners bolster citizen horticulture efforts

### Situation:

With the steady population growth of Laramie County, the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) has seen a rapid increase in the number of calls concerning lawn, garden, and tree issues. With only a part-time horticulturist on staff, responding to the increased demand is not possible without volunteers.

The Master Gardener course involves 10 weeks of intensive training with 40 additional hours of community volunteer service over a summer. The classes are taught by University of Wyoming entomologists and soil specialists, Master Gardeners who specialize in a specific topic, and the Laramie County UW CES horticulturist.

Following training, each Master Gardener intern performs a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer community service in which they build on their knowledge by helping people with lawn and garden concerns. In 2009, 24 out of 27 Master Gardener students graduated. This is an 88-percent program completion rate.

The Laramie County Master Gardener program requires an additional 10 hours of community volunteer service per year for graduated Master Gardeners; they typically continue to volunteer 36.7 hours per year. There are 243 trained Laramie County Master Gardeners, and there are 118 Master Gardeners current with their requirements.

In 2009, the Laramie County UW CES office handled 6,204 calls, e-mails, walk-ins, yard calls, educational programs, an in-house newsletter written and distributed quarterly for Laramie County Master Gardeners, provided educational material in the public office newsletter *Horizons*, and contacts through Master Gardener events. Another 4,643 volunteer hours were reported by Master Gardeners through house calls, events, and programs, for a total of 3,700 citizen contacts.

Additionally, graduated Master Gardeners and the county horticulturist take interns on house calls or consultations in addition to their work in the extension office answering phone calls and walk-in questions.

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**Impacts:**

The Master Gardener volunteer program is very effective in meeting the high-volume demand of educational outreach for horticulture concerns. Master Gardeners volunteer at the county fair, at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens with its new Children's Garden, at the Plant Select garden, and at a demonstration vegetable garden. Master Gardeners have been working with the City of Cheyenne on the Greenway, which is a transportation path for walkers, joggers, and bikers, conducting a plant inventory and identification and recommending trees to plant.

The Master Gardeners assisted the Stride Learning Center, a pre-school program for learning disabled children ages 3 to 5, with a sensory garden, allowing participants to touch and smell herbs and assisted them with their public plant sale.

One Master Gardener volunteer went the extra mile and completed a certificate in horticulture therapy. The program provides therapeutic training on gardening that results in a calming effect with participants, won a grant for \$4,500, and was able to set up raised bed vegetable gardens with grant funds at Attention Homes, a Laramie County half-way house for teenagers.

Master Gardeners have volunteered 4,643 hours of service to the Laramie County community in 2009. Volunteer time in Wyoming is now valued at \$17.73 per hour, which is a return of \$82,320.39 back to Laramie County community members.

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