

Participants
gained skills
and knowledge
of gardening
and were able
to demonstrate
their new skills
in their gardens.



UW Cooperative Extension Service reaches all abilities through Ark gardens

Situation:

In spring 2009, the state Master Gardener coordinator with the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) contacted the UW CES area educator for Albany and Carbon counties about an opportunity to provide training and mentoring to residents of Albany County Ark Regional Services in Laramie. Ark provides training and assistance to adults and children with developmental disabilities. Working with the residents, Master Gardeners helped prepare raised beds for planting, gave guidance on planting vegetables and care of plants, and provided assistance and guidance for harvesting.

Master Gardeners and Ark residents met throughout the summer. Participants also planted vegetables and flowers at Ark group homes. Flowers were selected to be butterfly and hummingbird attractors, which enhanced the learning experience for residents. Participants and Master Gardeners selected vegetables to plant during a field trip to a local nursery.

The area educator obtained funding for the project from Fiskars, a manufacturer of gardening tools. Its Project Orange Thumb provides communities grant funds, along with tools and materials, to aid in horticulture education.

Impacts:

Seven Ark residents participated in the four-month program. Through observation from start to finish, participants gained skills and knowledge of gardening and were able to demonstrate their new skills in their gardens. Participants also gained self-confidence and showed great pride in the results of their gardening efforts. When vegetables were harvested, residents immediately wanted to eat them for lunch. An added benefit was the nutrition gained through wanting to eat more fresh vegetables. Ark participants shared the impact with the participating Master Gardeners. One Master Gardener stated,

- “We had celebration meals using the fruits of our labors and were able to share the extras with other Ark programs. While vegetables were not always at the top of everyone’s list of favorite foods, we discovered they always taste better straight from the garden and knowing that you nurtured them along.”

The Master Gardener added,

- “Master Gardeners and Ark gardeners came together simply as gardeners to share the joy and satisfaction of working outside and watching things grow. We are now a community of gardeners looking forward to another season of growing together and enjoying the special friendships we have cultivated.”

Ark’s Habilitation Services manager stated,

- “Everyone loved working with people from the community, developing new friendships, and learning new skills. They benefit from the consistency and routine. They had the opportunity to learn so much and be involved in so much more of the process because of the additional people through the Master Gardeners. I really hope the partnership and relationships we made can continue in the future!”

This project provided the extension horticulture program volunteers an experience in working with this diverse audience resulting in a positive experience and outcomes for participants and Master Gardener volunteers.

This project
provided the
extension
horticulture
program
volunteers an
experience in
working with this
diverse audience.

