

Extension Master Gardener Volunteers Enhance Horticulture Program Effectiveness

The Situation

The statewide demand for horticulture information often exceeds the ability of local agents to meet client needs. The Extension Master Gardener (EMG) program and volunteers are vital to K-State Research and Extension's (KSRE) ability to provide accurate, up-to-date, and research-based horticultural information that meets the needs of Kansans in their local communities.

What We Did

Agents rely on trained EMG volunteers to deliver home lawn, garden and landscaping information teaching best horticultural practices to both adults and youth. The EMG program provides in-depth horticulture training in exchange for volunteer time. Agents and specialists contribute by teaching a comprehensive basic training course covering topics from plant growth and development to pesticides, fruits and vegetables, flowering plants, trees and shrubs, and plant pathology.

Additionally, volunteers are provided opportunities for advanced training in topics beyond the core areas, leadership roles, and recognition.

Outcomes

Trained EMG volunteers better their individual communities by providing information and partnering with local organizations to answer client questions on garden response lines, staff garden shows and community events, make public presentations and teach horticulture programs, build and maintain demonstration gardens, and assist with vegetable research trials.

In 2021, there were 1,201 active EMG volunteers across the state of Kansas, with programs present in 72 of 105 counties. These volunteers completed more than 20,459 hours of advanced training and, on average, each volunteer shared their knowledge with over 50 persons in their local community. Altogether, Kansas EMG volunteers donated over 91,083 hours of volunteer service back to their local communities. These contributions are equivalent to over \$2.6 million dollars ([Independent Sector, 2021](#)) in salary savings and equivalent to 43 full-time Extension staff positions.

Additionally, 243 new EMG volunteers completed basic training through 45 hours of online and in-person horticulture instruction in 2021. New volunteers were trained in 30 local Extension units, representing 50% of Kansas counties.

Success Story

Sedgwick County Extension Master Gardeners hosted the John C. Pair Horticultural Center Open House. Over 115 volunteers provided tours and educational outreach for over 200 horticultural industry professionals and 536 members of the public. This event showcased active research, highlighted K-State Research and Extension's educational outreach in the community, and opportunities for prospective students.

Participants offered these comments:

"The most interesting part about my visit to the John C. Pair Horticultural Center was that I liked seeing the test plots evaluating the various trees, grasses and plants. The staff and volunteers did a good job explaining the research. I also liked the path with the variety of established trees."

"Your open house was well received. I found the hosts and hostesses were welcoming, well organized, & very knowledgeable. Thank you for proving once again that Kansas people do it better!"

"I've never been prouder to be a Master Gardener than I was hosting this Open House event."

"I learned a lot as a volunteer preparing for this event, which is why I was excited to help host this event! I learned even more sharing the information with our guests and through my time interacting with the visitors."

The event raised \$665.25 toward Pair Center research efforts, doubled the number of online followers on the Pair Center's Facebook account, inspired over 12 individuals to apply for the Sedgwick County Extension Master Gardener Program, generated eight new subscribers of the monthly Sedgwick County e-newsletter, and connected 10 perspective students with K-State.



During the John C. Pair Horticultural Center Open House Extension Master Gardener, Valorie White, shares with visitors about the center's organic sweet potato production. Visitors learned about the growing and harvesting process, as well as how the sweet potatoes are used in everyday products. This was one of 10 stations Master Gardener Volunteers hosted during the event.



Extension Master Gardeners host a tree information booth during the John C. Pair Horticultural Center Open House. This booth demonstrated many of the common problems trees in Kansas face. Master Gardener Volunteers educated visitors how to prevent experiencing these problems with correct tree planting and maintenance.



Extension Master Gardener, Josh Mostowitz, shares with visitors about ongoing pine wilt research during the John C. Pair Horticultural Center Open House. Visitors learned about the many diseases of pine trees in Kansas, and how K-State research is looking to combat pine wilt disease in Kansas by selecting for potentially resistant trees.



Extension Master Gardeners highlighted the National Elm Trial research during the John C. Pair Horticultural Center Open House. At this station visitors learned about the top performing Elm trees in this study, and the benefits each tree variety brings to the home landscape.

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