

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Wise Use of Human and Natural Resources

El Paso County Master Gardener volunteers discover personal and community benefits beyond seasonal color and fresh tomatoes.

Situation

Colorado Springs officials encourage citizens to adopt conservation measures, such as water-wise landscaping, to offset growing demand for municipal water. For more than 25 years, Colorado State University Extension's horticulture program and Colorado Master Gardener (CMG) volunteers have helped residents throughout El Paso County rise to the challenge by teaching resource-conserving landscape and gardening practices. When county budget cuts led to the program's hiatus in September 2009, public access to much-needed, research-based horticulture information was significantly reduced.

Extension's Response

In 2010, the El Paso County Board of Commissioners worked with CSU Extension to reinstate the horticulture program by combining two positions—director of CSU Extension in El Paso County and horticulture agent—into one. In September 2010, Barbara Bates was hired.

This change meant El Paso County Extension could revive its CMG program. It did so by inviting previously active CMG volunteers to consider rejoining. In November 2010, interested volunteers attended a meeting to learn about the program's future direction and purpose. Sixty-six former El Paso County CMG volunteers attended.

At the meeting, volunteers were asked to complete an optional, 12-question survey about their CMG experiences. The survey was designed to gather information on how the program adds value to the community and CMG volunteers. It was also designed to measure if and how the CMG program changed the gardening practices of its volunteers, and if those changes resulted in cost savings or resource conservation, such as reduced water use. Sixty-one volunteers completed surveys. See survey results on page 2.

By January 2011, 81 previously active CMG volunteers had rejoined the program. In this first year of operation, the director/agent and CMG volunteers focused their expertise and resources on serving El Paso County residents by staffing the Extension CMG Help Desk and offering a series of classes on resource-conserving landscape and gardening practices. Volunteers have also written articles for newsletters, presented a Q & A panel on local television and coordinated horticulture competition at the El Paso County Fair.



The Bottom Line

- Colorado Master Gardener volunteers connect El Paso County citizens to resource-conserving landscape and gardening practices that generate economic and environmental impact.

By the Numbers

- Percent of Colorado Springs residential water used for home landscaping: 50
- Percent of CMGs who changed the way they garden: 98
- Percent of CMGs who decreased water use: 83

Results

Results from the 2010 CMG volunteer survey show that the program has contributed to the personal and professional development of volunteers while adding value to the community. According to survey results, the CMG program gave volunteers more directed purpose and connection:

- 98 percent reported that CSU Extension information and training changed the way they garden at home. A majority of respondents indicated making one or more of the following changes:
 - removing turf
 - using native or xeric plants
 - grouping plants with the same water and sunlight needs
 - using soaker hoses
 - mulching
 - tailoring water schedules.
- 83 percent reported that CSU Extension information and training led to decreased water use in residential landscapes and gardens.
- 88 percent reported that becoming a certified Master Gardener increased their level of county-wide volunteer involvement.
 - Volunteers listed 50 other community organizations they give their time to. This level of volunteerism, according to Bates, “shows that Extension is a phenomenal capacity builder that brings people together.”
- 91 percent reported that CSU Extension activities provided new and valuable community connections.
- 85 percent reported learning a significant aspect about themselves as a result of volunteering.
 - “I really like giving the public knowledge about their gardening quandaries... and I learn a lot from the research as well.”
 - “I especially enjoy doing research and being able to help people solve their gardening problems.”
 - “It has increased my awareness of the importance of community service and the satisfaction I get from providing horticultural education to the community.”
- 83 percent of the respondents who reported being employed in the green industry believe CMG certification has benefitted them professionally by enhancing their technical capacity to grow plants, tend soil, etc.

Beginning in January 2012, El Paso County Extension will expand the CMG program by offering 10-week training for new volunteer recruits.

“People are hungry for information to help with their gardening projects. Money saving tips are of value. If we are going to conserve water, education must continue.”

– CMG volunteer, El Paso County Extension

“We have this really valuable resource that was put on hold. It’s time to put the program and CSU Extension’s research-based information back to work to benefit everyone.”

– Barbara Bates, director and agent
El Paso County Extension

Learn More

El Paso County Master Gardener Help Desk:
Phone (719) 520-7684
e-mail: CSUMG2@elpasoco.com

To become a CMG volunteer, visit:
www.cmg.colostate.edu

Contact Information

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