

Impact

Colorado State University
Extension

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

Solutions for today's gardeners

Extension's network of 1,500 Colorado Master Gardeners helps Coloradans overcome gardening challenges and improve their lives.

Issue

Social, environmental and technological changes have broadened the needs and interests of gardeners. For instance, the 2008 economic downturn prompted renewed and widespread interest in backyard and community gardening, local food production and food security. Coloradans from all walks of life seek unbiased and trustworthy gardening know-how to address concerns, keep pace with ongoing change, sort through a host of gardening information now available and experience gardening success.

Extension's Response

Since 1975, Colorado State University Extension's network of 1,500 Colorado Master Gardener (CMG) volunteers has provided research-based gardening information, at the county level, through one-on-one contacts, programs and other outreach. Volunteers help the public reduce inputs into the landscape, improve soils, conserve water, diagnose lawn and tree problems, and learn to grow food and flowers.

In recent years, county-based CMG coordinators and volunteers have diversified their programming to address food security, community development, social and physical challenges, and environmental constraints. Examples from around the state include:

- Backyard and community gardening classes and tours
- Junior master gardener programs and other youth-focused initiatives
- Water-wise, low-precipitation, and native plant tours and demonstration gardens
- High altitude gardening/season extension research, education and demonstration
- Expanded CMG-managed farmer's markets
- Horticulture therapy at schools for the blind, rehabilitative hospitals and other settings.

To help individuals and communities keep pace with gardening best practices and solutions, CMG coordinators and volunteers have improved public access to information through new media outreach. Several county CMG programs share seasonal, local and reliable gardening know-how through blogs, websites and Facebook postings.

CSU Extension has expanded and strengthened its CMG volunteer base to reach more individuals and communities across the state. Online distance learning has brought the CMG program to rural and remote communities. Furthermore, the Front Range advanced plant diagnostic program helps experienced CMG volunteers refine their expertise and more efficiently resolve plant problems.



The Bottom Line

- Statewide, CMGs are the public's leading source for responsive, unbiased, research-based gardening know-how.
- CMGs help Coloradans save money, garden responsibly, improve landscapes, grow their own food, strengthen local food systems, build communities, and overcome physical and social challenges.

By the Numbers

- Number of CMG volunteers: 1,500
- Volunteer hours reported in 2010: 55,900
- Value of volunteer time: \$1,116,000
- 2010 Food bank donations in pounds: 32,300
- Number of youth reached in CMG projects: 7,900

Impact

Around the state, county CMG volunteers report helping Coloradans improve the quality of their lives through gardening. From teaching young children and families how to grow their own food, to demonstrating water-saving solutions for residential landscapes, CMG volunteers extend research-based information that helps people make informed choices regarding resource issues.

In 2010 alone, CMG volunteers reported donating more than 55,000 hours in service to their communities. The value of these hours equals \$1,166,000. These contributions of time and expertise occur at many levels, from answering questions at county Extension offices to mentoring low-income families over the span of a growing season.

The following list generated by Extension agents and CMG volunteers showcases the impact of their diverse efforts:

- CMGs help families and individuals learn to grow their own food, develop self-sufficiency skills, adopt healthy lifestyles and stretch dollars during tough economic times.
- CMGs assist communities in strengthening local food systems and addressing regional food security by helping improve local food production and donating produce to food banks. Outcomes on research of new techniques for extending the garden season, particularly at elevations above 6,000 feet, will contribute to this impact.
- CMGs promote economic development and increase access to local foods through farmer's markets and food-based community events that celebrate local food and seasonal harvests and attract thousands of citizens.
- CMGs promote and share environmentally responsible gardening solutions via water-wise, low precipitation xeric gardens and appropriate pesticide use. Homeowners save money, conserve resources and improve property values.
- CMGs help youth develop ecological understanding, lifelong gardening skills, an ethic of community service and a taste for nutritious foods.
- CMGs provide opportunities for youth and adults to overcome physical or social challenges to quality of life. For example, sensory learning gardens at Denver-area schools for the blind help develop connections between touch, taste and smell.
- The number of Coloradans with access to gardening expertise, information and assistance has increased from new media initiatives, annual symposia, community festivals and an expanded CMG volunteer base.

County Partners

Colorado Master Gardeners are active in 41 Colorado counties, engaging residents with gardening expertise, technical assistance and outreach programs. For a complete list of county and area programs visit: <http://cmg.colostate.edu/volunteering.shtml#countycontact>.

“The hundreds of visitors who come to our xeric tour always include new residents who have no idea what can be grown in this area, and need help getting started. Even if visitors walk away with just one gem—learning the right tree to plant here, how drip irrigation works, that pea gravel is a great mulch, that there are alternatives to a bluegrass lawn—we have helped educate and inspire them to be more successful gardeners within the constraints of our environment.”

— Edith Brideau
Pueblo County Extension Colorado Master Gardener

Learn More

CSU Extension documents outcomes from Colorado Master Gardener programs around the state. Read how individuals and communities across Colorado are improving their gardening know-how with the help of CMGs.

Visit: www.ext.colostate.edu/impact/impact.html to read about regional and local programs.

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