

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

Pueblo County Master Gardeners: From the Ground Up

Expanded presence of county-based Colorado Master Gardener volunteers means timely and relevant horticulture information is delivered to more people.

Situation

In Pueblo County, city-driven beautification projects, native plant and Xeriscape demonstration gardens and tours—along with other public horticulture projects—have sparked interest in residential water-wise landscaping and home-grown food production. As a result, county residents have expressed the need for timely and relevant horticulture education and technical assistance.

Extension's Response

To meet the increasing interest, Linda McMulkin, Colorado State University Extension horticulture coordinator in Pueblo County, has expanded the role and presence of Colorado Master Gardeners throughout the county. McMulkin works closely with Elizabeth Catt, Pueblo County Extension's horticulture assistant, to match volunteer interests with rewarding opportunities.

Colorado Master Gardener volunteers participate in community education and outreach as their payback for the horticulture training they receive. Volunteers field questions through the county Extension office, provide education at events and venues and assist community organizations with horticulture education and special projects.

The top ways that Pueblo County Extension and its CMG volunteers support the city and county include:

- Maintaining a demonstration garden on the Colorado State Fairgrounds and helping maintain gardens at the Southeast Colorado Water Conservancy District grounds, the Pueblo Zoo, and Cattail Crossing fishing pond. They also plan and deliver educational programs for the annual Pueblo Xeriscape Garden Tour.
- Providing educational programs and technical assistance to three community and 17 school gardens funded by the Urban Gardens Approach to Reduce Disease and Empower Neighborhoods and Schools (UGARDENS), a project of the Pueblo City-County Health Department.
- Contributing research-based content to Pueblo County Extension's quarterly newsletter, 'From the Ground Up.' McMulkin also writes a gardening column for the Pueblo Chieftain newspaper and volunteer Marilynn Chambers writes a weekly gardening column for the Pueblo West View.
- Organizing and running the bi-weekly Pueblo Farmer's Market through the Farmers' Marketeers, a nonprofit that turns market revenues into college scholarships for Pueblo County youth. CMGs have run the market for more than 30 years.



The Bottom Line

- Pueblo County Extension has significantly expanded its Colorado Master Gardener outreach and is serving more county residents than ever before with reliable, unbiased horticulture expertise.
- Pueblo County Extension collaborates with many organizations to educate residents on resource-appropriate horticulture choices that save money and are visually appealing
- Volunteers support interest in the local food movement by teaching community members to grow their own food.

By the Numbers

From 2011

- Colorado Master Gardener volunteers: 54
- CMG volunteer hours: 3,014
- Direct contacts: 12,230
- Print media contacts: 1,182,000

Results

Pueblo County Extension horticulture staff and Colorado Master Gardener volunteers have increased the recognition of CSU Extension's expertise and involvement throughout the city and county. Volunteers contribute to more community-based projects and are educating more residents on regionally-specific gardening solutions than ever before.

The research-based horticulture expertise that volunteers are trained to provide has become more socially and environmentally relevant as the region's semi-arid climate increases interest in water-wise landscaping and native plants. Throughout the region, volunteer-led xeric demonstration gardens and tours—as well as native plant education—are helping residents learn how to save money by using less water.

Master Gardener involvement in community and school gardens also contributes to many potential social, environmental and economic benefits. According to the Pueblo City-County Health Department UGARDENS website, community and school gardens:

- Improve quality of life
- Provide a catalyst for neighborhood and community development
- Stimulate social interaction
- Encourage self-reliance
- Beautify neighborhoods and preserves green space
- Produce nutritious food
- Reduce family food expenses
- Provide opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education
- Create opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections.

The Health Department says it expects to see positive health behavior changes among more than 4,000 individuals as a result of an increase in community and school gardens, new and strengthened partnerships between neighborhoods and schools, and school nutrition policy changes.

Through community development projects, such as UGARDENS, it's clear that Pueblo city-county residents are seeking horticulture information that creates a sense of place, conserves resources and promotes healthier lifestyle choices. In addition to helping residents develop resource-appropriate gardens by increasing access to water-wise landscaping information, volunteers also help residents learn to grow their own food, spend time outdoors, and exercise.

Colorado Master Gardeners are also uniquely positioned to offer educational experiences that promote positive youth development. For example, CMG guidance and horticulture expertise was critical in the success of the Lake Pueblo State Park rain water harvesting and native plant garden that was created and installed by members of the Pueblo West High School science club. Ultimately, the project created a new model for community service with the local school district's International Baccalaureate program.

“It was so wonderful to watch the students build the garden, and when they got their hands dirty is when they finally got it. There's such a difference between talking all winter about native plants or biomes to actually getting out there and digging out, carving, shaping and re-shaping the plot—that's when they got really happy, and really into it.”

—Elizabeth Catt, Pueblo County Extension horticulture assistant

Tried and True

Colorado Master Gardener (CMG) volunteers assist local CSU Extension horticulture staff in delivering gardening information to the community that fosters successful home gardening practices. For over 30 years, volunteers in Pueblo County have answered homeowner horticulture questions at the Pueblo County Extension office and organized and managed the Pueblo Farmer's Market, currently held at Midtown Shopping Center. This is one of the few markets in Colorado that is entirely run by CMG volunteers.

Horticulture Partners

City of Pueblo
Colorado Parks & Wildlife
Colorado State Fair
Lake Pueblo State Park
Local greenhouses and garden centers
Mountain Park Environmental Center
Pueblo City-County Health Department
Pueblo City-County Library
Pueblo Zoo
School Districts
Southeast Colorado Water Conservation District

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