

Impact

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

Native Plant Master volunteers changing the way Coloradans landscape

Statewide expansion of the nation's only Native Plant Master™ education program encourages sustainable landscaping while increasing awareness about the threats of invasive weeds to Colorado's native plants.

Issue

Sustainable landscapes took on new relevance in the late 1990s as the state struggled from the effects of a multi-year drought. During this time an increased spread of invasive alien weeds displaced native plants. A decade later, noxious weeds threaten over 1 million acres of the state's private and public lands. More than ever, homeowners and landowners need education about the relationship between water conservation, native plants, weeds and sustainable landscapes.

Extension's Response

CSU Extension responded by creating the Native Plant Master™ (NPM) education and volunteer program. A field-based 'train the trainer' program, NPM trains a corps of volunteers who then educate the public about the role and importance of native plants in creating sustainable landscapes and the ecological impact of invasive weeds. Jefferson County Extension launched the state's first NPM training in 1997.

Native Plant Master volunteers take 36 hours of hands-on coursework taught by county agents and other NPM trainers on trails in local open space parks and other public lands. Field learning is supplemented by the Colorado Plant Database, Extension's research-based online resource that identifies more than 1,000 Colorado plants. All NPM courses are open to the general public. Volunteers seeking NPM Certification agree to make 60 educational contacts each year.

The program has broad appeal, attracting homeowners, garden center employees, landscape architects, open space planners, natural area docents, government employees, and small acreage landowners.



The Bottom Line

- For every dollar Extension spent on non-personnel program costs in Jefferson County, NPM volunteers generated \$7.50 in self-reported savings from sustainable landscaping and weed control efforts.
- By training adults to both volunteer and educate others about the principles of horticultural best practices, CSU Extension is helping Coloradans better understand how to conserve precious natural resources by adopting sustainable landscape choices.

By the Numbers

- NPM Volunteers: 458
- NPM Course Participants: 1,296
- NPM Courses Statewide: 48
- Direct Educational Contacts: 28,489
- NPM Revenues: \$30,809
- Estimated Cost/Benefit of NPM in Jefferson County: \$1=\$7.50

Impact

A 2009 statewide NPM survey revealed that volunteers educated thousands of people about the benefits of native plants and reported an increase in landscaping with native plants and controlling invasive alien weeds. The value volunteers placed on these efforts totaled \$200,507 in 2009 alone. Many volunteers who participated in NPM to enhance their job skills also reported that becoming a NPM has increased their ability to more effectively do their job—whether at a garden center or for local government.

The greatest benefit of the NPM program may well be its multiplier effect: a few hundred volunteers are trained and thousands are educated through neighbor-to-neighbor talks, on-the-job training, guided naturalist walks on public lands, and other learning opportunities. NPM is the leading statewide entity with the expertise and resources to train people about the relationship between water conservation, native plants, weeds and sustainable landscapes. As a result, CSU Extension has found a cost-effective way to increase the sustainability of Colorado's backyards and wildlands—one native plant at a time.

Native Plant Master Mission

To educate the public about native plants in order to foster stewardship, sustainable landscaping and management of weeds that threaten native ecosystems.

County & Area Partners

Boulder	Montezuma
Custer	Morgan
Eagle	Pueblo
Gilpin	San Miguel
Jefferson	Tri-River Area
Larimer	

“As an open space planner, I evaluate acquisition proposals for potential benefits to the open space system. That evaluation includes a site visit. Through my training in the Native Plant Master courses, I am better able to identify native and alien species and to pass this information along to my colleagues including the Natural Resource staff...by providing specifics that may prompt further site investigations prior to presentations to decision makers.”

– Native Plant Master
Jefferson County

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