

Impact



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

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

Citizens learning about native plants generate statewide economic impacts

Situation

Colorado is a dry state subject to periodic drought. The Native Plant Master program was created 20 years ago to respond to concerns about sustaining built and natural landscapes while minimizing the use of water and reducing the impact of invasive, non-native weeds that can thrive in dry conditions.

The Native Plant Master program has a wide range of benefits for a wide range of people. Participants include land managers, biologists, green industry personnel, business owners, volunteers, educators, homeowners and others.

Why natives? When appropriately sited, native plant landscapes require significantly reduced inputs such as water. They provide areas in both the built and natural environment that can increase biodiversity including native birds, wildlife and beneficial insects. The Native Plant Master program has played a key role in improving our appreciation and knowledge of native landscapes and the value that they bring across Colorado.

Extension's Response

The program was first offered in 1997 by Colorado State University Extension in Jefferson County and since has been adopted by an additional 11 Extension offices. With changing intensity of use of our public lands and increasingly dry conditions in the state, use of native plants in built and natural landscapes can add to a sustainable future for all Coloradans.

Since the first Native Plant Master training, the program has continued to grow. In the first year, three field courses were offered in Jefferson County. This past year, the program has expanded with multiple Extension offices across the state offering 68 field courses and indoor classes.

Participants in the program go on to educate the public, multiplying the impact. In the last year alone, more than 15,000 individuals have been educated by program volunteers and Extension staff using information they learned from the program.

This educational outreach has resulted in citizens saving water, money and time. Changes implemented by participants have resulted in an economic impact of more than \$33,000 last year due to savings from instituting water-wise native landscaping and increased land productivity from weed control. These practices were implemented on more than 33,000 acres.

Participants who complete three field courses are awarded a Colorado Flora Certificate. Field courses follow a science-based curriculum designed for the program. Special classes are also offered that include site learning in unique habitats, such as the alpine life zone, as well as indoor classes such as basic botany, landscaping with natives, and invasive weed management.

Volunteer certification as a Native Plant Master is optional. To earn certification, volunteers must be accepted through an application process, pass three field courses, and make 60 educational contacts using information they learn from the program. A new volunteer track will engage volunteers in data collection and scientific observation of plant pollinators.



The Bottom Line - 2017

- \$33,873 in savings reported by participants due to reduced landscaping inputs and increased land productivity
- 33,507 acres were impacted by sustainable landscaping or alien invasive weed control completed by program participants

By the Numbers - 2017

- 1,881 participants in 68 classes
- 15,751 educational contacts made by volunteers and CSU Extension staff
- 3,092 volunteer hours
- 187 volunteers
- \$74,641 value of volunteer hours
- 95,478 webpage views on the Colorado Plant Database
- 1,200 plants in Colorado Plant Database, which provides research-based information on plant identity, ecology and human connections

Impact

Thousands of Colorado residents have been educated by the Native Plant Master Program (NPM) since its inception in 1997. In their own words to the right, here's a small sampling of what participants say about the program.

The NPM team measures program outcomes through an annual survey. Program participants are asked to report on sustainable landscaping and invasive weed mitigation projects they completed that year as a result of their participation in the program. Last year, participants reported saving \$33,873 due to reduced landscaping inputs and increased land productivity. These projects were completed on 33,507 acres across Colorado.

Savings from sustainable landscaping result from reduced water use, pruning and pest control due to planting native species that are naturally adapted to local conditions. Savings from weed control result from improved grazing, crop output, ornamental landscapes, wildlife and tourism.

These figures indicate that CSU Extension has found a cost-effective way to increase the sustainability of Colorado's managed and natural landscapes while reducing water use and invasive weeds. The Native Plant Master Program is helping to create a sustainable future for all Coloradans.

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.

NPM County Partners

Boulder
Clear Creek/Denver/Gilpin/Jefferson
Custer
Delta/Mesa/East Montrose/Ouray
Douglas
Eagle
Larimer
Logan/Morgan/Phillips/Washington
Montezuma
Pueblo
San Miguel/West Montrose
Teller

"I use my knowledge I acquired from the class daily. I have also shared so much of what I learned in the classes about native plants and noxious weeds with countless land owners, contractors, and coworkers." -*Tami Kochen, Pitkin County Land Use Planner*

"I think that the dramatic increase in population to environmentally sensitive areas, like the front range, demands increased education initiatives, like the NPM program, in order to teach the importance of stewardship. Likewise, native plants MUST be incorporated into the average suburban yard, if we hope to keep water demand in balance with our water supply." -*Meridith Long, architect*

"This program has been one of the best things I've ever been involved in! It helps keep my spirits up when I know that there are others who find native plants as interesting and important as I do. I so appreciate the opportunity to continue to learn more and more about them." -*Carey Harrington, CSU Xeriscape Demonstration Garden volunteer*

"I am so impressed by the knowledge and generous spirit of the NPM instructors and leaders. They are encouraging and are able to differentiate instruction ... important because some fellow participants work in botany-oriented professions, some are NPM from other states, and some, like me, have little background in botany and are more recently enthused by native plants and their importance in our environment..." -*program participant*

More information

<http://conativeplantmaster.org>

Contact Information

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