

## Lake County Master Gardener Program, Florida

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### INTERNATIONAL MASTER GARDENER SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE

Category: Community Service  
Project: Mobile Plant Clinic

A survey of the Lake County office Master Gardener Plant Clinic clientele was conducted to determine the efficiency, etc. of the clinic. A concern that was pointed out in the survey was the distance that many of the participants were traveling. The Lake County office Plant Clinic provides service to more than 60,000 people annually. Looking at past records we determined the rate of growth in the county and rate of increase of clientele contacts, percentage wise we were not keeping up. At a meeting of the Lake County Master Gardeners the idea of some type of mobile trailer was suggested. This would provide a method of taking the University of Florida Extension to the people.

The following Master Gardeners have contributed a total of 4600 hours to complete and operate this project.

Bill Spangler	Jeanette Hanst	Bill Gay	Leona Gardiner
Ralph Gerber	Mary Gerber	Elizabeth Brewer	Red Linville
John Cameron	Jean Cameron	Pris Peterson	Joanna Fox
Murray Huffinger	Lee Johnson	Teresa Watkins	Sandy Hults
Pam Hetheron	Red Linville	Betty Shearon	

The Lake County Master Gardeners applied and received a grant from the C.V. Griffin, Sr. Foundation for \$5,000 to fund the development of the mobile plant clinic. An eight foot by twelve foot concession type trailer was designed and constructed to our specifications by Wells Fargo Trailers. The grant provided the funds needed to obtain the trailer shell. Additional funds were raised through a plant sale to fund the interior work needed. The counter tops and cabinets were installed with the assistance of the Master Gardener Coordinator, along with electrical outlets, interior lights and phone lines. Lake County Board of County Commissioners paid for the tag and covered the insurance cost.

They felt this was an excellent idea and wanted to support the Master Gardener project. A trailer hitch was purchased for the county pickup to pull the trailer to different sites.

The trailer was finished and stocked with donated reference books from the Lake County Master Gardener Society. Four movable filing boxes provide for the holding University of Florida publications. Lake County Master Gardener and professional sign painter, David Sauer, contributed with the first design for the trailer.

The intended purpose of this project, like all other Master Gardener Plant Clinics, is to provide the best information on landscape management practices to area residents.

Additional purpose of this project was:

- To get the University of Florida Extension out into the community
- To make more people aware of the services and information available through the University of Florida
- To better serve the community

This project takes the University of Florida to the people providing easy access to information and assistance to area residences. One frequent response was “I didn’t know the University offered this kind of help.”

On site evaluations, personal contacts, follow up evaluations and individual comments have helped us evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the Mobile Plant Clinic. Being able to take the information to our clientele has basically provided access to a new audience. Many of our residents were aware of the University of Florida, but many were not. The survey of contacts showed a high ratio of first timers. More than 80% of the people had never utilized the services provided by the University of Florida. More than 60% had never heard of or knew about the services provided through the University. The Mobile Plant Clinic has greatly contributed to the education of area residents and contributed to the community by offering services that were not available to many. A new group of people have and continue to be reached each time the clinic is utilized. The Mobile Plant Clinic was utilized 60 times this past year. Each week the clinic is set up at the area flea market to provide on goers with information. One of the comments on a recent survey was expressed by lots of people, “I am so glad you were here”. The clinic has recorded more than 8,000 contacts. The projected visual awareness of participates provided by event organizers was more than 120,000. With the Mobile Plant Clinic we have been able to tap into a new group that we had not been able to reach in the past.

Follow up evaluation of 100 people that received information was completed this past year:

- 98% satisfaction rating with service
- 97% repeat customers – have utilized the plant clinic at least twice again

Five landscape practices were evaluated to determine any changes. Results were evaluated on the follow up evaluation to determine:

- Reduced or eliminated routine applications of pesticides
- Identify pest before utilizing pesticides
- Reduced water use
- Reduced amount of nitrogen fertilizer
- Increased mulch use

Results of evaluations:

- 48% demonstrated all five changes
- 67% demonstrated 4 of the changes
- 84% demonstrated 3 of the changes
- 92% demonstrated at least 2 of the changes

The Master Gardeners of Lake County with the support of our Horticulture Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator were able to identify a new group and were able to provide a means of reaching this group. The Mobile Plant Clinic will continue to service area residents that may not have access to the University of Florida Extension services through other means. The ability to take the plant clinic to the people will assist in Extension awareness and community service. With awareness of the Master Gardener Mobile Plant Clinic in the area has come a higher demand/request for the Master Gardener to attend functions. We are faced with a request that is greater than the time and volunteers we have available. A Mobile Plant Clinic team has been developed to look into ways to better utilize and expand use of the Mobile Plant Clinic.

Information needs to be available for people to use. This is why as Master Gardeners we are always looking for ways to get the information into the hands of our clientele. Taking the University of Florida to our clientele, that would not be able or willing to get the information any other way has shown significant impact. Not only do we receive recognition when we attend events, but we are noticed when traveling to and from as well. The Mobile Plant Clinic allows Lake County Master Gardeners to better serve as ambassadors of the University of Florida Extension and, to better serve the community.

**“I am sure glad you were here.”**