

International Master Gardener Search for Excellence Application

Name of MG Program and State

Vermilion County Master Gardener Program, Illinois

Name, title, address, phone, e-mail of MG Coordinators/Extension Staff

John H. Peverly, NRM Educator

Gloria Young, Master Gardener Coordinator

25 East Liberty Lane, Danville, IL 61832

phone: 217-442-8615

e-mail: peverly@uiuc.edu ; gyoung@extension.uiuc.edu

Name, title, address of MG contact person

Nancy Roderick

20877 E. 2650 N. Rd.

Bismarck, IL 61814

Category

C. "Workshop or Presentation or Hands-on Programs"

Name of Project

First Tuesday Gardening Classes.

Description of Project. Include methods of instruction, results, conclusions.

The public are offered information and skills about gardening and related topics monthly on the first Tuesday evening from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM, normally at the Extension Service building.

Instruction is by knowledgeable volunteers from the area, including Master Gardeners and specialists from the University of Illinois. Hands-on experiences and demonstrations are used as well as lecture, discussion, and provision of topical handouts. Refreshments support a relaxed atmosphere. Door prizes are given. When possible these relate to the evening's topics.

The program is available to all. Advertisement to the public is through local newspaper, radio, Extension Service outdoor billboard, promotion by local businesses, mention during the weekly Master Gardener Radio Program on WDAN, and word of mouth. The building is handicapped accessible. A \$5 donation is optional. Contributions have always more than covered the cost of refreshments and door prizes.

The value and effectiveness of the program is demonstrated by public enthusiasm, active participation in the question and answer portion of the classes, formal evaluation responses, and increased use of the horticultural inquiry service at the Extension office.

We conclude that the stated mission of the Tuesday evening project "to educate and promote to the general public sound gardening techniques and practices" is being met. The project successfully extends the resources of the University to the public. University of Illinois research informs speakers and provides materials for handouts. The First Tuesday Gardening Classes fulfill for this community the Master Gardener Purpose to "provide horticultural information specific to local climates, soils and plants, and training to the gardening public....". This is being done in a manner that is accessible and user friendly.

Names of Master Gardeners involved in the project from start to finish that should receive a certificate if this is a winning project

Terry Schnoor, Janice Schnoor, Ron Shaffer, Sharon Shaffer, Gloria Young, Ray Scarce, Trudy Scarce, Connie Filson, Claudia Ferrell, Catherine Rew, Jacque Eicher, Dorothy Ksiaskiewicz, Marianne Venute

Simplicity

Evening classes are targeted to the public through advertisement style and topic selection. Donations cover expenses. Knowledgeable area volunteers serve as presenters. Refreshments and topical door prizes are provided through donation or purchase. Holding classes always on the same evening of the month (first Tuesdays) facilitates scheduling and memory. A similar project could readily be replicated elsewhere.

Practicality

The evening time frame makes the classes available to most of the working public. Donations rather than fees cover expenses, but exclude no one. Broad public advertisement using local newspaper, radio stations, the Master Gardener weekly one-hour radio program on WDAN, the Extension Service outdoor billboard, promotion by local businesses, and word of mouth make the program widely known. Topics of local and seasonal interest attract participation. Evaluation forms provide information and ideas for new desired programs.

Originality/Creativity

Originally the project was the brainstorm of one Vermilion County Master Gardener who wished to make pertinent horticultural information easily and comfortably available to the public. Using knowledgeable area volunteers, who are often honored to be asked, has enabled the project to be offered to the general public free of required charge, with only an optional donation. Providing refreshments creates a friendly atmosphere for newcomers. Door prizes add interest and motivation. Selecting prizes related to the topic of the evening can further the evening's lessons.

Widely varying topics of local and seasonal interest have included: Ornamental Grasses, House Plants/Tropicals, Greenhouses, Ponds, Native Grasses, Proven Winner Flowers, Trees, Diseases, Soils, Bulbs, Fruit Trees, Plant Potting, Mulches and Composting, Vermi Composting, Landscape Design, Gourds, Seed Starting, Beginning a Garden, Shrubs, Roses, Garlic, Steppable Plants/Pathways, Greenery Wreath Making, Annuals and Perennials, Vegetables, IMP (Integrated Pest Management), Turf Grasses/Lawn Management, and Floral Design. New topics being considered for the future include: Cacti, Food Preservation, and Outdoor Lighting. Each presenter enhances the subject presentation in different ways often including demonstrations and hands-on participation.

For one unique First Tuesday Class, activities were moved to the Vermilion Conservation District's Herb Garden. The presentation regarding herbs was enhanced by the sampling of foods cooked with herbs and by a tour of the herb garden.

Extension and MG Mission/Goals

This project clearly fulfills the following University of Illinois Master Gardener Objectives as stated in the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Policies: "Expand the capacity of

Illinois Extension Service to distribute horticultural information to individuals and groups in local communities" and "develop and enhance community programs related to horticulture."

Significant learning and impact

Public response has been excellent with new and increasing participation. In the beginning attendance averaged 20 to 30 persons. Attendance has grown to as many as 45 to 50 participants per evening. Lively participation in question and answer sessions demonstrates interest and learning. Upon written evaluation, most participants report "receiving new/helpful ideas" and "going home to try a new method or practice". Increasing Extension Office horticultural inquiries evidence growing community awareness of the expertise available there. Some participants, as a result of attending the First Tuesday Gardening Classes have gone on to become Master Gardeners. The First Tuesday Gardening Classes meet the basic goals of being educational and available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.

Number of people impacted

At least 1550 persons have participated in the First Tuesday Gardening Class series since its inception about four years ago. (*Calculation: minimal average attendance of 35 x 11 sessions per year x 4 years.*) Gardeners tend to share what they know, so these participants will have influenced others as well.

Support from other community groups

Garden Centers have provided speakers, plants and other prizes, examples of new plants, and help with publicity. Master Gardeners, some of the speakers, and area farm and hardware stores have donated prizes. The University of Illinois, Danville Area Community College, the City of Danville, the Vermilion County Health Department and growers in the area have contributed speakers. The Vermilion County Conservation District cooperated with the presentation on herbs, mentioned above.

Budget

All contributions are directly submitted to the University of Illinois Extension Office and matched back to the unit office by the State, according to Extension policy. Cost of refreshments and door prizes are submitted to the Extension Office. Donations have always covered and frequently exceeded costs. Building use and cost of copying materials has been provided by the Extension Service.

Other pertinent information

Vermilion County is geographically situated on the eastern state border with Indiana. Tuesday Gardening Classes are advertised regionally, and frequently attendees are from other Illinois and Indiana counties. As a result, Vermilion County Master Gardeners have helped organize several cross-state educational events related to gardening topics. Thanks to the initiative demonstrated by the successful Tuesday Gardening Classes, there is a growing interest and action across the two-state region in similar offerings to the public.