

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Horticulture in-service keep faculty, staff and volunteers up-to-date and in-the-know

The Situation

Persistent budget declines for Extension programs increase the importance of having well-trained Extension volunteers to provide information and public service on the organization's behalf (Steele, 1994). In 2010, Extension Horticulture programs and services directly reached 32,135 individuals state-wide. Another 110,000 participated indirectly by accessing web and media publications (CalsPlan, 2010). Consumer horticulture questions are answered effectively by educated staff, paraprofessional staff and Master Gardener Volunteers in most county offices under supervision of an Extension faculty member.

With home gardening currently enjoying a surge in popularity, the University of Idaho Extension Horticulture Topic Team recognized a need for advanced horticulture subject matter training to help faculty, staff and volunteers be more accurate, efficient and timely when solving problems for their clientele. In addition, Extension faculty from single-educator county offices trained in crops, livestock, or community development are often called upon to assist home gardeners and would benefit from basic horticulture training suited for that purpose.

Our Response

To address this need, an Extension Critical Issues grant was secured and three, full-day horticulture in-service sessions were planned by the team to deliver intensive, hands on training to faculty, staff and volunteers across the state. The sessions were designed to provide attendees with current information to improve their ability to diagnose plant problems and recommend appropriate solutions. Travel grants were offered to staff and volunteers needing financial assistance to attend the workshops.



The Idaho Botanical Garden in Boise provided an excellent backdrop for the Southern District Training. Photo by Ariel Agenbrood

Sessions were organized by committee to address specific needs at each of the three locations: Moscow, Idaho Falls and Boise. Topics prepared and presented by Extension specialists, educators and invited guests included beginning and advanced plant problem diagnostic procedures, researching and recommending appropriate pesticides, insect and spider identification, turfgrass management, tree care, updates from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, and information on both commonly encountered and emerging pests.

The no-cost sessions included hands-on activities, tours, and multi-media presentations. Participants also received considerable reference and resource materials to take back to their counties.

Program Outcomes

In all, 104 faculty, staff and volunteers attended the workshops, which took place August 23-30, 2011. A

participant questionnaire was used to evaluate the workshops in Boise and Moscow (n=89). Results of the evaluation indicated that:

- 98% of respondents found the information presented “useful” to “very useful”
- 100% of respondents believed the quality of information presented was “good” to “excellent”
- Nearly all participants felt more confident in their ability to “Take a more active role in Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinics,” “Diagnose a plant problem, insect or disease,” and “Refer a client to an appropriate source of assistance”
- Some of the changes participants planned to make to their Extension program or Master Gardener Volunteer activities included:
 - “(Doing) more investigation before making a recommendation”
 - “Start a better diagnostic questionnaire to have in the office-to serve people better”
 - “Learning and practicing asking the right questions to make it easier to diagnose plant/insect problems”
 - “Read the pesticide regulations”

The Future

Participants overwhelmingly voiced a desire to repeat this kind of training annually, and suggested a number of topics, including more of what was covered in these sessions. With no promise of grant funding beyond this year, the team was encouraged to learn that over 83% of respondents indicated that they would pay \$15 to \$35 for a similar workshop in the future.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

University of Idaho Extension Horticulture Topic Team
University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
University of Idaho Arboretum
W.F. Barr Entomology Museum
Idaho Botanical Garden
Bonneville County Extension
Boise City Community Forestry
Idaho State Department of Agriculture

References

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- CALSPlan *Statewide Clientele Contact Report*. Ed. Paul McCawley. University of Idaho Extension, 31 Oct. 2010. Web. 30 Sept. 2011. https://calsplan.cals.uidaho.edu/Report_ContactsByTeam.asp?2010.

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