

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Horticulture update programs keep volunteers and staff up to date

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 2011, Extension Horticulture programs and services directly reached 33,924 individuals statewide. Another 110,000 participated indirectly by accessing web and media publications (CalsPlan, 2011). 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 two full-day horticulture in-service sessions were planned by the team to provide intensive, hands on training for faculty, staff and volunteers across the state. The sessions were designed to provide attendees with updated information to improve their ability diagnose plant problems and address current topics in horticulture. Travel grants were offered to staff and volunteers needing financial assistance to attend the workshops.



The Berry and Nut Farm in Hayden was the site of a tour as part of the Current Issues in Horticulture program in Coeur d'Alene.

Sessions were planned by committee to address specific needs at each of the three locations: Coeur d'Alene and Boise. Topics prepared and presented by Extension specialists, educators and invited guests included Implications of Genetically Modified Organisms in Horticulture, bees and Pesticides, Herbicide Carryover in Composts and Mulches, Fruit Tree Insects and Diseases.

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

Program Outcomes

In all, 24 volunteers attended the workshops, which took place in Coeur d'Alene on July 19, 2012. A participant questionnaire was used to evaluate the workshops. Results of the evaluation indicated that:

- 88% of respondents found the information presented “useful” to “very useful”
- 87% of respondents believed the information presented was “good” to “excellent”
- Nearly all participants rated the speakers as “good” or “excellent”
- Nearly all participants felt more confident in their ability to “Take a more active role in Master Gardener Plant Diagnostic Clinics,” 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:
 - “be better at educating the public on the effects of pesticides on bees”
 - “be more confident in discussing fruit tree insects and diseases”
 - “provide supplied handouts regarding herbicide carry-over”

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 all respondents indicated they would pay up to \$25 for this program 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 Kootenai County Master Gardeners
- Wilbur-Ellis Company
- WSU APIS Molecular Systematics Lab

References

Steele, D. L. (1994). *Volunteer leader inventory*. Rotary training guide. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

CALSPlan Statewide Clientele Contact Report. Ed. Paul McCawley. University of Idaho Extension, 31 Oct. 2011. Web. 13 Sept. 2011. https://calsplan.cals.uidaho.edu/Report_ContactsByTeam.asp?2011.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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10/12