

# IMPACT

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Extension

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## Southern Idaho regional Master Gardener program outreach

### AT A GLANCE

**Idaho Master Gardeners are reaching far beyond the normal model of outreach and accomplishing amazing goals**

### The Situation

The Southern Idaho Regional Master Gardener program provides horticulture service to eight UI Extension county offices in south central Idaho. An increase in population, due to prominent corporations moving to the region, has increased horticulture inquiries in Extension county offices. In the past few years, many new insect pests, diseases and weeds were identified by the Department of Agriculture as probable for our area. These circumstances have resulted in an increased need for community horticulture education.

### Our Response

In 2013, the Southern Idaho Master Gardener program began training volunteers to assist University of Idaho Extension and communities with home horticulture diagnostics, and providing support for community education through demonstrations and classes. Since 2013, the Southern Idaho Master Gardener certification program has offered 10 courses, training 246 students with knowledge in many aspects of horticulture. Of the 246 students, 122 received their certification by completing 40 hours of special community education projects and Extension office diagnostics. As Master Gardener participants recommend techniques to others, they serve Extension's outreach purposes and protect and enhance the urban landscape from current and encroaching pests.



Master Gardeners working at the Twin Falls Farmers Market.  
Photo by Tony McCammon.

### Program Outcomes

Active Master Gardeners have increased Extension's outreach through many worthy projects. The five following activities showcase the high quality volunteerism of the Southern Idaho Master Gardener program and the broad scope of their impact on the communities they serve.

### Diagnostic Clinics

In five of the eight counties in the region, diagnostic efforts are completely coordinated by Master Gardener volunteers working with their local Extension educator and staff. Master Gardeners have answered over 4,800 diagnostic requests and developed over 2,300 face-to-face contacts since 2013. They identified and reported when the Elm seed bug arrived in Buhl in 2013; and in 2014, they identified the first case of knot gall on honey locust in Idaho.

### **Protecting Pollinators Workgroup**

Groups of Master Gardeners have collaborated in Hagerman, Filer, Twin Falls and Burley to design and build pollinator demonstration gardens and waystations. They have partnered with businesses and agencies throughout the valley to offer community butterfly release celebrations, received over \$9,700 in grants and donations for garden construction, provided community classes on pollinator habitat and submitted articles to local newspapers. They also received international recognition on their project for the development of stratification and growing protocols for pollinator friendly native plants. The workgroup has reached over 700 individuals with face-to-face information about our precious pollinators.

**Victory Gardens of the Wood River Valley:** The Ketchum Master Gardener class of 2015 created a gardening class that provided an outlet for their newfound knowledge. They created an organic version of the Victory Garden Series. Working with the UI Extension, Blaine County office, the Master Gardeners conducted the 10-week course for 20 participants. Results from their evaluation show that 73% of participants were very likely to change their garden management. Due to the success of their efforts, a waiting list has already been created for next year.

**Farmers' Market Education:** Partnerships between Master Gardeners and local farmers' market board members resulted in free marketing and space for gardeners to provide education while promoting Extension and the Master Gardener Program. On Saturday mornings, Master Gardeners set up a series of educational displays in both the Twin Falls and Jerome Farmers' Markets. In all, 35 educational booths including on-site diagnostic clinics were designed and taught by Master Gardeners. Master Gardeners had over 3,200 face-to-face contacts between the 2015 and 2016 summers, including 75 requests for information on the Master Gardener program.

**Burley River Walk Botanical Garden:** Eight participants from the Advanced Master Gardener class in Burley formed a committee and organized a small army of Master Gardeners to save the neglected River Walk Botanical Garden. The garden sits on a little more than an acre. Their group began working with the city council to turn the designated "doomed project" over to them. After the city granted the rights and seed money to begin the project, volunteers got right to work renovating the garden. A few Master Gardeners began writing grants for the project, others wrote articles for the paper to involve the community, and some began stratifying seed and growing plants. This project has been incredibly visible to the community and has put the UI Master Gardener program in a very positive light.

Conclusion. The Master Gardener volunteers are extending the reach of Extension into their communities in extraordinary ways. Their successes are a reflection on the excellent programs we offer as a university and the sustainable capabilities of our programs when volunteers feel needed and are well trained.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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