



Homeowner and Youth Gardening

Situation:

Strafford County's population now exceeds 122,500. Each year UNH Cooperative Extension receives thousands of requests from New Hampshire citizens for education on a wide range of topics including home gardening, wildlife, water quality, household pests, backyard livestock, food preparation and food safety, urban forestry and many other topics.

UNH Cooperative Extension developed a variety of methods to simultaneously meet this need and reduce the burden on staff. Using over 500 Master Gardeners (who volunteered 11,000 hours in 100 communities last year), Extension expanded its impact by responding to over 10,000 phone inquiries, conducting more than 50 workshops in schools and communities and working on a diverse range of projects that resulted in aesthetic, environmental and economic benefits for both New Hampshire citizens and volunteers. Each contact with the general public, homeowners, gardeners and municipalities provides the opportunity to teach people how to make changes to their surroundings that optimize the safe use of their properties while protecting the environment.

UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:

Geoffrey Njue, Strafford County Agricultural Resources Extension Educator, along with many Extension educators and specialists, provides training to Master Gardener volunteers in soil science, integrated pest management (known as IPM), fruit and vegetable production, lawn care, and landscaping. Currently, there are 50 active Master Gardeners in Strafford County helping with Extension programs and contributing to local community service projects. In addition to the 250 phone and email inquiries by the public handled by Geoffrey Njue this year, 486 phone calls from Strafford County citizens were answered by Extension's Family Home and Garden Education Center this year. The most common topics were vegetable gardening, fruit tree pruning, lawn care, poisonous plant identification, landscaping, household pests, water quality and backyard livestock.

Public health concerns in Strafford County, like all of southern New Hampshire, include threats of insect-borne diseases such as Eastern Equine Encephalitis and Lyme Disease. Extension Specialist, Alan Eaton identifies insects, assists town officials and residents in Strafford County with mosquito management recommendations, and presents educational information at workshops, through print media, and displays at the Rochester Fair on how to lower their risk of contracting these diseases.

How We Make a Difference:

- Strafford County staff help homeowners who come directly to the local office by identifying plant disease, insect specimens and weeds and provided recommendations for control. These clients benefited by having 70 insects, diseased plants and weed specimens identified with appropriate treatment recommendations.
- Educators reviewed another 146 soil tests results for homes and grounds, and answered more than 250 phone and email questions regarding soil tests, insects and diseases, lawn and tree care, and other gardening concerns. With the help of the fruit specialist emeritus and IPM specialist, the county staff conducted a fruit pruning demonstration and early pest management strategies for home in which 18 home owners attended. The staff also made three visits to home owners who needed guidance in pruning their fruit trees.
- Master Gardener volunteers worked with staff and volunteered 1,839 hours, reaching more than 120 youth and adults with gardening education and information. Twenty-three children completed the five-month gardening program. This represents a cost benefit to the county of \$35,879 when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.51/hour for volunteer time (independentsector.org).
- Master Gardeners through the Master Speakers bureau presented four gardening seminars to community groups with research-based gardening education.

- Strafford County 4-H has implemented a youth gardening program that has effectively introduced agriculture, science, nutrition and youth development skills to numerous youth in the county. In partnership with the Cooperative Extension Master Gardner program garden, plots are planned, sowed, cultivated and harvested further developing a sense of adult partnership for the youth. This hands-on connection with the soil also provides youth with a real sense of growth and responsibility as earth and community stewards. The efforts of Strafford County 4-H gardening program have been recognized at the state level and will serve as a catalyst to implement a statewide, national Junior Master Gardner program.
- Over the past three years, almost 1,000 (555 were from homeowners) soil samples from Strafford County have been analyzed and recommendations made regarding fertilizer application rates.

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