URI Master Gardener Program

2017

EASTERN REGION
COORDINATOR REPORT

THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

URI MASTER GARDENERS
Cultivating the future
Submitted by Garry Holmstrom, Eastern Region Coordinator

PUBLIC EDUCATION STATISTICS:

PROJECTS: ELEVEN TOTAL

NEW: TAYLOR POINT RESTORATION, GOOD GARDENS AT NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY

Clients: 4,836 adults----2026 children

SCHOOL GARDENS: TEN TOTAL

Clients: 775 adults----1,005 children

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS:

Workshops & Events: 30 recorded; many additional weekly training events by MGs

Events: 5, all at Projects

KIOSKS:

Events: 7; Clients: 172

Events: 28 (not counting Farmers’ Markets)

SOIL TESTING:

Events: 29

Clients: 128

Tests: 260

TOTAL EASTERN REGION REACH:

Clients: 6,611 ADULTS ---3031 CHILDREN

TOTAL FOOD DONATION:

3,177 lbs. grown by Mount Hope Farm Grow4Good, Norman Bird Sanctuary Good Gardens, Prescott Farm, Middletown Library Community Garden and donated to local soup kitchens and food pantries.

Total Master Gardener Volunteers and Interns: 81
Total MG Volunteer Hours recorded: 3,382.3. (excludes School Garden Mentors)
Total Labor Value: $81,647.62. (excludes School Garden Mentors)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR INCLUDE:

NEWPORT HARBOR WALK

Our 2017 Master Gardener Program Project of the year, over 2000 adults and 100 youth learned directly from Master Gardener Newport Harbor Walk Project in 2017. Many thousand others visited, observed, read and were inspired by the creative use of native pollinator plants grown in repurposed dinghies and in our first rain garden, with more to come.
The King Park demonstration rain garden was installed this year to show people how to harvest rainwater that flows from a roof’s surface and downspout as usable water for irrigating a garden. This garden has issues with both stormwater and sea water inundation and is an ongoing experiment in growing plants in less than optimum conditions. The 2 ½ mile Newport Harbor Walk Project’s purpose is to re-introduce and celebrate the beauty and diversity of native RI plants that have been lost due to the over-development of the Newport waterfront, while at the same time protecting and promoting public access to the shore. These native plants, when planted in combination with other pollinator plants, create an ecological system along the shore that is natural and sustainable, even though the plantings are done in a somewhat unconventional manner. Public education events included kiosk, one in-garden workshop on installing a rain garden, a series of regularly scheduled in-garden workshops, guided tours, plant tags and local press coverage that increased public interest and participation in the events.

**PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS (EXCERPTS FROM PROJECT LEADER REPORTS):**

**BRISTOL VETERANS HOME, BRISTOL**

After 18 years of dedicated leadership, Marguerite Hardisty, Master Gardener class of 1999 handed the baton to John Twomey, class of 2015 who is leading the transition from the old garden beds to the new, smaller, fewer beds at the new facility. As we transition to the new facility, we will plan programs to engage veterans and their families in the gardening and learning process. Planning in January 2018 for each new garden bed, according to the sun and shade conditions, will support planting in the spring.

This past season a small container vegetable garden was grown to allow veterans to plant, weed, harvest and show their visiting families their prized produce. We plan to expand this effort in 2018 due to the enthusiastic response by veterans and the staff. An in-garden workshop was conducted for visiting families on a Sunday to support the larger visitation. Starting in June, we conducted 5 soil testing workshops at the greenhouse, and conducted over a dozen tests, making recommendations on how to improve the pH of the soil tested. New signs will support a growing demand and use of soil testing in 2018.
GOOD FRIENDS COMMUNITY GARDEN (GFCG), MARTIN LUTHER KING CENTER, NEWPORT
This was a good first year for our project which serves children from the community center as well as adults involved in the community garden. The children learned a lot and had a blast growing food in their plot at the community garden. Besides working with the children, the other aspect of this project was to work with community gardeners in answering their questions. As we expand our team, we can come up with more innovative approaches to teaching so the children will be receptive and productive. With more MG volunteers we could offer more days for the children to come to the garden and learn planting, tending, eating veggies and fruits. MGs will teach the parts of a plant, type of vegetable plants and how they grow, and insects’ (including pollinators) role in the garden.

MIDDLETOWN COMMUNITY LIBRARY GARDEN
Our clients are local gardeners who want a place to grow vegetables. We had some terrific new gardeners this year including an immigrant family from China with two young kids who loved being in the garden. We have a limited number of raised beds and each person gets their own raised bed for the season. We have about 30 beds plus four community beds that we tend together. Each year, through turnover, about 8-10 beds become available and are quickly filled. We taught about pollinators; and by growing native plants plus making them available to the gardeners, we demonstrated how they would attract bees. All the water used in this project comes from runoff collected in rain barrels or is donated by the Fire Department. We emphasized that the Master Gardener Program does not recommend this for edibles due to food safety concerns. Education continued with emphasis on the eco-friendly way to garden. We taught them to wash veggies before eating them. We encourage composting, the use of organic material and strongly advise against non-organic material. Not using yard waste bags and composting was a big change; and we will see how the compost comes out in the spring ’18.
**GROW4GOOD GARDEN, MOUNT HOPE FARM, BRISTOL**

We emphasize growing food for the Bristol Food Bank while teaching several thousand visitors, 4-H children, Mount Hope Farm Inn and wedding attendees, and our 15 Master Gardener and community volunteers. Just under one ton of food was planted, tended, weeded, drip-line watered, harvested, weighed and delivered for distribution. We taught sustainability, soil care, produce care, how to save seeds, what types of plants are best for pollinators, etc. As part of an educational opportunity with the 4-H club, we used the Irish Potato Famine of the mid-1800's as an example of why we should promote biodiversity from the perspective of food gardens. Education events included: an in-garden workshop, guided tours, youth and family events, monthly kiosk and soil testing, plant tags and informational conversations and coaching of the public. Our participation in the annual Mount Hope Farm Fest again attracted hundreds of visitors to the gardens, with our perennial border native pollinator plants and shrubs as a highlight.

**GOVERNOR BRADFORD GARDEN, MOUNT HOPE FARM, BRISTOL**

The gardens at Governor Bradford House, built in 1745, are made up of five different gardens totaling almost 2,300 square feet. Working with Mount Hope Farm’s Horticulturist, the Master Gardeners and Interns began this second year by completing the rehabilitation of two large gardens. What were once overgrown gardens with plants that rarely flowered are now home to beautiful plants that provide season long blooms complementing the historic setting. The herb garden, which is again well maintained, is now a centerpiece of questions, instruction and source of 30+ herbs for use in the kitchen and curious tasters. Of the two gardens that follow an old stone wall, one was rehabbed earlier this year and has now become the favored backdrop for many photos. The other was recently rehabbed with an eye towards replanting at the beginning of next year. Visitors include Inn guests, newlyweds and families of young scholars at the nearby Roger Williams University. These gardens have become a showpiece and an educational opportunity for the URI Master Gardener Program.
Thousands of local and out-of-state visitors frequent this Sanctuary annually, recently including a group of Master Gardeners from Washington DC who were thrilled to see a native plant garden and all it entails. Informal education to visitors emphasized native plants to support native and migratory pollinator species, education of incorporating native plants into the home garden and best practices regarding care for the gardens from spring to winter. Educational events included guided tours, plant tags, publicized Q&A sessions and workshops on Integrated Pest Management, invasive removal and native restoration. The Norman Bird Sanctuary (NBS) Harvest Fair was an opportunity to meet and greet the public, give garden tours and conduct Q & A at the MGP Kiosk. Team members participated in NBS Country Garden Fair as flower judges, education r/t identification of plants, plant health and best practice in the home gardens. Our biggest success - Monarch and Swallowtail caterpillars were identified in the native gardens. As a team, we are basing our success this year by following Larry Weaner's theory. We continue to seek minimal tool storage on site to limit the daily hauling of gardening tools for our work.

Newly started in mid-2017, over 64 adults and 597 youth directly learned from our MG Project, producing approximately 300 lbs. of produce for the Martin Luther King Center Newport, animal ambassadors, campers and Harvest Fair attendees. MGs from Mabel’s Garden assisted the startup efforts of this project. A well-organized series of public lectures on gardening for youth camp was enthusiastically received. Additionally, we had interns from the MET School in Providence and East Bay Community Action Program who learned several aspects of the garden from redesign to harvest. Volunteers from various RI companies, required community service folks, Boy and Girl scouts got their hands dirty in the garden along with a 15-minute garden tour. Next season, we will be designing signage for self-tours and maximizing the redesign for Norman Bird Sanctuary educational programming. Our biggest success was redesigning the garden and approval as a Master Gardener Project. Next year we will be redesigning the hoop house, creating educational signage and brainstorming on interactive garden education.
Colonial farming is our purpose. Over 400 adults and 114 youth benefited from learning on site and 740 pounds of produce was donated this year. In addition to explaining the organic techniques of gardening that we employ and the plant material used on the property to visitors, we seven scheduled and publicized lectures on the first Sunday of the month from April to October. This included:

- Soil and Soil testing presented by Garry Holmstrom and Carol Nagel;
- Spring Edible Perennials presented by Johanna Becker and Susan Estabrook;
- Composting Techniques presented by Terry Connell;
- Three Sisters Garden presented by Betsy McClintock;
- Cover Crops presented by Susan Estabrook; and
- Feeding a Family from a Colonial Garden presented by Jeff Richards.

Taylor Point MG Project is an East Bay Land Stewardship Project to remove invasives and restore native plants in the natural habitat. This project is a partnership with the Taylor Point Restoration Association under the direction of CRMC Certified Invasive Plant Manager Dennis Webster. Approval by the Jamestown Town Council occurred in May 2017, and the Coastal Resource Management Council (CRMC) on September 5, 2017. URI Master Gardener Program approval occurred in September. We began to remove invasive honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, black swallowwort, Rosa rugosa, autumn olive, wineberry, privet, garlic mustard, bittersweet nightshade and porcelain-berry from the Black Cherry Woodland, sections of Potter Cove Beach and a section of Taylor Point Cliffs. We will be monitoring the cleared areas and planting native species as indicated. Training and educating all volunteers, including community members and URI Master Gardeners, proceeds each work day session focused on land stewardship, invasive species and benefits of native plants.

Farnham Farm, Prudence Island

Two MGs worked the Project this year, with approximately 7 volunteers and two dozen plot renters. Soil development and alternatives to pesticides became the focal point of education and practice. Off-site workshops were conducted on the island to demonstrate what gardening is possible on Prudence Island with its unique environment and soil conditions. Healthy Nutrition vegetable growing was
emphasized at the onsite farming sessions. Attendance was up during the spring workshop over last year’s. However, the availability of interested participants was limited and as topics were taught, participation dropped. This project will become independent of the Master Gardener Program after the 2017 growing season. Thank you MG Hope Morow for leading this project on Prudence Island.

**Desourdy School Garden Mentor Highlights**

*(Excerpts from School Garden Mentor Reports)*:

The goal at all Desourdy School Garden Mentor locations is for each grade to incorporate a tailored aspect of curriculum into their gardens. Insects, Native American companion planting, water cycle, pollination and seeds are taught using the URI Cooperative Extension curriculum as a guide. Master Gardeners work with the principals and teachers to assist, provide resources and seek solutions through a team approach of visit, review, recommend and help. Children enjoy planting, watering, tending and harvesting. They take ownership of the garden and see it as part of their school environment. Their increasing knowledge and enthusiasm are the greatest success. Parents and parent organizations provide continuity in the garden during summer break.

**Barrington Christian Academy**

We have two major experiences: the middle school has a garden elective once a week and the fourth grade spends a lot of time in the garden in the fall and spring. Students learned plant life cycle, soil amendments, insects and how to help the homeless. We also had an open house that focused around the garden. With MG-donated plants and seeds, visitors planted seeds in cups and took them home. Other elementary teachers added perennial flowers around the garden with their classes. This year we added two new beds. We had success with transplanting kale and sunflowers that were started inside by our winter gardening club. Students collected seeds from other plants, saved them and replanted them. A new cold frame was constructed to teach extension of the growing season and taught the use of garden tools and implements. In the future, we hope to add a fence and will implement the new URI school garden curricula.
BRADLEY SCHOOL, PORTSMOUTH
With Principal Christina Bellanti, teacher Brenda Pacheco rekindled interest among young students to observe the garden and watch/help plant veggies, flowers once the weeds were gone, the fence mended and order restored. Linda Hall, Master Gardener class of 2010, took charge of clearing, repairing, amending soil and planting flowers and vegetables to allow a fresh start for all in the garden. Students learned to help harvest tomatoes, squash and peppers with short discussions on how the plants produce flowers that produce fruit. They helped remove invasives, weeds, vines and trash from the extended garden around the completely vine covered flag pole. This demonstrated how a little effort can produce an area to grow food and flowers, while gaining support from neighboring families to do the same.

Learning points for the students focused on:
- How weeds are a nuisance and must be removed to provide soil for vegetables and flowers;
- Plants need water, sun, pollinators and no weeds, in order to grow and produce fruits;
- Invasives are not helpful and should be removed to promote the native plants that native birds, critters and bees need to survive and increase;
- Our new Greenhouse can extend growing season.

In spring 2018 they will learn to start plants from seeds. Our first harvest is pictured.

LUTHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, SWANSEA, MA
During this first year as a Desourdy School, MG Scott Sunaz-Lods created a garden, gained school and local support, and included the garden in their curriculum. Principal Sean Scalon donated a grow lamp for the classroom which was used to get MG provided seeds started in early spring. One hundred students were able to care for the seedlings while learning about the life cycle of a plant: each taking turns watering and turning on and off the lamp.

PRIMROSE HILL ELEMENTARY, BARRINGTON
MG Candace Breen jumped into action in her first year as an Intern and now Master Gardener to organize the existing garden, clear the weeds, conduct soil tests, and prepare for planting. Growing support by the Principal, parents and students supported planting and harvest days. The biggest challenge was summer season parent support. Although MGs helped maintain the productive beds, teachers and parents will be called upon to maintain the spring planting so returning students can see their fruitful results when school resumes in fall. Pruning of healthy, overgrown pear trees this fall will support larger fruit at reachable heights and more sun on the beds. Next year we will plant sunflowers and corn in the garden, with the help of parents to harvest the lettuce and leafy greens.

SOUTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, SOMERSET, MA
A great start was achieved at South Elementary SGM Program. Grants were requested to start 3 Butterfly Gardens with 3-Sisters, veggies, flowers, emphasizing native plants. Amending the soil will continue to enhance productivity, reduce watering and prevent weeds. Search for a new SGM and
assistant SGM will take this MG Project to the next level toward success, use of standard Curriculum and full integration into the student activities.

**Sowams School, Barrington**
Students learned about many different topics from our garden: garden care taking, how to harvest and plant needs, and how to behave in a garden area. They also learned about the negative effects weeds can have on a plant. The firsthand knowledge gained from actively participating in the gardening was effectively achieved and reinforced in the classrooms. Some of the activities were academic like math, science and art.

We did receive plant donations from the URIMG greenhouses, the backbone to the success of our garden. For many years we have ordered seeds and started them indoors. Getting the plants from URIMG has transformed our garden. We still start from seed indoors and integrate with donated plants and plan to improve our survival rate.

**Cluny School, Newport**
Regrettably, the Cluny School closed its doors this summer. The very successful and well maintained garden, rain garden, rain barrel project and other student activities will sunset. Thank you Cluny School for teaching young students to become better gardeners.