PUBLIC EDUCATION STATISTICS:

TOTAL DIRECT CONTACTS: 2,123 adults 1,679 children

FOOD DONATIONS:

TOTAL DONATED: 5,319 pounds

The Providence Rescue Mission, Amos House and St. Vincent de Paul Society received 4,780 pounds of fresh produce from the Roger Williams Park Product Donation Garden, and 374 pounds from the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center Flavor Lab. The House of Hope Fair Street Residence received 165 pounds of fresh produce from the House of Hope Demonstration Garden.

DEMONSTRATION GARDENS:

Beechwood Senior Center North Kingstown, RI

The Beechwood Senior Center is a demonstration garden that features native trees, shrubs and perennials. The focus at Beechwood is to educate community members on science-based gardening practices and plant care through a wide variety of horticultural presentations hosted each year.

The gardens are full of beneficial pollinators and contain a bee house to support this. Trees, shrubs and perennials are labeled to inform visitors how they can be used in the home landscape and a self-guided tour is available as well. This year, Master Gardener (MG) volunteers hosted lectures to engage the public and members of the community center, providing them with useful advice and science-based gardening practices.

The following public workshops were hosted at the demonstration garden site in 2019:

House of Hope Warwick, RI

House of Hope Community Development Corporation (CDC) hosts MG volunteers at two of their sites in Warwick at Fair Street and Shippen Avenue. The mission of House of Hope CDC is to prevent and end homelessness in Rhode Island. At these two sites, previously homeless residents are learning new life skills including gardening and healthy eating. This year's successes for the URI Master Gardener, House of Hope partnership were well documented in local newspaper coverage, including Rhode Island Monthly, the Warwick Beacon and URI Today.
Volunteers established a strong connection at the Fair Street site this year. Five raised beds that were started in fall of 2018 were completed and filled with new soil and a fence was constructed to keep rabbits and woodchucks away. The team also covered the area around the beds with weed barrier, then mulch to keep the site attractive and weeds at bay. Native pollinator plants were placed around the inside perimeter in order to attract beneficial insects to the garden. To further engage the residents, volunteers talked with them to find out what kinds of produce they would like planted. Volunteers not only taught residents what the items were and how to care for the plants, but also how to harvest, cook and preserve the foods as well. Everything that was planted grew quite well and there was plenty to harvest.

At the Fair Street site, four different workshops were held over the season for House of Hope residents, neighbors and the public at large, including: 1) Composting; 2) Organic Gardening; 3) Drying and Preserving Herbs; and 4) Caring for Houseplants.

A soil testing event was held along with each of these workshops. Using the garden as a teaching tool, MG volunteers were able to educate workshop attendees, as well as multiple curious passersby, with detailed information about growing in raised beds, companion planting, and the importance of native pollinators.

The much larger Shippen Avenue site, which was established in 2015, unfortunately did not perform as well as in previous years. All items that were planted in May were lost to rabbits as were about 50% of new and replacement plants that were planted in June. This was due to a fence that has fallen into such a state of disrepair, there was nothing preventing wildlife from eating everything in the garden. Due to the destruction of the plants, the residents were not as engaged in the garden nor with the volunteers as they had been in years past. The team plans to have a new fence, paid for by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, installed in early spring to remedy the issues that were encountered this year. Even with the loss of almost all the plants at the Shippen Ave. site, food donation increased roughly 30% of the garden space from 2018. It is expected that food donation will double in 2020 when the new fence is in place.

Perhaps the most exciting result at both sites has been the connection to the community. According to Jackie Mercado, House of Hope Case Worker and URI Master Gardener, “The garden has opened a new relationship for residents and their neighbors. It has shown the mutual interest that we all have for horticulture, building positive interactions and conversations.”

James Mitchell Varnum House  East Greenwich, RI

Located within the Historical Hill & Harbor section of East Greenwich, the James Mitchell Varnum House Museum is open to the public on weekends. The location hosts weddings, visits by school groups and other events also. On the spacious grounds, MG volunteers maintain a formal kitchen, medicinal and dye garden, as well as a rose hedge.

The garden is built on a strong base of well-amended soil, rich with compost and helpful microorganisms. There is a heavy focus on planting native plants that support pollinators and are resistant to drought. The garden is maintained by frequent weeding and mulching; no pesticides are ever used. All plants are clearly labeled with their name, description and Colonial use.
Varnum House volunteers hosted two public workshops in 2019: 1) Colonial Kitchen and Medicinal Herbs; and 2) The Role of Colonial Plants in Dyeing. Both events were very well attended showing a 1700% (not a typo) increase from 2018. People who visited came from diverse backgrounds: there were garden hobbyists, a rheumatologist interested in herbs, Wiccans interested in dyeing and retirees interested in pollinators. During the public workshop event, the museum docents were dressed in colonial costume and engaged with the public. When school groups visit the museum, the gardens are also included on the tours.

Roger Williams Park Botanical Center Display Gardens  Providence, RI

Operated by the City of Providence Parks and Recreation Department, the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center (RWPBC) Display Gardens are maintained and hosted by URI Master Gardeners, with support from community volunteers. On the first Saturday of each month, volunteers hold various work sessions, which coincide with the days that the Botanical Center is open to the public for free.

The following public workshops were hosted at the demonstration garden site in 2019: 1) Growing Microgreens; 2) Growing Unusual Vegetables; and 3) Pruning Perennials. Workshop participants gained hands-on experience during the microgreen’s workshops, leaving with multiple containers of planted seeds. All three workshops generated a lively Q&A session between the presenters and attendees.

In addition to the formal workshops, there was opportunity for informal education as the public toured the Display Gardens and Rose Maze while volunteers were doing weekly maintenance. The RWPBC is visited by many school groups from Providence and around the state for instructional tours and visits. This year, 30 tours were given to roughly 250 students and led by URIMGP docents.

The garden is maintained organically, and no pesticides or herbicides are used. Over the 2018-2019 winter, two large garden beds were left intact instead of cutting everything to the ground. The intent was to leave some natural garden space for the overwintering native insects, provide seeds for the birds, and cover for the ground-dwelling critters. This was used as a visual teaching tool for the public to bring awareness for the need of supporting our native biodiversity. Signs were also installed stating, “Nature at Work” as a starting point for a discussion about the gardens being left as is and how that helps the ecosystem.

Roger Williams Park Produce Donation Garden  Providence, RI

Located within the Roger Williams Park Community Garden, the URIMGP Produce Donation Garden (PDG) has served as a training ground for interns since it was established in 2011. Some members of the community garden that have engaged with MG volunteers have gone on to take
the Core Training course, earn their Blue Pin, and become active participants and leaders in the program. This year, one former community gardener completed the Core Training and was awarded the 2019 Rookie of the Year honor!

Food kitchen clients Amos House, Providence Rescue Mission, and St. Vincent de Paul Society have all visited the garden and regularly encourage their clients to visit as well. Within the Community Garden, three garden beds were rented to enhance the education of the developmentally disabled mentees of Perspectives Corporation, ProAbility, and Resources for Human Development. PDG volunteers work directly with the students and their caretakers to develop gardening skills, working hands on in the dirt and more importantly helping to develop life skills such as showing up on time on a regular basis, asking questions, developing conversation, and communications skills. Many children are engaged as well, including 40 school groups that toured the garden in 2019. Camp groups from Audubon Society and RWP Botanic Center summer interns were invited into the garden to work beside experienced gardeners to develop both gardening and life skills. Once a month, the team holds a Saturday workshop. In addition to the PDG volunteers and Community Gardeners, many members of the general public attend as well. The public workshops hosted this year included: 1) Planting Peas and Root Vegetables; 2) Raised Bed Gardening; 3) Using the Crops you Grow; and 4) Seed Saving and Composting.

The PDG is a 100% pesticide-free garden relying primarily on healthy soil conditions, as well as utilizing neem oil, row covers, hand picking and occasional spraying to deter pests. To encourage healthy pollinator activity, the garden volunteers created a new, 1,000 square foot Native Perennial Pollinator Garden in the center of the Community Garden. Two bee hives that went dormant over the winter of 2018 were repopulated with fantastic results. Bees were found all over the gardens to the benefit of both the PDG and Community Gardeners. The team experimented with replacing 10% of the total planting area with annual pollinator flowers (white dill, marigolds, cosmos and borage) instead of edibles. The experiment turned out to be a huge success, as it attracted many pollinators and beneficial insects directly to the areas where they were needed. Community Gardeners were encouraged to plant pollinator flowers in their own gardens and were provided with URIMGP free seeds to support them. Over 75% of the gardeners (50 garden plots) followed the recommendation.

To maintain a healthy soil structure, the gardens are amended at the beginning and end of each growing season. Seaweed was added and tilled into the soil; and a unique spring fertilization program was implemented based on the advice of Stephen Walach at the Friends Academy Donation Garden in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts and the North American Organic Farmers Association. Volunteers practice crop rotation every year and continuously add compost to our plants from the on-site composting program. A unique concept tried by the
volunteers was establishing a “plant pro” for each crop planted. A member of the team is assigned to each type of plant to care for and educate their fellow gardeners on the unique means of planting, pruning, and caring for each of these varieties.

All these paid huge dividends when it came to food production. Volunteers grew beets, carrots, eggplant, kale, lettuce, zucchini, Swiss chard, turnips, peas, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions and many others. Food that was donated was 225% more in 2019 than in 2018, and tomato production increased from 850 pounds to over 2600 pounds as well. The combination of all these efforts have had a tremendous effect on not only the quantity, but also the quality of the produce grown and donated. Volunteers are making a difference in many lives!

Roger Williams Park Edible Forest Garden Providence, RI

Unlike any other URIMGP project garden in Rhode Island, the Roger Williams Park (RWP) Edible Forest Garden is primarily a natural site. Located in an urban setting, the garden is a multi-level, self-sustaining forest ecosystem with native trees and shrubs making up the upper layers all the way down to native strawberry used as ground cover. Visitors to the garden learn about permaculture basics, the benefits of multiple microclimates located in a small space, and hügelkultur, the German technique of constructing a mound from decaying wood debris and other compostable biomass plant materials that is planted as a raised bed.

Smith’s Castle North Kingstown, RI

Smith’s Castle is one of the oldest homes in Rhode Island and is now a museum run by the Cocumscussoc Association. URIMGP volunteers care for the formal garden, herb garden and newly established Three Sisters garden. The different gardens illustrate the various gardening techniques that would have taken place on the site from pre-colonial time up to when the home became a private residence. Volunteers were able to teach visitors how the methods colonists used and the methods they learned from the indigenous people resulted in rich soil, healthy plants, promoted pollinator activity and increased yields. Raised beds, the no till method, and early IPM practices are all techniques that are still very applicable today.

The project hosted several popular events where URIMGP volunteers lead guests on garden tours, provide answers to gardening-related questions at a Kiosk, as well as offering free soil testing to the public. A new opportunity to educate the public was at a “Tea and Local History” event hosted inside the museum where volunteers presented a garden talk. Topics covered included the mix of plantings in all the gardens, how both colonists and indigenous people improved and protected their soil, and composting.