URI MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

EASTERN REGION

2019 REPORT

THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
2019 EASTERN REGION REPORT
Compiled by Brian Pagliaroni, Eastern Region URIMGP Council Coordinator

PUBLIC EDUCATION STATISTICS:

TOTAL DIRECT CONTACTS: 1,478 adults
1,395 children

FOOD DONATIONS:

TOTAL DONATED: 3,535 pounds

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS:

Great Friends Community Garden Newport, RI

The project seeks to introduce young children (aged five to ten years) to gardening. The audience are underserved youth from the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center’s (MLKCC) after-school and summer programs. This project is a collaboration with Aquidneck Community Table, which provides three raised-bed garden plots located at the Great Friends Community Garden (GFCG) for use by the project.

Master Gardener (MG) volunteers endeavored to design each week’s session around a specific theme or a couple of related themes. The sessions typically were divided into components:

1. An active hands-on element such as planting, weeding, watering, or a scavenger hunt to identify plants or pollinators, or a demonstration of bee-keeping practices by a visiting master beekeeper to reinforce understanding of the importance of pollination
2. An art project such as making a seed mosaic or a painting on a matte board, or simply drawing and writing in the workbook we provided each child
3. A book-reading session on a topic relevant to the main subject or area of focus on a particular week.
4. A physical activity, usually with a disguised didactic element (such as a relay race for depositing various types of refuse in appropriate recycling or composting bins), was an important element for helping to channel abundant youthful energy.
5. Finally, a food/ snack element formed a consistent (and consistently popular) aspect of the sessions. This included home-made basil ice cream and popcorn from a local farm.

One child returning to the program remarked, “I love gardening, it’s so peaceful.” This team is seeking more crew members to help connect youth to the joys of gardening and food growing.
Members of the Community Garden were coached by URI Master Gardeners who enjoyed sharing tips and seedlings, addressing pests, and maintaining demonstration gardens. The public was welcome to visit the garden for soil tests and Saturday gardening gatherings. Community gardeners were educated in monthly hands-on sessions on topics such as trellis building, asparagus, weeding, garlic, crop rotation and square foot gardening.

This year, a native plant system garden was planted to attract pollinators and educate about natives. Water was collected in tanks and was used for the garden. No pesticides were allowed in the garden.

During Saturday mornings, the public was invited to visit and receive gardening advice and soil testing. The Community Garden provided fertilizer, peat moss, compost and other natural, organic materials and encourage gardeners to use these rather than chemicals.

The Grow4Good and Governor Bradford House Gardens cover over 11,000 square feet of space that are maintained by URI Master Gardeners. Each garden provides a spectacular opportunity to educate the public on sustainable gardening practices. In 2019, approximately 1,800 pounds of produce was raised and donated. Over the past three years, just under 3 tons of produce has been grown and donated to the East Bay Food Pantry.

In 2019, nine well attended gardening workshop were held, our largest variety to date. This included “Uses and Methods of Preserving Herbs”, “Planning and Planting a Pollinator Garden” and “Planning a Native Plant Garden”. Additional garden walks allowed guests to ask questions. Another method that was used to educate the public was the monthly Kiosks and Soil pH Testing events at the Farm’s Farmer’s Market. During those six events, 75 soil pH tests were conducted for 42 clients. The Kiosks recorded 172 visitors who asked questions and took advantage of the free seeds that we made available to all who stopped by.

Several children were also educated in the gardens this year. Master Gardeners worked directly with Mount Hope Farm, who hosts both a 4-H Club and a summer camp, to provide educational opportunities for children. Once a month, the 4-H members would visit for mini workshops and help in the garden. What a thrill it was for them to find a Swallow Tail Butterfly caterpillar on one of our native milkweed plants! Additionally, the summer campers visited once a week and helped harvest the produce that was donated to the East Bay Food Pantry.
Newport Harbor Walk

The Newport Harbor Walk has created a green space in an urban setting by re-introducing some of Rhode Island’s native plants in a non-conventional manner with the use of up-cycled dinghies as large flower containers. A sixth container garden was added in 2019 at Fort Adams in partnership with Sail to Prevail. These drought-tolerant pollinator plants, planted in combination with other North American native plants, creates a diverse ecological system along the waterfront that is not only natural and sustainable, but also visually appealing. Native handmade bee hotels were also displayed at several organized events throughout the season, along with chats on what residents can do to support native bee habitats in their own residential landscapes. In-garden workshops were offered at various dinghy planter locations, as well as guided pollinator tours and a workshop at the King Park Rain Garden. This project was featured at the Newport Folk Festival’s participation row. Due to the urban nature of this project, there is ample opportunity for informal education.

This project continues to partner with the RI Green Infrastructure Coalition and the City of Newport regarding stormwater and sea level rise. The team provides the public with important science-based facts on ways residential gardens can help mitigate the impact of stormwater and sea level rise. Master Gardeners teach about how rain barrels and rain gardens in local neighborhoods can make a difference, while providing RI native pollinator plants for participants to take home.

Norman Bird Sanctuary

The Good Gardens

The Good Gardens has become a point of interest on the trail map and is a pillar for education programming at the Norman Bird Sanctuary (NBS). MG volunteers, the NBS Education Department and the camp garden coordinator collaborated to invite over 1000 youth and 200 adults to visit the garden for lessons within the Good Gardens’ outdoor classroom. Specific lessons for summer campers included the life cycle of plants, insects and their role in the garden, pollinators with an edible flower tour, tops and bottoms with carrot and beet harvest, scavenger hunts, sensory tours, traditional Three Sisters, plant classification, ‘Wiggling Worms at Work’ for composting and ‘The Lorax’ for stewardship, and harvest. Eco-Blitz camp kids harvested and made purslane pesto, learning the uses of what many of us call “weeds”.

The garden hosted community programs on compost, bean harvest and potato planting. A one-on-one and hands-on approach was used with discussions on gardening practices, IPM and trellising ideas. Visitors to NBS had the opportunity to talk to and ask volunteers about gardening. Workshops consisted of composting, a potato planting project, pruning, and Hugelkultur. Visitors to the garden were shown how to harvest, what native plants and pollinators are grown, and how vegetables are grown and trellised.
Prescott Farm  
Middletown, RI

Master Gardener volunteers educated tour groups of school children, campers and Road Scholars through the host, Newport Restoration Foundation. They spoke about colonial garden techniques, as well as plants that would have been grown and eaten by colonists in 1750 New England. Additional talks were given in a series by Master Gardeners, including Spring Edible Perennials, Incorporating Herbs in Your Landscape, Colonial Food Ways, and Three Sisters Gardening. Garry Casabona, State Biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service was invited to the garden for the third year to discuss how native plants and pollinator plants can be incorporate into your landscape.

The pollinator garden was enhanced with more native plants this year. The garden that was designated as a "Butterfly, Pollinator, Bee" garden on the property was changed to include more native plants that have more than three-season appeal for critters and a more attractive design than before. Soil testing and gardening advice was also dispensed. A lecture on soil health complimented the practices of cover crops and mulches used at the garden.

Rhode Island Veterans Home  
Bristol, RI

A new greenhouse was constructed by a group of skilled volunteers, providing over 1,400 square feet of growing space. This ambitious project was completed and will soon be operational. The facility will engage veterans in horticultural therapy and will also be used by the Master Gardeners to grow plants. This year, native plants were used in the garden to attract pollinators to the patios. Soil testing was offered. Monarch Butterflies were hatched and released, a big hit with veteran residents and their families.

Taylor Point Restoration  
Jamestown, RI

The Taylor Point Restoration project focuses on land stewardship, educating people about pollinators and native plants, water and soil conservation and managing land without the use of pesticides. Master Gardeners provide education during community work sessions on topics such as plant identification in all seasons, invasive removal techniques, tool handling and care, ticks and Lyme disease, storm erosion and shoreline changes. This year, as the team continued to expand the areas cleared of invasive plants, they noted an astounding number of native seedlings and well as mature plants growing with renewed vigor in recently cleared areas.