PUBLIC EDUCATION STATISTICS:

TOTAL DIRECT CONTACTS: 3,985 adults
                         4,755 children

FOOD DONATIONS:

TOTAL DONATED: 17,980 pounds

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS:

Canonchet Farm Habitat Restoration Project  Narragansett, RI

This project features a good example of how partners can work together toward a common goal, and the power of volunteers to accomplish habitat restoration. In collaboration with the Town of Narragansett, the South County Museum, the Narrow River Preservation Society and The Friends of Canonchet, the crew of 14 Master Gardeners and 22 others have seen the successful return of native plants in areas where invasives were removed. After clearing privet, phragmites and knotweed, native ferns, rose mallow and cat tails have emerged.

The team works year-round, weather permitting, on regularly scheduled days. Volunteers learn to identify native and invasive plants, both with and without leaves. They learn best practices for working around poison ivy and ticks, as well as how to care and maintain tools.

Various groups participated in work sessions, including the URI Women’s Rowing Team and the Alpha Psi Omega Fraternity. A group of Eagle Scouts installed geologic locator signs and the Girl Scouts worked on a project at the habitat.

Educational walks were held on a variety of topics. These included walking to relax, finding and identifying frogs, nature journaling, rare and invasive plants, native marsh plants and the history and beauty of stone walls. Presenters included Master Gardener (MG) volunteers and partners, as well as subject experts. Overall, an estimated 230 adults and 50 children were educated.

Charlestown Schoolhouse Garden  Charlestown, RI

This project is a jewel on the grounds of the Cross Mills Library, partnering with the Charlestown Historical Society to provide ongoing public education. Land Stewardship is a cornerstone of this project which relies solely on rainwater. No pesticides are used, yet the garden manages to showcase season-long blooms in a small space. The garden encompasses the URIMGP native plant system and other pollinator plants. The plight of the monarch has been a focus for several
years and milkweed cultivation is emphasized. Three chrysalises were found along with numerous beautiful adult butterflies, which visitors love to see. Milkweed seed packets with planting instructions were a popular public offering this fall and successful teaching tool for children.

Multiple educational opportunities were offered, including an Earth Day mini greenhouse project for children. Crew members hosted 30 members of the Arbutus Garden Club to share garden designs and sustainable practices. A site visit to a local senior center to share a sunflower painting and planting project was well received. The leaders hope to interact with more such groups in the future. This project reports impacting a total of 175 adults and 50 children.

New plants tags were added this year, and handouts are available to illuminate the native plant system. Visibility and heavy foot traffic leads to many opportunities for informal education. Crew members visit one another’s gardens, sharing ideas and challenges. Offsite crew field trips also keep the interest and team education viable.

**Chestnut Restoration Research Project**

South Kingstown, RI

This ongoing project to help restore the American Chestnut is done in partnership with The South Kingstown Land Trust, The American Chestnut Foundation and the South County Garden Club. Tours were held highlighting ongoing inoculation of trees to determine resistance to blight. A continuing education offering was attended by Master Gardeners interested in learning about the project and the inoculation process to determine which trees are blight resistant. Tours are available on request throughout the season. In 2019, 50 adults and 10 children visited and received education at this project.

**East Farm Apple Orchard**

South Kingstown, RI

2019 was a record harvest year in the orchard. Blessed by favorable weather, aided by strategic spraying to control disease and using strategies to foil theft, this project donated almost 16,000 pounds of apples to food pantries and food insecure groups. URI Master Gardeners led groups on harvesting tours consisting of 250 adults and 210 children. They also successfully managed the wasp issue faced in previous years. By using landscape fabric installed under the trees by Rudi’s Rangers, dropped apples were collected and donated to a local livestock farmer rather than decomposing in the grass.

18 harvesting events were held during season, from mid-August through mid-November. While picking apples, attendees learned about URI fruit and bee research, the lifecycle of apple trees and apple varieties, benefits of attracting various pollinators and limiting the use of pesticides. Harvesters, many of whom returned repeatedly,
2019 SOUTHERN REGION REPORT
Compiled by Cheryl Smith, Southern Region URI MGP Council Coordinator

included 4 scout groups, 3 large school groups, Hope’s Harvest gleaning volunteers and international students from the Graduate Village at URI. It was rewarding to hear the diversity of languages being spoken amidst the laughter of harvesters enjoying a day spent working in the orchard. Transition students from The Bradley School came with their employment specialist to learn about opportunities in the horticultural field. Heather Faubert spoke about the work in the orchards and greenhouses, as well as landscaping jobs, while a RI Nursery and Landscape Association representative spoke about that their apprenticeship program and opportunities in the green industry field.

East Farm Demonstration Garden

This project encompasses multiple vegetable and pollinator gardens, and experiments with a variety of growing techniques and garden management strategies. This season highlighted companion planting throughout the garden as a focus for weed and pest management. Composting techniques and the extensive use of marigolds helped deter pests, while also minimizing weeds and pesticide usage.

East Farm crew members offered public gardening huddles throughout the season, with topics that changed monthly. Examples of topics included: starting a garden, transplanting, growing, weeding and fertilizing. Companion planting was demonstrated along with pruning, harvesting, and weed and insect control. These popular huddles, highlighting every aspect of vegetable gardening for the homeowner, were presented by trained team members, increasing both their own knowledge and their confidence with public presentation and interaction.

Two twilight educational sessions were well received, pointing out mid-summer successes and challenges and training interns and Master Gardeners in practical vegetable garden skills. Collaborating with URI Faculty, Nan and her crew experimented with different plant varieties, making recommendations to the public about plants they might wish to try at home. Monthly sandwich boards were developed, which offered in-depth information on a highlighted plant. Question and answer sessions and garden tours were held after public events. Children also participated in an interactive session, learning about the parts of a plant, and harvesting and tasting tomatoes. This project reaches visitors from the adjacent farmer’s market. Outreach efforts to engage a diverse community have included the Narragansett Tribe and a veterans program in Providence.

Overall, the East Farm Demonstration Garden impacted approximately 250 adults and 50 children. The team grew and donated 1,730 pounds of produce. This team enthusiastically welcomes new members – there could be no better place to learn all aspects of vegetable growing!

East Farm Giving Garden

2019 will be the final year that this garden focuses on edible growing techniques. Despite challenges with disease and pests, this garden team still managed to produce 250 pounds of
produce for donation using intensive growing techniques. Cover crops, such as microclover, helped minimize weeds while drip irrigation helped conserve water.

For 2020, the team is enthusiastic about collaborating with the East Farm Pollinator Meadow project to showcase research-based pollinator conservation techniques. The new “Bumblebee Garden” will showcase smaller scale habitat planting that can be accomplished by the homeowner. It will also be a test area for plants destined for the larger meadow. The hope is to encourage greater public visitation in this area that may be more easily accessed than the larger meadow. Plans are in place for detailed signage so that visitors can learn about the plants and bees when crew members are not on site.

**East Farm Pollination Meadow**

This 5-acre meadow is located at East Farm. Rudi’s crew of 35 Master Gardeners and 10 others partner with URI Plant Sciences and Entomology on a research project. The meadow received several groups of visitors this season, including attendees from the National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference and the Xerces Society Pollinator meeting. Tours led by Dr. Alm focused on which plants were successful and which were less so. URI students visited and learned about bees and pollinator ecology.

Overall, the meadow impacted 65 adults and 12 children. Plans are in place to include more tours and open houses in 2020. As noted above, the Pollination Meadow will join forces in 2020 with the reimagined Bumblebee Garden (formerly the Giving Garden).

**Kettle Pond Native Plant Garden**

This project was recognized as the 2019 URIMGP Project of the Year. A huge public success, this project impacted 600 adults and 3,000 children in 2019. An ambitious calendar of presentations educated many elementary school groups, 4 garden clubs, Veterans, native plant enthusiasts and MGs continuing their education. Informal tours were offered to visitors when volunteers are on site. A monarch life-cycle session was particularly popular with 45 adults and children in attendance. An art in the garden seminar was also well received.

Team members installed plant signs throughout the extensive gardens and developed a scavenger hunt for adults and children highlighting plant identification. All 19 plots were computer mapped and a key was developed to locate and identify plants and assess progress. Handouts were developed for adults to take a self-guided tour and see natives for both sun and shade. A colorful “What’s In Bloom” chart was updated weekly showing photos from the garden. Binders were developed for the public with detailed information about all the natives in place.
Biodiversity is stressed in all interactions with visitors who learn about natives, invasives and the historical and medicinal use of plants. Project partners include The US Fish and Wildlife Services Department of the Interior and The RI Wild Plant Society.

Winter sowing and plant propagation of 32 native species was a key success. Team members grew thousands of plants, replanting many at Kettle Pond while donating 1,000 plants to USFWS for use in refuges throughout Rhode Island. Others were donated to garden club members who attended presentations and to Casey Farm for the new Pollinator Garden.

Keeping team members engaged, the co-leaders set goals for each work session. Follow-up emails with photos recognize and show appreciation for the volunteer’s efforts. As team members learn and develop confidence, co-leaders help develop leadership, public interaction and presentation skills. There are plans in place for 2020 to work with UMass Dartmouth on their “Beecology” project. This is but a taste of all that is happening at Kettle Pond. This project is an impressive ambassador of the Master Gardener program.

**URI Botanical Gardens**

2019 was a rehabilitation year for this garden. It was the stunning site host for the URI Spring Festival in May when many of the mature plantings were in bloom and on display for the public. In partnership with Cooperative Extension and URI faculty, a small team of 7 Master Gardeners and 2 graduate students accomplished a great deal. With further help from Dr. Brian Maynard, the team raised annuals and perennials at the URI greenhouses which were then used in the gardens.

Numerous invasive plants were removed, while existing plants were divided and pruned. Land stewardship was also exemplified through the use of organic methods of plant care and the use of mulch to minimize weeds and water needs. A small pollinator garden was installed around the new Rosanne Sherry Memorial. The Chet Clayton Rose Garden was renovated, and a continuing education program was offered to those interested in planting, fertilizing and winter care of roses. The Botanical Garden project also annexed the adjacent vegetable garden space in its restoration efforts. Plans for 2020, now that the Botanical Garden is “ready for prime time”, will include garden tours and ongoing informal education. The Botanical Garden hopes to recruit several new interested crew members for next year.

**URI Mallon Center Vegetable Garden**

This has been a successful first year for this joint venture between project leader Sandra Cook and students from the Graduate Village. Graduate students and family members from Nepal and Iran worked together to grow a variety of fresh food to share with others in the Graduate Village.
residencies. Food was continually harvested from May through November by the students who worked to grow it.

This underutilized space on the west side of the Mallon Center was transformed to include multiple raised beds and a pleasant seating patio. During the Spring Festival, members of the public were invited to tour the space. Techniques for square foot gardening, composting and weed control measures were on display and demonstrated. Interested gardeners also learned about integrated pest management, using a jet of water rather than pesticides to dislodge insects. Land Stewardship was on display and taught through the use of pollinator plants and sunflowers for birds. Weeds were minimized and water was conserved by using straw mulch. Through the season, this space impacted 78 adults and 31 children. Plans for next season include creating a raised square foot garden suitable for children.

URI Graduate Village Community Garden

URI Master Gardeners mentor 36 garden members from the Graduate Village apartments, representing a culturally diverse population that struggles with food security. Teaching about composting, garden planning and seed planting, the team helped increase the yield of produce over last year. Garlic, microgreens and sprouts were successfully grown along with many other vegetables.

URI President’s Garden

This garden has been enhanced over the years by project leader Carolynne Johnson, who worked with 2 other Master Gardeners this year. Native and pollinator plants have been added to the garden, which provides a focal point for University events hosted by the President. There is season long bloom and year-round interest, and the site is popular for photographs during graduation. An estimated 100 adults were impacted by this garden. Signs identify plants and the crew is happy to answer questions posed by visitors when they are working. Plans are being developed to encourage adoption of this garden by the URI grounds crew, thereby allowing URI Master Gardeners to provide advice and guidance, consistent with our educational mission.

Wilcox Park

Situated in the heart of busy downtown Westerly, this exemplary project partners with the Westerly Library. There is a great deal of interest from the community in the many educational offerings, and hopes are to increase both community volunteers and Master Gardener team members. Working with 22 Master Gardeners and 2 others, the team focuses on maintaining and teaching about the pollinator garden installed by The New England Wildflower Society and the rain garden installed by Save The Bay. An ambitious schedule of regular educational offerings teaches about all aspects of native plants, trees and shrubs. Popular tree tours, with as many as 50 attendees at a time, highlight champion specimens and share the environmental value of trees, discussing natives and tree culture. New plant signs were installed in the rain garden this season.
Workshops included vegetable gardening for beginners, where attendees learned about soil improvement, seed starting and plant selection, watering, fertilizing and harvesting. An heirloom tomato seminar and tasting was quite popular. The use of plants by Native Americans and native plants throughout the season were other topics offered.

Multiple kiosks with soil testing were offered. The project offerings enjoy excellent participation, having reached 631 adults and 17 children. The leaders plan to work with the library to expand and improve upon publicity in 2020.