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Montgomery County Extension
http://extension.umd.edu/local/Montgomery/

Mission: To support the University of Maryland Extension by educating Maryland residents about safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.

In 2015 the average Montgomery County Master Gardener volunteered more than 63 hours of service.

Montgomery County Master Gardeners logged in approximately 24,761 hours and made 19,463 contacts in 2015. According to Independentsector.org, this work is valued at $571,236.

The foundation of the program is a five-week Master Gardener (MG) training course coordinated by horticultural consultant Stephen Dubik. The course is held annually and taught by many University of Maryland faculty. This year’s class graduated 45 interns into MG membership, bringing to 388 the number of active members at the end of 2015. Each MG must obtain a minimum of 10 hours of continuing education and 45 volunteer hours during the first year and 25 volunteer hours and 10 hours of continuing education per year thereafter.

For more information about the free services including Speakers Bureau, Telephone Hotline, Plant Clinics, and Therapeutic Horticulture provided by Montgomery County Master Gardeners, please contact us at 301-590-9650 or by email: lwaters@umd.edu

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MCMG initiated three new well-received programs serving the public in 2015.

The Growing Gardeners/Cultivando Jardineros program, which was launched in the spring, with the goal of educating working-poor parents and their children on how to grow some of their own vegetables on their balconies, terraces, and in tiny yards. The program helped 244 Manna Food Center clients at three of its distribution locations to plant tomatoes, peppers & herbs in 5-gallon buckets. It provided them with seedlings, pots, planting medium and guidance on how to do it. The program was undertaken through an informal partnership with Manna, which provides food to an average of 3,760 low-income Montgomery County families each month.

The Growing Forward/Youth Gardening program also was launched this spring at the White Oak Recreation Center and involved twice weekly, hands-on gardening in specifically built raised beds as well lessons on a number of gardening and nutrition-related subjects and a field trip to the Brookside Nature Center. More than 150 pounds of food was sent home with the youngsters who participated in the garden. One week, at the suggestion of the kids, the program donated about 12 pounds of food to the local Manna Food Bank. The program continued into the fall meeting once a week, sometimes engaging youth who just showed up and sometimes tapping the aftercare activities at the recreation center. An average of 15-20 youth participating over the eight-weeks about 800 third-to-eighth graders were involved overall.

The Urban Gardening Initiative was the third new MG program in 2015 with a mission of sharing MG knowledge of horticulture and gardening with residents in an urban area of the county through monthly demonstration events at the open-air Fenton Street Market in downtown Silver Spring. Using a hands-on learning approach, MG volunteers offered a variety of activities such as building self-watering containers and using herbs for cooking and as a fragrance. The program also featured a event at the Silver Spring Library for planning a garden. From May through October, the program drew a total of 1,442 individuals of a variety of backgrounds and ages.

The Demonstration Gardens at the University of Maryland Extension Office (UME) in Montgomery County (MC) in Derwood and at the MC Fairgrounds in Gaithersburg educated residents about what plants will grow well under prevailing conditions of soil and climate while illustrating Integrated Pest Management techniques. The Demonstration Garden at the Fairgrounds received approximately 4,700 visitors during the week of the Fair in August and offered information, demonstrations and help on a wealth of gardening topics. The Derwood Demonstration Garden donated more than 1,720 pounds of fresh produce to Manna Food Center in 2015. The demo garden provides gardening programs for autistic children who visit each week during the growing season to seed, weed, and harvest vegetables and flowers in their own area of the garden. This gardening, and the Children's Garden, continue to be popular with visitors. The Derwood garden won the Award of Excellence in the Keep MoCo Beautiful contest for the sixth year.
The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Herb Garden, located in front of the National Library of Medicine, was maintained by seven MGs April through November. They met weekly to plan, assess, weed, water, fertilize, and maintain the garden. In September, the Potomac Unit of the Herb Society of America added the NLMHG to its list of “Gardens to Visit in the Washington DC Area”. Twenty out-of-towners from surrounding states visited the garden. Employees and researchers also frequented the garden.

The External Special Events Committee provided assistance at UME’s three-week Close Encounters event in October which hosted more than 4,000 students, teachers and parent chaperones. Since 1993, over 60,000 students have participated in this hands-on educational program designed to teach students about modern agriculture, and about maintaining a healthy environment and leading a healthy lifestyle. At the annual National Cathedral Flower Mart in May, Master Gardeners offered support in the form of an “Ask a Master Gardener” table for two days, answering questions and offering information about safe and effective horticultural practices to 336 contacts.

The Internal Special Events Committee organized events for the benefit of the MG membership. These included May and October plant swaps, a June potluck picnic luncheon, a holiday centerpiece creation workshop, and a December holiday party. The committee also managed the annual awards program at the party where a number of master gardeners received recognition for their exceptional service over many years.

Plant Clinics maintained 15 sites at county libraries and outdoor venues in 2015. Volunteers logged a total of 3,609 hours and assisted 5,601 county residents with their garden and house plant questions. The clinics also offered activities to interest and educate children. Additionally, clinic volunteers staffed a table at one GIEI event at Derwood as well as an insect zoo table that day.

Grow It Eat It had two down-county basic vegetable classes and two large-scale events (spring and summer) in 2015. These two events had the traditional mix of classes, plant clinic, demonstration garden, tables of information, outside partners etc. New in 2015, GIEI added retail and children's programs tho the events, both of which brought substantial income into the Master Gardeners.

The Program/Education Committee planned and coordinated speakers for the MG's 10 monthly membership meetings during the year. Speaker topics included: why we need bees, designing sustainable landscapes and the humane management of wildlife in the garden.

Digging Deeper is a journal club of Montgomery County Master Gardeners with the purpose of exploring scientific articles from peer-reviewed journals related to horticulture and the Master Gardener Mission. A new endeavor in 2013, the 42 members shared articles on line and a smaller group of 5-10 met monthly during the off season for gardening, approximately five times during the year.

“The Seed, News that Grows on You,” is the MGMC's lively, full-color e-newsletter. It is one of the primary means of communication for the organization's large and active membership, along with the MG website and the list serve. Eleven issues were published in 2015 (November-December was a combined issue), a total of 128 pages. The newsletter is posted monthly on the MG website, where it is available to all Master Gardeners, as well as other visitors to the site.
The **Speakers Group** supported the MG mission by educating county residents on current best practices for good environmental stewardship. In 2015, the speakers gave 75 talks making 1,258 contacts with the public and received $2,085 in donations. It also helped provide speakers and previewed talks for the GIEI spring open house. Speakers group members were featured at the **15th Spring Conference**, "Adapt, Evolve, Engage: Gardening Strategies for Today and Beyond", which had more than 100 registrations and realized a profit of over $3,000. This conference was memorable as it was held despite an extreme snow event. Speakers Group members also presented at the 2015 **Fall Conference for Master Gardeners**. It published a new brochure listing 100 topics for which the group can provide speakers -- available in color print copies or online. It also has recently posted photos and biographies of most of the speakers online.

**Therapeutic Horticulture is a** community outreach program that teaches horticulture and shares its pleasures and benefits with youth and seniors with special needs. In 2015, it provided 22 on-going horticulture programs at locations throughout the county. Three of these programs were new. The weekly or monthly garden-related activities, planned and supervised by MGs, served as an aid to recovery and rehabilitation, as well as a life-enrichment activity. One hundred and three MGs devoted a total of 3,768 hours of volunteer time in these activities interfacing with 2,905 contacts through the year.

![MG Heather Whirley at Spring Conference. (Photo by Sherry Marshall)](image)

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