

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

Horticulture More than a Hobby

Greening our urban environment.

Gardening is often listed as America's favorite hobby, but it's much more than that. Lawns, gardens, and green spaces increase property value, clean our air, cool cities, feed families, and tie us back to agriculture. When the growing gets tough, the USDA/land-grant partnership is there to help the tough get growing.

Payoff

- **Growing five-a-day.** Only 20 percent of the U.S. population eats the recommended five servings daily of fruits and vegetables. Community gardening improves dietary quality and helps participants use their own resources to meet part of their food needs. The **California** Extension's Berkley and Los Angeles community gardens provide fresh, healthful produce to low-income residents who otherwise might be challenged by cost and transportation to add fresh fruits and vegetables to their diets. The gardeners receive payment from the Women Infants and Children program (WIC) for their produce. Since summer 1994, **Illinois** urban gardeners' programs have provided fresh vegetables to about 30,500 mothers in WIC. **Idaho** Extension helped the USDA/Nez Perce Food and Nutrition Services produce edible soybeans to improve the nutrition of the 280 families this program's garden feeds. **Vermont's** garden-enhanced nutrition education programs helped 26 low-income communities grow vegetables for 572 youth.
- **Western water woes.** Demand for urban water is becoming a critical issue in the arid West. It is estimated that 35 percent to 60 percent of the water used in western U.S. metropolitan areas such as Las Vegas and Salt Lake City is applied to residential and commercial landscaped areas. These cities are among the fastest growing and the driest in the country. **Nevada** Extension's landscape water-use evaluations in Las Vegas yielded an overall water savings of 42 percent, or more than 5 million gallons per year. Extension faculty taught more than 320 Master Gardeners and 250 clients water use and conservation techniques. The **Utah State** water check team completed 1,583 residential water audits in Salt Lake County during 2003. On average, homeowners could save at least 25 percent on their summer water bills and end up with healthier lawns by more carefully monitoring their irrigation water use.

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- **Masters of the garden universe.** Last year, 1,500 **Colorado State** Master Gardeners supported extension horticulture programs in 21 counties and provided 53,000 hours of volunteer time worth nearly \$800,000. **Illinois** and **Missouri** Master Gardeners participate in the national Plant A Row for the Hungry Program, which involves gardeners in community hunger projects and allows them to share the harvest. They donated approximately 140,000 pounds of produce in 2003. **Louisiana State** Master Gardeners volunteered 8,628 hours valued at \$107,850. In **New Hampshire** more than 400 active Master Gardeners contributed 12,000 hours to programs in 100 communities. Likewise **Rutgers** Master Gardeners rallied 600,000 hours of volunteer efforts. **Oklahoma State** orchestrated 33,580 hours of volunteer service and reached more than 79,000 Oklahomans with as many as 600 educational and community programs and activities conducted in their communities. In **Washington**, Master Gardeners conduct plant clinics at more than 170 locations and help more than 300,000 people per year. In 2003, Master Gardeners in **West Virginia** provided more than \$315,994 in free services to communities. **Wisconsin** Extension trained more than 600 new Master Gardeners; the number of active Master Gardeners was about 1,100 statewide. These volunteers contributed 74,725 hours to projects such as establishing 34 acres of community gardens and providing gardening training that yielded \$463,920 worth of food for 160 Hmong families.
- **Taming the turf.** In **Connecticut**, researchers found that readings from light meters can more precisely guide nitrogen fertilization of turf to decrease the threat of fertilizer leeching into groundwater and surface water. **Florida** scientists found they could reduce water application by as much as 20 percent before the grass on any fairways began to look unhealthy. **Kansas State** researchers found that planting drought-resistant turfgrass species uses 40 percent less water than less resistant types. They also developed a novel low-impact seeder that saves up to \$1,600 per acre over traditional methods and would allow a golf course to remain open during the process. **New Mexico State** scientists developed a specially adapted Bermuda grass known as NuMex Sahara. It offers a brighter green color and

improved texture compared to common Bermuda grass. The water-saving grass has made its way to golf course fairways in Hawaii, soccer fields in Peru, palace grounds in Saudi Arabia, and more than 65 other countries. **Ohio State** research and extension faculty showed that people can use fewer chemicals to grow healthy lawns. They estimate that by using practices demonstrated in their plots — some as simple as mowing at the proper height — homeowners can reduce lawn chemical use by more than 50 percent.

- **Waste Not.** **Georgia** experiments used recycled wood mulch in home landscapes instead of disposing of this wood in landfills. It costs about \$18 per ton to dispose of the waste in a landfill. Getting rid of 19,000 tons of this waste through composting and mulching is saving Effingham County government \$342,000 annually in disposal fees. **Oklahoma State's** Oklahoma Proven (OKP) is a plant promotion and evaluation program designed to help consumers choose plants appropriate for Oklahoma gardens. By educating consumers to use plants that will thrive in Oklahoma, this program is helping reduce pesticide use.



Cooperative State Research, Education,
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