

IMPACT



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Master Gardener Training Cultivates Students

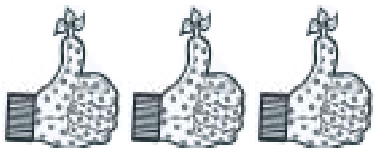
The Situation

The Idaho Master Gardener Program trains volunteers to assist the University of Idaho Extension and communities with home gardening questions and problems, as well as provide a variety of public service projects. The training goal is to provide students with increased gardening knowledge and motivation and to produce Master Gardeners that practice sustainable and integrated pest management techniques in their own gardens. When they recommend those techniques to others, they help protect the urban landscape. The question is, are these training goals being met?

Our Response

To assess goal achievement, a pre and post class survey and quiz were administered to 59 students at four sites in District III in spring of 2001.

The survey asked 9 questions about habits and perceptions of gardening activities and knowledge. The quiz contained 20 challenging true/false questions designed to be difficult for an “average” gardener. Topics in the quiz were covered during the training. Tests were paired and the before and after survey answers and quiz scores were compared.



Program Outcomes

Survey results indicate differences between sites. At Site A, almost half of the class were professional horticulturists and already planned to spend a larger amount of time in their garden. At the other sites, few professionals took the class. Furthermore, they planned to spend more time in the garden after the class.

At all sites, student plans for special garden projects and their perception of their gardening interest increased.

Fewer students indicated that they practiced sustainable techniques and IPM in their landscapes at the beginning of the class than at the end. This indicates that they either adopted sustainable techniques during the class, or they realized that they already were sustainable gardeners and didn't know it. However, most students taking the class did not change their composting habits (a very sustainable technique), which indicates prior knowledge of sustainable habits and IPM.

Students felt their knowledge and potential skills as Master Gardeners were greater at the end of the class. This was matched by the results of the quiz. Not only did they feel more confident, but also their technical knowledge was greater. How much greater depended largely on the training site.

Students started out with almost identical average test scores (63 to 68 percent). By the end of the training, the Site C students scored the highest with

an average of 94 percent. Increase in average score was least for Site D students (74 percent). The differences between sites were a result of: 1) the number of students showing an increase in score and, 2) the number of points of that increase. Site C was greater in both of these areas than all the other sites.

The students in the Site A class, which was comprised of almost half professional gardeners, felt more comfortable being a Master Gardener at the beginning of the class than students at any of the other sites. Their initial technical knowledge, however, was no greater than students at the other sites. Furthermore, no one in the Site A class indicated their gardening knowledge was “strong” at the beginning of the class. This may indicate an unfounded sense of security at the beginning of the class as far as being a technically adept Master Gardeners. After the class, the Site A scores increased at about the same frequency but by fewer points than the Site C and Site B scores. This indicates that the Site A students retained slightly less technical information during the training than students in Site C and Site B.

The Site D class started with slightly lower initial quiz scores, but they did not feel their knowledge was weak. Their gardening interest at the beginning of the class was somewhat lower than the other sites, however, it increased after the class. After the class, they felt as comfortable as students at other sites in their ability to serve as a Master Gardeners. Nevertheless, their increase in technical information was less than the other sites.

One final positive outcome of the Master Gardener Training is that students at all sites became more familiar with University of Idaho Extension and knew more about its operation, locations, and services.

Conclusion

The Idaho Master Gardener Program in District III trained 68 new Master Gardeners in 2001 at these four sites. When their 36 hours of volunteer time are completed, they will have provided \$34,272 of services to the CES and their communities

(\$14.00/hr). It cost approximately \$16,000 to provide the initial training (\$25.00/hr plus food and travel costs for instructors), resulting in an \$18,272 benefit in a single year. In addition, these Master Gardeners are highly motivated, technically adept, and aware of sustainable and IPM techniques to recommend. They are able to answer questions and diagnose problems in the Extension offices, allowing the Extension educators to spend time at other duties. In addition, they are aware of, and can recommend, the other Extension services.

For More Information

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