

## High-Altitude Victory Garden course delivers proven tips for short season gardening

### AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho (UI) Extension in Teton County adapts popular Victory Garden course to include high-altitude, short season gardening curriculum, reaching 42 new gardeners in three years.

### The Situation

According to a recent National Gardening Association survey, American households are increasingly gardening (77 percent). Gardeners are also becoming younger (29 percent), with older gardeners holding steady at 35 percent (National Gardening Association, 2018). This survey reported a record amount of spending (\$47.8 billion) on lawn and garden retail sales, with an average household spending \$503 annually, nearly \$100 over the previous year. Today's gardeners are buying "knowledge" and are hungry for "how-to" information. This also holds true for aspiring and seasoned gardeners throughout Idaho.

To keep pace with this growing interest, UI Extension offers both the Idaho Victory Garden and Idaho Master Gardener courses. Despite the plethora of resources and state expertise available within UI Extension, there has been little gardening and consumer horticulture curriculum tailored specifically to short-season and high-elevation climates such as Teton County (elevation 6,109 feet and USDA-Plant Hardiness Zones 3b-4b). Furthermore, with Teton County's rural and geographically isolated population of 10,000 residents and limited Extension faculty residing in the area, it



Extension educator, Jennifer Werlin (far right) teaching students about worm composting. Photo: UI Extension, Teton County.

had been challenging to deliver horticulture and food system classes specifically for this clientele.

### Our Response

With shifting demographics and a growing clientele interest in home gardening, locally produced foods and self-sufficiency, UI Extension in Teton County began offering the "High-Altitude Victory Garden" course in 2017. Based on the popular UI Extension Idaho Victory Garden curriculum, this course was completed by a total of 42 participants the past three spring seasons in Teton County (2017-2019).

The course was divided into six classes, each running 1.5 hours over the lunch hour. Like other victory gardening courses, a modest course fee covered costs.

Using the Idaho Victory Garden curriculum, UI Extension educator Jennifer Werlin tailored and revised the course materials and lessons specifically to Teton County's short season and cold climate. The curriculum includes lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations and hands-on activities. Family resource books with relevant Extension publications and other resources were also included (e.g., *Ball® Blue Book of Preserving*, UI Extension Bulletins *Planning an Idaho Vegetable Garden*, *Composting at Home* and *Harvesting and Storing Fresh Garden Produce*). Nearby Extension educators with positions focused on consumer horticulture, agriculture and food safety and nutrition taught some of the lessons and provided additional topic expertise.

An end-of-course evaluation with both quantitative and qualitative questions was conducted each year, with the addition of individual class evaluations in 2019.

### Program Outcomes

Participants in the course traveled as far as a 1.5-hour one-way for the course, with participants from both eastern Idaho and northwestern Wyoming. Participants ranged in age, gender and backgrounds, yet all participants came with a desire to learn tips for making gardening more successful and efficient in the montane area.

Survey participants (N=25) reported that season extension and composting best management practices were the most useful course topics. On a Likert scale of one to five (with one "little to none" and five a "high" likelihood), participants reported that as a result of the course, they were highly likely to begin their own high-altitude victory garden (average 4.72). They also reported that they were likely to attend future UI Extension classes (average 4.3). Client comments showcased

an eagerness to learn and enthusiasm for gardening and future learning opportunities:

- "Great class, great value. Will definitely use resources!"
- "Thanks for offering this class here! Was great having an opportunity to learn in this valley."
- "I gained something from each topic- I really liked knowing exact varieties of plants that do well. Lengthening the growing season tips were great."

Participants also noted an increased knowledge about UI Extension from knowing a little about UI Extension at the beginning of class (2.2) to a somewhat high knowledge of Extension services by the end of the course (3.96). One participant wrote, "I didn't realize that UI Extension offered so many services. I'll definitely use these (services) in the future. I would be interested in a master gardener class."

### The Future

With increasing interest and attendance in gardening and horticulture classes each year, UI Extension in Teton County will offer a 12-week Idaho Master Gardener course in 2020. The High-Altitude Victory Garden course will resume in 2021, with the Idaho Master Gardener course and Idaho Victory Garden courses alternating years thereafter.

### Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

UI Extension faculty Ariel Agenbroad, Wayne Jones (*emeritus*), Lance Ellis, Ron Patterson and Lorie Dye.

References: National Gardening Association (2018). Your 'Typical' Gardener is Younger These Days – and Has a LOT of Questions! Accessed at <https://garden-research.com>.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jennifer Werlin, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Teton County • 208-354-2961 • [jwerlin@uidaho.edu](mailto:jwerlin@uidaho.edu)

38-19-jwerlin-high-altitude • 10/19