

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Plan the Garden, Preserve the Harvest!

AT A GLANCE

Cross-discipline program increases clientele knowledge and skill in home gardening and home food preservation.

The Situation

In 2020, COVID-19-related state lockdowns contributed to a sudden surge of home gardening and food preservation interest across the United States. While numbers of home gardeners and food preservers increased drastically, many consumers lacked knowledge or awareness of available resources for their newly acquired hobbies. The increase in home gardening and food preservation activities contributed to necessary supplies becoming scarcely available through commercial outlets. This shortage left many consumers confused about purchasing options for essential equipment and supplies to conduct these activities.

Our Response

To provide the opportunity for individuals to safely access current, research-based content, Extension educators with expertise in horticulture and family and consumer sciences developed a cross-discipline program, "Plan the Garden, Preserve the Harvest!" This was developed specifically for an introduction to these topics. This one-hour and 30-minute virtual presentation was designed to meet the state of Idaho and University of Idaho group gathering limitations and social-distancing guidelines without limiting participation, thus providing the opportunity to reach a larger audience.



Community clientele join virtually to gain introductory horticulture content and an overview of home food preservation.

Introductory horticulture content was shared for the first half of the presentation. An overview of home food preservation options was presented during the second half of the allotted presentation time.

To inform consumers with various programming needs of this opportunity, the class was marketed through multiple avenues. By reaching out to established community partnerships, this class was shared via social media platforms by 15 community entities, expanding marketing efforts without creating the need for advertising funds.

Program Outcomes

In January of 2021, one "Plan the Garden, Preserve the Harvest!" workshop was delivered via Zoom, with

more than 150 participants attending live. The interest in southern Idaho prompted a team of educators to conduct the cross-discipline program in northern Idaho during March, with over 50 participants joining the class virtually.

A post-program survey incorporated horticulture and food preservation questions and was shared with participants one week following the class. This survey intended to gauge participant learning and planned action following their participation in the class.

Of the 211 unique contacts that attended “Plan the Garden, Preserve the Harvest!,” 58 completed the follow-up post-program survey. A total of 22 knowledge, skill and perspective outcomes were measured in the post-program evaluation. Listed in Table 1 are the mean scores of the top two evaluation outcomes for each content area with the most significant mean score increases. Participants ranked on a scale of one (Very Low) to five (Very High).

Table 1. Highest mean score increases in confidence for gardening and preserving, N=48.

Topic	Increase in Mean Score
Layout of the garden using spacing guides	1.12
Family garden and Preservation Assessment	1.12
Freezing Fruits, Vegetables and Herbs	0.96
Food Handling and Preparation Guidelines	0.95

Participants identified to what extent the workshop improved their skills in gardening and preservation based on information learned in class (see Table 2). Responses showed that gardening was “Very Highly”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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or “Highly” improved by over 78% and food preservation increased by over 67%.

Some survey responses include:

- Thank you for providing digital resources I can access in the future as I’m truly a beginner and won’t remember everything covered in class.
- Appreciate your preparation, sincerity, all the answers to questions and your enthusiasm. Well planned, motivating and educational presentation.
- My knowledge on these topics was improved by the class. My skills on the topics will improve as I put them into practice, and I have successes in the garden.

Table 2. Gardening and food preservation skill improvement rating, N=46.

	Improvement of skills to use gardening information	Improvement of skills to use preservation information
Very Highly	19.57%	15.22%
Highly	58.70%	52.17%
Moderately	13.04%	23.91%
Slightly	4.35%	4.35%
Not at all	4.35%	4.35%

The Future

As program participants continue to desire more in-depth content, additional content-specific classes are being offered virtually to extend the foundational information shared during the initial “Plan the Garden, Preserve the Harvest!” class. Home horticulture and food preservation specific virtual programming has scheduled five additional workshops and will continue to do more. To date these cross-discipline workshops have had more than 865 participants attending live.