

# impact

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

## Pandemic pivot: master gardener training goes from in-person to virtual to hybrid

### AT A GLANCE

A regional, virtual master gardener training program maximizes the limited time and resources of Extension faculty and staff while yielding high quality volunteers for participating counties.

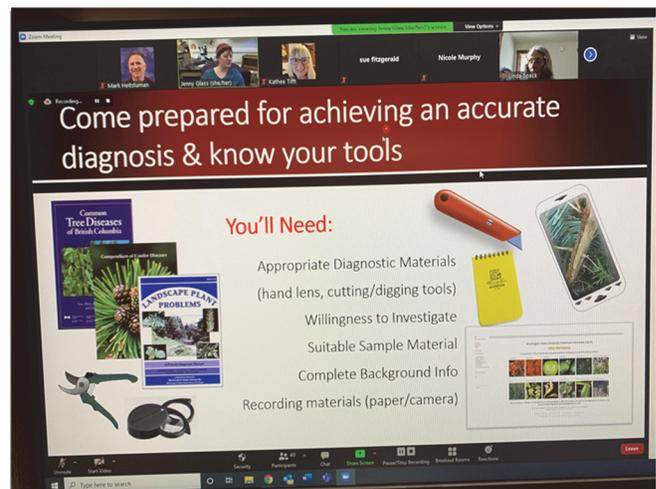
### The Situation

University of Idaho Extension and Washington State University (WSU) Extension have collaborated for 19 years to deliver regional master gardener (MG) training to the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley. Residents in surrounding Washington and Idaho counties that do not have resources to offer MG training are invited to participate in this regional training format.

The lengthy commute was a barrier for residents of Whitman County who were interested in attending to become certified master gardeners. Walla Walla County MG's were looking for classes to maintain their certification. UI Extension, Latah County was considering design changes for their MG training and looked to our regional program as an optional temporary solution for their MG candidates.

### Our Response

In the fall of 2019, the program planning team met with WSU Extension Information Technology (IT) specialists to explore possible technologies to connect all three physical sites. IT recommended using a Meeting Owl Pro camera at each site. The Meeting Owl Pro integrates a 360-degree camera, microphone and speaker into one portable unit and works well with



A virtual presentation on Plant Diseases and Plant Diagnostics provided to master gardeners on March 31, 2020.

Zoom, the cloud-based video conference service used to deliver classes to remote locations. Classes began in-person on Feb. 4 in Clarkston, Washington and were accessed via Zoom by participants in Colfax and Walla Walla, Washington. Because the classrooms and speakers were visible to all simultaneously, Meeting Owl increased interactivity between locations. When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic in March, in-person meetings ceased. After canceling the March 17 training, classes pivoted to 100% virtual delivery via Zoom for the five remaining sessions. While the Meeting Owl camera was not needed once everyone participated via Zoom, the use of the Zoom platform and the lessons learned while delivering trainings remotely allowed for a smooth transition to a totally virtual master gardener training beginning on March 24, 2020.

## Program Outcomes

- Seventeen of 48 participants responded to the survey for a 35% response rate.
- 82% of the respondents indicated their knowledge of gardening increased either a lot or very much.
- 59% said their knowledge of environmental stewardship increased a lot or very much.
- 65% of respondents said they were confident in finding answers to most gardening questions.

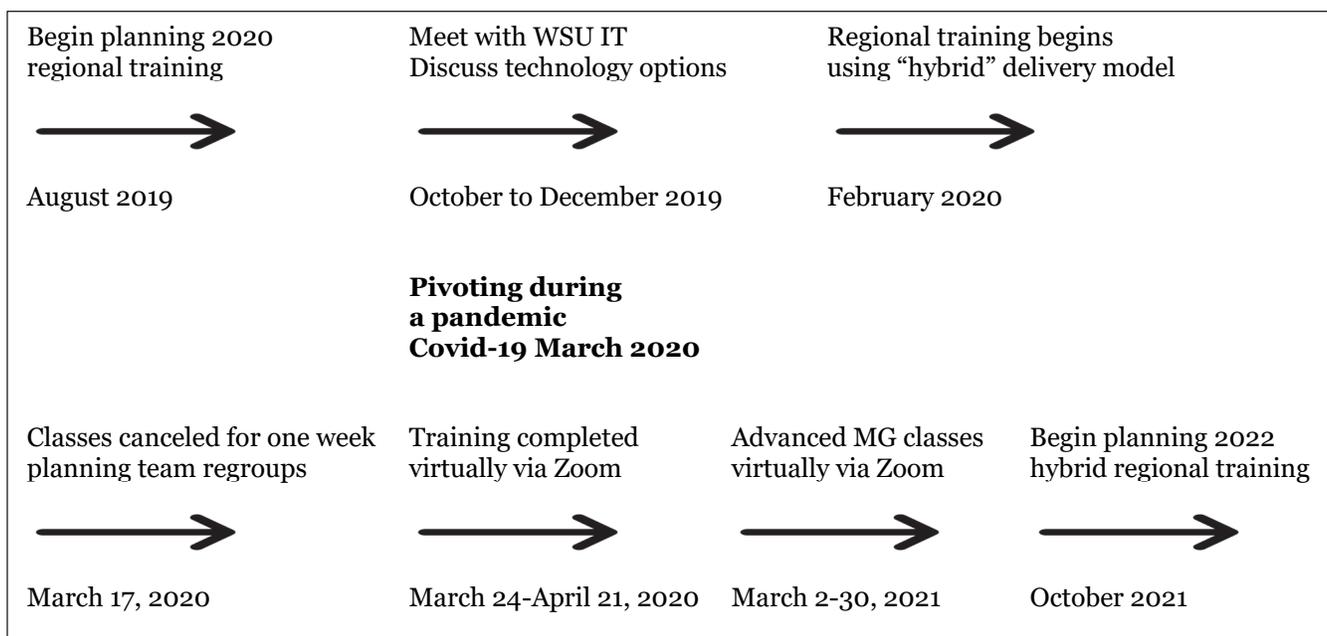
## The Future

Master gardeners prefer a Hybrid model for future trainings. A 2020 participant stated they “would

recommend a Zoom component even after the pandemic (hopefully) ends. I loved the training and being able to now call myself a Master Gardener. Such a fun, educational, community-minded program.”

A 2021 participant stated they “really wish we could have had hands-on training. I know it was impossible under the circumstances. To have the training and then be able to apply it, works so much better for understanding.”

In 2022, the program planning team is providing master gardener classes in person and via Zoom. Our preference is for speakers and participants to attend in person at their sites (as long as recommendations allow) but attendance via Zoom will also be available.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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