MU Extension Regional Specialists Share Their Expertise about Community and School Gardening

Spring is here, which means that the gardening season is in full swing! MU Extension regional specialists from around the state are involved in a variety of community and school gardening projects and programs that use curricula developed by MU Extension faculty. This month’s feature newsletter article highlights some of these projects to give you ideas about how MU Extension could assist the next gardening project you undertake as part of your Healthy and Active Communities grant.

When the Community Partnership in Phelps County, a Missouri Foundation for Health Healthy and Active Communities grantee, was developing community gardens so that children, low-income families and senior citizens would have access to fresh produce, improve nutrition, learn gardening skills and increase physical activity, they called on Andy Read, MU Extension regional specialist in horticulture based in Phelps County and serving a 16-county area in south central Missouri.

An MU Extension horticulture specialist like Andy could offer Master Gardener training to get more people involved in gardening and growing food in the community. People who complete the training commit to providing at least 30 hours of volunteer assistance to community gardening and other garden-related work. In collaboration with the Council for a Healthy Dent County, Andy trained 18 Master Gardeners in the Salem area. The Master Gardeners were among the 120 volunteers at the Salem Community Garden who grew food for themselves in addition to donating 500... (continued on page 2)
pounds of it to the local food pantry, senior center, crisis center and homeless shelter.

Gardens are a lively learning environment for youth as well as a place to engage them in growing vegetables and fruits. In Gasconade County, Andy assisted Matt Leuchtmann, Gasconade County R-II School District gifted student program coordinator, in developing a community garden. Andy involved the students in taking soil samples, teaching them about soil properties and soil chemistry and helping them interpret the results of the soil tests to determine the appropriate amendments. As Andy worked in the garden with the students, he quizzed them on the concepts they had previously learned with Matt and did hands-on demonstrations on topics like photosynthesis, seed development, plant reproduction and the difference between monocots and dicots.

Another MU Extension horticulture specialist, Marlin Bates, based in Platte County, is working with volunteers from the Master Gardeners of Greater Kansas City and Fairview Christian Church to engage young people in a program called Garden ‘N Grow. This hands-on program designed for young people aged 9-13, enables them to have fun while learning about vegetable gardening and “cultivating” skills in science, math, and teamwork. Participants decide what kinds of vegetables they want to grow and, after a summer of maintaining their garden plot, harvest the vegetables to eat at home and donate to food pantries. The Garden ‘N Grow curriculum is easy for anyone to adopt. The Garden ‘N Grow Leader Handbook and Gardener’s Notebook are both available to purchase through MU Extension Publications (http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=MP737).

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Camelia Younger, MU Extension regional specialist in nutrition and health education, is based in Texas County. She worked in collaboration with Master Gardeners, area agencies and businesses to develop a community garden in Texas County in 2007. The garden is a place where people who do not have a lot of knowledge about growing their own food can learn and put that knowledge to practice. During the garden season, a portion of the food grown is distributed through the Texas County Food Pantry. Since its development, the Texas County Community Garden has served as a model for gardens in other counties such as Dent, Howell, Douglas and Greene.

Eating from the Garden, an MU Extension-developed program for 4th and 5th grade students integrates the learning in school gardens into math, language arts, environmental studies, nutrition, health and physical education. The program involves volunteers who are trained to implement the curriculum.

MU Extension and Gateway Greening are working together to teach St. Louis residents how to grow produce on underutilized land.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of gardening-related projects that MU Extension regional specialists are involved in. Any member of the MU Extension Implementation Team is available to help connect you to a regional specialist in your area who could provide project technical assistance or appropriate programming.

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