

impact

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

Inaugural Edible Garden Tour inspires participants to garden

AT A GLANCE

USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 5 presents unique growing challenges. A self-guided garden tour offered participants increased self-efficacy, knowledge and skills to garden at home.

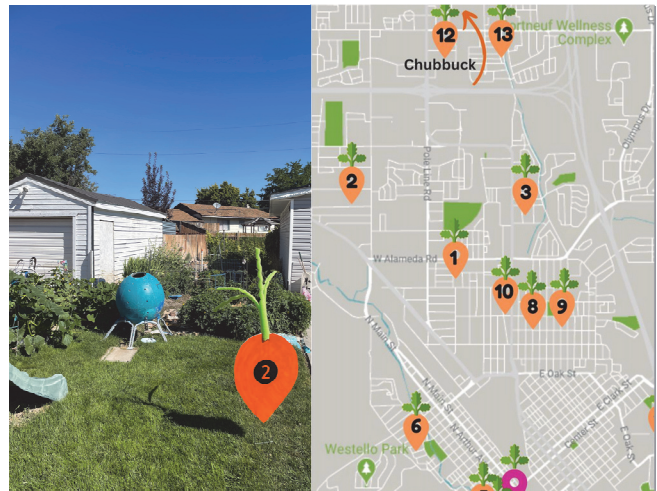
The Situation

Pocatello poses unpredictable growing conditions in eastern Idaho and, therefore, can intimidate those wanting to start a garden. The family and consumer sciences educator for UI Extension in Bannock County believes increasing production of food for one's family is empowering and could save money. The Bannock County Advisory Committee agreed that expanding the community's knowledge about growing food should be a priority.

Our Response

The Edible Garden Tour was structured much like an open studio art tour. We invited volunteer gardeners across Pocatello and Chubbuck to share their gardens. Thirteen gardeners with various levels of expertise and garden sizes signed up to host. The goal was to inspire community members to grow their own food and alleviate the intimidation of growing in Zone 5, whether in container gardens or vast acres.

Gardeners were encouraged to make their garden stops unique and memorable. Many gardeners shared seeds, offered iced tea infused with their herbs and offered solutions to gardening problems. Some provided handouts, had notes in their gardens, offered seed-



Garden location with carrot sign; example of the map of the tour. Photo by Kathryn Hickok.

saving activities and spoke about preserving their harvest from previous years.

It was a priority that this event was free to attend, but registration was required. Within the online registration form was a liability waiver developed by the University of Idaho Risk Management Department. The registration form also included questions about participants' interest in and experience with gardening. An online follow-up survey was sent immediately following the tour.

The tour included a mid-day celebration event at the Marshall Public Library, a central location that provided free use of its space and tables. Participants and gardeners were invited to bring their lunch and enjoy a free resource fair from local organizations and clubs

including the Idaho State University Botany Club. Club members discussed seed saving and soil testing strategies. The Mighty Microgreens demonstrated how to grow greens in a tiny space. UI Extension educator Ariel Agenbroad explained how to grow a salad bowl garden and shared resources about growing food in a small space. UI Extension educator Kathryn Hickok from Bannock County demonstrated a fresh salsa recipe using a human-powered blender bike. UI Extension bulletins covering food preservation, gardening tips and other resources were available for public access.

Program Outcomes

The first Edible Garden Tour exceeded expectations and met organizers' goals. The tour aimed to inspire community members to grow their food by experiencing successful gardens. One hundred thirty-six people registered for the tour. Registered participants reported gardening for reasons like saving money on food, feeling empowered to grow their food, promoting pollination, teaching children a new skill, learning new skills, saving money on produce and maximizing their yards. Sixty-eight of those who registered reported they do not yet garden.

Individuals or groups visited an average of four gardens. After attending the tour, 83% of respondents felt more connected with the community. Participants agreed that this event encouraged gardeners to share their enthusiasm, knowledge and energy with others. One respondent noted how this was a chance for their family to see how to grow food in a small yard by incorporating vegetables into ornamental spaces.

The tour increased awareness of UI Extension in Bannock County as 50% of the participants reported not attending an Extension event or class prior to this event.

The event was initially advertised through community flyers and on Facebook and reached over 737 Facebook users. The event was also posted within Facebook

groups unique to this region. It attracted additional press coverage and promotion by The Idaho State Journal, Healthy City USA!, the local radio and Neighborworks Pocatello.

Twenty-nine people completed the follow up survey and reported the following after participating in the garden tour:

- 11 people did not currently garden but plan to have a garden next year
- 6 people thought they might save money on produce
- 4 people felt more confident about starting a garden
- 17 planned to make improvements to their current gardens
- 11 learned inexpensive ways to grow food
- 8 learned low water gardening strategies
- 8 better understood how to grow food
- 13 met a new friend
- 11 learned how to grow food all year long

The Future

This successful event significantly raised awareness of UI Extension in Bannock County and increased knowledge of those who attended. Participants recommended tips to improve the tour for 2024. For example, host gardeners requested that they have an opportunity to tour the other gardens.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

The Marshall Public Library promoted and provided free space to gather; startup funds and funding from U & I Together Innovative Project provided resources to allow for Salad Bowl Gardening demonstrations. Ariel Agenbroad, area UI Extension educator from southwest Idaho, traveled from Boise to provide outstanding information about gardening on a small scale.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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