

impact

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

Idaho master gardeners learn and serve in Latah County

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension's Idaho Master Gardener Program in Latah County fulfills a long-term need for local horticultural knowledge and service.

The Situation

Latah County is predominantly rural with over a century of agricultural and gardening activity. Recent generations have relied more heavily on the purchase of fresh food rather than growing it themselves. Gaining knowledge on the most effective methods for home-based fruit and vegetable production as well as landscaping are important to the citizens of Latah County and the Palouse region. This has become even more imperative since a large influx of new residents in the county have come from different climates. The UI Extension office receives over 100 requests for help each year with plant and tree problems. Master gardeners are trained to help with these issues. The master gardener program was started by Washington State University Extension in 1973. All 50 states, including 36 out of 44 Idaho counties, have a formal master gardener certification program.

Our Response

University of Idaho Extension's Idaho Master Gardener Program is offered annually from February to May for Latah County. The UI Extension office has offered a master gardener program since the 1980's. The classes are held once per week for a total of 42 hours of



Certified Idaho Master Gardeners renovated a demonstration garden in downtown Moscow in 2023.

instruction. Master gardener students receive research-based education in horticulture and gardening on a range of topics including entomology, pesticide use, landscape design, water conservation methods, fruit tree pruning, weed identification, plant diseases and how to diagnose plant problems. These courses are taught mainly by UI Extension faculty and a few other volunteer experts. Students who complete the course and 30 hours of service within the year can become a certified Idaho master gardener.

Latah County partners with UI Extension to provide a part-time master gardener coordinator who organizes the annual course, plant clinic and certification process. Latah County's small farms and horticulture UI Extension educator teaches and oversees the program.

Program Outcomes

The UI Extension office relies heavily on the certified Idaho master gardeners to solve the cases turned into the plant clinic held weekly June through September. They host a monthly booth at the Moscow Farmers Market and at the Tuesday Market for gardening outreach and education. Master gardeners also created and care for a community demonstration garden which was started in 2000 and was renovated in 2023. The garden has hosted numerous tours and educational events each year. Master gardener-led educational programming helps disseminate research-based education to the general gardening public.

The following table illustrates the number of people who have participated in the program. Each volunteer hour represents the personal effort necessary to meet the need within the county.

Idaho master gardeners in Latah County

Years	Number of students	Number of volunteer hours	Number of certified master gardeners
2004-2009	127	5,108	98
2010-2014	73	4,159	80
2015-2019	68	3,942	29
2020-2024	94	4,643	40

The ripple effect of positive impact from the master gardener program in the region is widespread. Important outcomes include an increase in environmental stewardship within the region. Knowledge of minimal and targeted use of pesticides is critical to prevent unnecessary death of pollinators and other beneficial insects that greatly contribute to overall local food production. Other pesticide hazards are likely being avoided due to increased knowledge in the community.

WSU, UI and the City of Moscow regularly send their landscape maintenance crew members to the Univer-

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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sity of Idaho Extension's Idaho Master Gardener Program course.

Other beneficial outcomes include:

- A 2023 renovation of the Transit Center Sculpture Garden, a partnership between the master gardeners, the City of Moscow and UI Extension.
- A certified Idaho master gardener grows and donates approximately 3,000 pounds of produce annually to local food banks.
- Certified Idaho master gardeners sell their produce at the Tuesday Market.
- A master gardener started a local native seed company in 2004 that was recently transferred to new ownership.
- A new exotic fruit fly was identified through a plant clinic inquiry in 2012.
- Idaho master gardeners in Palouse, Washington have created citywide rose plantings, a skate park and native plant garden.
- Two master gardeners have started landscape design businesses.
- A master gardener started a seed library at the Moscow Public Library and has taught numerous seed saving classes in the community.

The Future

The demand for master gardener education continues to be a priority for the community with an average of 20 students registering each year. With weather shifts, an increase in invasive species of weeds and pests are predicted. Master gardeners are well-positioned to provide early alerts to the local gardening community so that problems can be addressed before they become widespread. Local food production continues to be a priority in the community and master gardeners assist by distributing resources and information. Water conservation continues to be a priority in the Palouse region and master gardeners will continue to learn and help teach community members about water-saving landscaping.