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## Master Gardener Volunteers News

August, 2009



### Even the Federal Government Thinks Master Gardeners are Wonderful!

*USDA Press Release on Master Gardeners*

### USDA Master Gardeners Available to Help Americans Grow Safe, Healthy Food Throughout the Country

#### USDA Offers Free On-the-Ground Resources for First-Time Growers

WASHINGTON, July 9, 2009 -- Looking for some free gardening advice? Has your well-intentioned "green thumb" resulted in your garden looking a little brown? USDA has a cadre of volunteers who provide free gardening tips and have a wealth of science-based research to answer your questions. Trained by USDA's Cooperative Extension Service, Master Gardeners provide information in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. To find a local Master Gardeners, visit [www.extension.org/pges/Extension\\_Master\\_Gardener](http://www.extension.org/pges/Extension_Master_Gardener).



"Master Gardeners are a valuable resource for people who want to get some tips on gardening and growing their own food from a read expert," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Growing fruits and vegetables in your own garden not only promotes a healthier lifestyle, but helps communities develop a safe, nutritious and sustainable source of food."

Master Gardeners can help Americans of all abilities to plant, grow, and harvest a garden, similar to USDA's "People's Garden." Earlier this year, Vilsack launched the 'People's Garden' on USDA property in order to help illustrate the many ways USDA works to provide a sustainable, safe and nutritious food supply as well as protect and preserve the landscape where that food is produced.



The Master Gardener program, which began in 1972 in Washington, is another important example of how people can contribute to promoting healthier food and communities. Since its inception, the program has grown to 94,865 volunteers across the country who give horticulture information to the public through a variety of locally-based programs. Volunteers receive 40 to 80 hours of instruction and, in return, give an equal number of volunteer hours during the next year. As the federal partner in the Cooperative Extension Service, USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) provides funding and national leadership to the program.

"Extension Master Gardener volunteers are more than just members of local garden clubs," said Bill Hoffman, national program leader and Master Gardener contact at CSREES. "They bring to bear the science base of the land-grant university system in service to their communities, through the training and certification they receive as well as the research-based answers they provide."

During 2008, this network of Master Gardeners provided more than 5 million hours of volunteer work in the communities -- valued at \$101.4 million. Nearly 80 percent of these 5 million hours take place in metropolitan areas. Additionally, in 2008, more than 16,000 new Master Gardeners joined the program for the first time, infusing the program with new life.

Although each community has its own unique projects, all Master Gardeners present workshops, answer gardening hotlines, work with youth, plant demonstration gardens, and teach gardening throughout the country:

**In Washington, DC:** As director of the Washington Youth Garden at USDA's National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., Kafa Anderson-Hall, who is a Master Gardener herself, spent hours as a child learning about the relationship between food, health and nutrition at the Washington Youth Garden. Never in her wildest imagination did she see herself on staff with the arboretum years later, passing along the same knowledge and skills today's youth. Today, Anderson-Hall relies on volunteers, many of the Master Gardeners, to help. Anderson-Hall said there are 15 Master Gardener volunteers who each provide two to three hours of service per week.

"The garden wouldn't be where it is today without our Master Gardeners," Anderson-Hall said. "There is no way our staff of three could accomplish all we do and be productive. It's incredible -- the number of hours the volunteers provide."

Anderson-Hall said volunteers are extremely committed to the garden -- the oldest volunteer, who is 72, has continued to volunteer even as she recovers from back surgery. Master Gardener volunteers maintain the garden, including weeding, planting and redesigns. They also provide hands-on interaction with the students. In Washington, DC, the Master Gardener program is run through the University of the District of Columbia Cooperative Extension Service.

Master Garden volunteers help support a wide range of programs in the District of Columbia. Family programs teach organic gardening and cooking, including presentations from nutritionists and chefs, so that families can benefit from the food they grow. A *Sprout* program

works to connect youth to their environment. *Seed to Supper* is a summer camp where students grow their own food and take it home to their families. The Master Gardeners who volunteer with the camp donate any excess food to the DC Central Kitchen, where the chefs provide a cooking demonstration to camp participants. In 2008, the camp donated 250 pounds of produce to the local food kitchen.

**In California:** Master Gardeners in California are using their knowledge and training to help combat wildfires. Through the University of California system, Master Gardeners provide resources for homeowners who want to *'fireproof'* their homes by using less flammable plants, removing combustible materials and properly spacing trees.

**In Maryland:** The *Grow It, Eat It* program by Master Gardeners in Maryland help people improve their health and save money by growing fresh vegetables, fruits and herbs, using sustainable agricultural practices.

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## Master Gardening Beyond Maine: What Are Some Possibilities?

*By Barbara Murphy, Extension Educator, UMaine Cooperative Extension Oxford County*

Are you interested in using your Master Gardener skills working with people in Central America? If so, or if you just want to learn more about the possibilities please consider attending this informational session.

**When:** Wednesday, September 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

**Where:** Maple Hill Farm and B & B, Hallowell

**Cost:** Free

**RSVP:** Required by calling or e-mailing Barbara Murphy at 1-800-287-1482 (in Maine) or [bmurphy@umext.maine.edu](mailto:bmurphy@umext.maine.edu) by *September 20*.

**Note:** Coffee and cookies will be served

The featured speaker will be Florence Reed, president of Sustainable Harvest International, which is based in Surry, Maine (<http://www.sustainableharvest.org/>). Flo will talk about the organization she founded in 1997 that is based in Central America which focuses on establishing sustainable communities through environmentally sound agricultural practices. Flo will also talk about possible opportunities for Master Gardeners within her organization.

In addition to Flo, you will hear from a group of York and Oxford County Master Gardeners who went to Guatemala in February to work with Mayan Villagers on re-establishing backyard gardens and chicken coops.

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## Volunteer Project Spotlight: Plant A Row for the Hungry

### Why Plant A Row for the Hungry?

*By Barbara Murphy, Extension Educator, UMaine Cooperative Extension Oxford County*



Each year many Master Gardener Volunteers choose to participate in Maine's effort to



combat local hunger by volunteering in the [Plant A Row For the Hungry](#) project. This program, launched in 1995 works to involve local gardeners and farmers in combating hunger by growing a row of vegetables and donating the harvest to local food pantries and soup kitchens. Since 2000, Maine farmers and gardeners have donated more than 600,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables to those with limited access to fresh, local produce.

### **How the Program Works**

Each participating county runs its Plant A Row program differently. For example, some counties utilize Master Gardener Volunteers help by organizing and harvesting gleaning opportunities from commercial farms, other counties have Master Gardener Volunteers grow and donate entire garden harvests toward the hunger effort while still others grow demonstration gardens and donate the surplus to Plant A Row.

### **Does the Effort Make A Difference?**

You bet it does! One York County food pantry reported that over 80% of its fresh produce comes from York County Master Gardeners gleaning effort. Soup kitchens from across the state have come to rely on PAR donations to augment their meal making ingredients. And, many individuals have reported how the produce is so delicious, and appreciated especially during these tough economic times.

### **What Can You Do?**

One obvious choice is for you to join your county's Master Gardener Volunteers Plant A Row program. However, if the local program's time and location don't fit your schedule, you can always donate any *high quality* surplus you might get from your own home garden. Next year, dedicate a row to the effort and encourage families and friends to do likewise. It is always helpful to check with your local charities before arriving at the door with a donation. Some food pantries don't have refrigeration so may only be able to accept storage produce like winter squash and potatoes. Others may have limited hours or prefer that the vegetables arrive at a certain time. If you don't know where to donate the fruits and vegetables, ask your Master Gardener program coordinator.

## Anything More?

For reporting purposes to various stakeholders and funders we try to keep a tally of the total number of pounds of produce donated annually. So, please estimate the weight of your donated harvest and report it to your county Master Gardener coordinator.

If you have questions about the program, feel free to call or e-mail me at 1-800-287-1482 (in Maine) or [bmurphy@umext.maine.edu](mailto:bmurphy@umext.maine.edu).

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## Plentiful Plant A Row Program From York County

*By Susan Tkacik, Horticulture Aide, UMaine Cooperative Extension York County*



*Master Gardener Volunteers Claudette Croteau, Maureen Brydon, Gleaning Team Leader for Harris Farm, and Joe Moreshead, Gleaning Team Leader for Rick Grant Farm*

York County Master Gardener Volunteers look forward hopefully, to once again lead the state in quantity of produce gathered for the Plant A Row for the Hungry (PAR) program, as they begin their 10th season participation in the hunger relief effort. In the last three seasons York County has contributed over 30,000 pounds of fresh

produce each year to shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens.

Already, teams of Master Gardener Volunteers have begun gleaning at the Spiller Farm in Wells. Bill and Anna Spiller, owners of the farm, were the first commercial enterprise to participate when PAR became an official Master Gardener project back in 2000 with one master gardener volunteer. Spiller Farm continues to be the program's major contributor.

The program has grown ten-fold since those early years. This year seven commercial growers are participating. Six farms are each assigned a team of four to 10 master gardener gleaners with a team leader acting as liaison to facilitate communication between the farmer and the team. The seventh farm, Zach's in York, donates all of their unsold produce from the farm stand at the end of each day. A master gardener volunteer coordinates with volunteers from five recipient agencies who pick up the vegetables five days a week and with Master Gardener Volunteers who pick up on the weekends and deliver to the York County Shelter Program, the major recipient of the PAR effort.

In addition to the commercial farms about two dozen individual growers participate in PAR. They register at the season's kick-off during the annual spring plant sale and then deliver their excess produce to hunger relief agencies in their home towns.

"York County farmers are extremely generous and welcoming to our PAR volunteers," said Zelda Kenney, a master gardener who helps to coordinate the effort. Besides Spillers and Zach's, participating farms include the Ben Grant and Rick Grant farms in Saco, Harris farm in Dayton, Riverside Farm in North Berwick, and Tibbetts Farm in Waterboro. Kenney noted, "Some, like

Spillers now have planned surplus, so they can be sure there is something each week for the PAR program." She continued, "I can't say enough about their generosity and the dedication of our volunteers, some of whom return season-after-season. The appeal of the program is that it makes perfect sense. Vegetable that might otherwise be composted end up as nutritious meals, helping to stretch families' and agencies' budgets."

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## Somerset County News

*By Hannah Todd, Horticulture Aide, UMaine Cooperative Extension Somerset County*

### Current Volunteer Projects:

**Cheryl Pratt** continues to beautify the Margaret Chase Smith Library by maintaining their gardens, **Brainard and Charlotte Tripp** have been planting, and pruning at Embden Town House and Stump Park, **Pete Drever** spent countless hours working with town officials to establish the Norridgewock Community Garden and then **Darci Hodges** helped to facilitate the "grand opening" and support the garden through the summer.

**Betsy Doane** presented talks to the Pittsfield Garden Club and prepared information for a variety of gardening programs. **Sarah LeBlanc and Carla Burnham** wore the Asian Longhorned Beetle costumes in the Athens 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fair to raise awareness about this invasive pest. They have both been very busy doing other projects as well.

**Cindy Smith** didn't let the tough economic times get her or the company she works for down! When she heard the company decided not to budget any money for gardening expenses she took it upon herself to refresh their gardens. She spent hours dividing perennials from her personal garden and transplanting them to her employers garden.

**Margot Rushton** worked with the hospital on a "Healing Garden". She is now working on selecting and designing signs for the Riverside Park in Norridgewock. **Martin Brecher** is also involved with restoring Riverside Park.

**Mark Sheriff** has given a couple of Apple Workshops. A workshop on restoring old apple orchards was held at the new jail in Skowhegan. The jail staff is hoping to restore an apple orchard as part of their plans to become more sustainable.

*Leon Hilton (MG '09) on left listens as Mark Sheriff on the right talks about restoring apple trees*

**Susan Jackson** has been a tireless volunteer. She spent most of the summer developing, and implementing a children's garden at the Kennebec Montessori School (KMS). Although, this project was a collaborative effort between Susan and students, Susan enthusiastically led the way! She taught the children a variety of gardening techniques from composting, to building raised beds. The children participated in the Plant a Row for the Hungry program and Susan even got someone from the Greater Waterville Food Bank to come speak to the children about the importance of donations and to thank them for all their hard work. On top of all this Susan has also been teaching beginning gardening classes!



**Sarah Carpenter** and **Patricia Horine** organized the ever popular plant swap at the Somerset Extension Office in May. **Jana Chandler** worked on the animal shelter's gardens and participated in Plant a Row for the Hungry. **Suzanne Hopkins** taught a hypertufa class. **Jolyne Paradis** taught a number of "How to Garden" classes. **Dick Bartlett** continues to organize the hugely successful Madison Community Garden.

**Mary McCaslin** has been busy since February 2009 when she first started the Master Gardener Volunteer Training program. She has written a number of articles for Upcountry Chatter, designed a one acre garden for the county, discussed vegetable production at farmers market, and created a cover crop display that was used at the Skowhegan fair.

*Mary's Cover Crop Display*



**Mel and Kathy Croft** have been busy renovating the gardens at the Somerset Extension Office. They were actually able to harvest veggies from the gardens to take to the local food cupboards. This was quite the feat because between Late Blight and the wet spring/summer the Extension Office gardens performed very poorly!



*Janet's Handbag*

**Janet and Richard Plouffe** have participated in a number of projects including a talk at the Mt. Blue State Park while dressed up as Asian Longhorned Beetles. Janet also made a hand bag for the ALB costumes for use in carrying handouts.



**Patricia Horine** has excelled at capturing Master Gardener Volunteer hours. Following are just some highlights of all her valuable work. The Triangle Garden, Gazebo Garden and History House Gardens in Skowhegan all look fabulous because of Patricia. She planned and implemented the neighborhood Garden Walk and wrote a mini gardening grant, which the History House received to help with renovations. Congratulations Patricia!

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## Upcoming Events:

**"Fall Garden Clean Up"** September 15<sup>th</sup> 6:00pm to 8:30 pm, Master Gardener Volunteer, Susan Jackson will be teaching a class through Lawrence Adult Education. For more information and/or to register call 207-453-4200. For directions please visit: [http://fairfield.maineadulted.org/directions\\_to\\_lawrence\\_adult\\_education](http://fairfield.maineadulted.org/directions_to_lawrence_adult_education)

**Tractor Supply** on September 26<sup>th</sup> between 10 and 2, would like to have a Master Gardener come and give a talk on one or all three of these subjects: Garden Clean Up, Planting Garlic, and/or Bulbs. Any takers??? Please call the office at 4747-9622 if you are interested.

**"Designing a Rain Garden"** TBD (December or January). Laura Wilson, Water Quality Assistant Scientist, for the UMaine Cooperative Extension will be conducting an in-depth training on designing and implementing a rain garden. There will be a project at Lake George following the training. This is exclusively for certified Master Gardener Volunteers and will be considered an advanced training.

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## Reminders:

Please report any time you have spent volunteering as a Master Gardener. To report your time you can send a brief written description of your project and time spent on the project to: UMaine Cooperative Extension, Somerset County Office, 7 County Drive Skowhegan, ME 04976, call the Somerset Office at 474-9622 ask for Hannah Todd and report directly, or e-mail your report to [htodd@umext.maine.edu](mailto:htodd@umext.maine.edu).

Please report the number of pounds of produce you have delivered to your local food cupboard, neighbors, relatives and/or friends. These totals will be recorded for the Plant a Row for the Hungry program.

These reports are due by October 5<sup>th</sup> so that I can report by October 15<sup>th</sup>. This is really important. UMaine Cooperative Extension wants all the hard work that you do for Somerset County recognized! Also, we need to include Somerset County data with the rest of the state to have accurate statewide totals. Thank you!

The Somerset Extension Office is having some “technical difficulties” with the telephone. If you call the office (474-9622) and get a busy signal please try calling 474-9264.

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*Master Gardener Volunteers Web Site: <http://www.umext.maine.edu/mastergardener/default.htm>*

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