



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



# MASTER GARDENERS

of Yakima County

## ■ BY THE NUMBERS

- 36 new Master Gardener volunteers trained and certified from 2013-2015
- 32,416 Master Gardener volunteers hours from 2013-2015
- Yakima County leads all Washington State MG Programs in averaging over 120 hours per active volunteer
- Volunteers at the MG Plant Diagnosis Clinics interact with an estimated 2,200 clients per year
- Six Youth Gardens in low-income neighborhoods reaching nearly 100 students
- 830 local students each year participate in the Youth Environmental Summit, Arborfest and Salvation Army summer daycamp
- Nearly 2,000 pounds of produce each year donated to food banks

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GARDENING

Developing capable, caring, contributing citizens through research-based, guided gardening programs

### ■ ISSUE

Over the past decade, Yakima County has had higher-than-average rates of poverty and crime over other counties in Washington State. In 2016, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reported that 30% of children under the age of 18 are living in poverty in Yakima County compared to 18% in the rest of our State. Yakima County ranks 37<sup>th</sup> out of the 39 Washington Counties for Social and Economic Factors contributing to poverty. Our County has twelve burglaries for every 1,000 residents, which is twice the national average.

### ■ RESPONSE

Gardening activities can provide diverse and low-income audiences with a sense of community contribution and pride. The WSU Master Gardener Program in Yakima County developed approaches to deliver science-based, environmentally friendly gardening programs to the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diverse communities in Yakima County.

- The Ahtanum Youth Park Demonstration Garden, started in Union Gap in 2004, teaches youth and other members of the community sustainable gardening practices and demonstrates plants that thrive in our semi-desert climate with and without irrigation.
- The Plant Diagnosis Clinic responds to gardening questions from the community. Over the past three years, Yakima County MGs have been invited to annual community venues including local farmer's markets, the Central Washington State Fair and the Yakama Nation Night Out providing outreach to community members.
- Yakima County Master Gardener's Youth Program provides expertise, education and enthusiasm to local school teachers and students in grades 1 through 12. Children are taught responsibility, gardening skills, environmental stewardship, food and nutrition information and an appreciation for providing their own food.
- In collaboration with the North Yakima Conservation District, the Master Gardener Greenhouse propagates vegetable plants, as well as flowers, for fund raising and over the past three years, unsold vegetable plants are donated to low-income gardens and individuals who then produce their own food.
- The Heirloom Garden promotes seed-saving banks for MG volunteers AND members of our local community. Classes on growing healthy vegetables are offered each month from spring through fall. Produce is donated to local food banks each year.
- The Buena Community Garden creates opportunities for low-income families and youth to spend quality time growing their own food.



## ■ QUOTES

“The community garden saves me \$500 a year in veggies. I grow green beans, tomatoes, corn, asparagus, watermelon and jalapeños. Stores [charge] a fortune; a head of lettuce costs \$1.99.”

--Karen, Buena Community Garden participant

“This is something good because you get to learn how to grow things. When there’s nothing to do, it’s something fun to do. You feel proud of yourself when you plant something and see it growing.”

--Carlos, Age 17, Buena Community Garden participant

“WSU’s Demonstration Garden is a must visit; whether you are looking for the best flowers, trees or shrubs to plant in the Yakima Valley Region, or you just need a few hours of peace and tranquility in a beautiful setting. If you have gardening questions, stop by on Tuesday mornings and visit with their volunteers.”

--Eric Patrick, City of Union Gap

## ■ IMPACTS

At the Demonstration Garden, 200 people per month pass through to partake in MG training classes, gardening classes open to the public, youth activities, guided and self-guided tours, family picnics, parties, quinceañeras and even weddings to enjoy the beauty of the garden and learn about semi-desert plants. The demo garden adds a sense of pride and beauty to an area that has historically had issues with crime and property damage.

The MG Plant Diagnosis Clinics have expanded our diversity outreach by adding hands-on activities for youths (build a “bug army”) at the State Fair, where 125 Hispanic participants and their families per year were receptive to educational programs about plants and insects. At the Yakama Nation, over 100 Native Americans and their families interacted with MG volunteers with plant-related questions through Native Night Out Events.

Over 150 students (600 contact hours) have participated in educational opportunities and maintenance at the children’s gardens at Union Gap Middle School, Wilson Middle School, Lewis & Clark, Whitney and McClure Elementary Schools and Eisenhower High School. Key to the success of these gardening efforts is teacher and student buy-in and upkeep at each garden. Through events such as ArborFest, the Salvation Army summer day camp and the Youth Environmental Summit, youth of all ages and from a variety of socioeconomic background have completed hands-on learning activities about plants and environment.

Over 250 seed packets have been produced at the Heirloom Garden and distributed to our community and to Master Gardeners in other Counties. Over the past three years, 2,000 pounds of food have been donated to local food banks, over 1,000 seedling garden vegetable plants have been distributed to low-income families, many of whom have not only supplied their families with home-grown vegetables, but have contributed excess vegetables to the food banks themselves.

The Buena garden has grown in size from five to 35 participating families, primarily Hispanic, Spanish-speaking families. Master Gardener volunteers acquired three grants to provide resources. This program was the focus of the 2016 Community Pride Days. Local high school students have volunteered to assist in the maintenance of these gardens. Community members have assumed more leadership responsibilities and the transition of this garden to the community has begun.