

Fond du Lac County Master Gardener Volunteers 2008 Report

The UW Fond du Lac Campus celebrated its 40th anniversary this year. As a major project for this occasion we were asked to help establish a new native plant garden display at the main entrance of the building on the UW Fond du Lac campus. Assistant Dean John Kiefer developed the concept and Connie Ranthum selected the native plants of which consisted of 46 forbs, 6 grasses, and 1 sedge. The total cost of the project was \$5,500 funded by the campus grounds and business office department with a donation of \$500 by our MGJV group. We provided the labor for planting along with assisting in preparing the soil and site for planting. We also relocated 12 bushes, 2 trees, mulched the area after planting and watered the plants with sufficient moisture. UW-Fond du Lac maintenance and administrative personnel were also involved.

Fond du Lac community gardens were established in 2000 and are coordinated by Patty Percy. Several members assist with set up and clean up of the over 6 ½ acres used by over 100 families. Rent for plots varies by size; a 20X20 plot is \$15.00 for the season. A 20X40 plot costs \$20.00. Various groups within the community use the plots for education and therapy. Many families depend on the garden to grow ethnic produce and sell at local farmers markets as well as food to eat. During the clean up in October, Master Gardeners and Jr. Master Gardeners harvested over 550 lbs of produce that was given to the local food pantry. The master gardeners assist first time gardeners with questions along with providing simple tools and instructions. A demonstration plot is also available to provide information about vegetables.

This year we reorganized our membership list with a new computer database to be used by Mike Rankin, the MGJV board, and any project chair/member corresponding with our MGJV members. Our County Extension office maintains a MG website and Linda Armstrong produced and mailed a member newsletter along with additional information about training opportunities. Linda also e-mailed electronic newsletters and notices to our members throughout the year. We established a mentoring program to assist new members and answer their questions about becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer. Kathy Sabel and Kathy Erickson coordinated this effort for our 20 new members this year. New member spring training started Jan 22 for 13 weeks with 20 new members attending.

Horticulture Hotline was also expanded and improved this year. Mike Rankin worked closely with Linda Armstrong and other members to train and execute a good positive experience for our MGJV Hotline volunteers. A training session was held with instructions on working with the public as well as giving accurate information. We also expanded the Hotline days to include Tues, Thurs, and Monday this year. Office hours are two hour shifts anytime from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Many members provided assistance to local gardeners this year.

Fond du Lac Master Gardener Volunteers include 74 active volunteers in our association, including 55 recertified for 2008, and many additional people who work with us and take educational training from other counties. We had 71 WIMGA members this year. Mike Rankin trained 20 new members at the beginning class started in January.

In 2007-2008 fiscal year we documented the following hours: 103 hours in youth education, 159 hours in community education, 3749 hours in support services, 1728 hours of continuing education. Our 2008 annual budgeted activities includes about \$11,000 income and expenses.

On Earth Day, April 22, volunteer members helped clean up around the UW-Fond du Lac campus. A free lunch was provided for the MGJV members who participated.

Junior Master Gardeners have been part of our program for many years. Meetings were held at the UW center on various ways to prepare common vegetables. The group also had a fall harvest from our community gardens to help the needy and stock the local food pantry. Last fall they gathered over 400 lbs of produce. A total of 55 kids were involved at various seminars/projects this summer. Several members helped with the Fond du Lac county fair and provided an educational flower display on July 15-20.

Free Spirit Sensory Garden was established in 2002 and is located east of Fond du Lac on Highway 23. Free SPIRIT Riders, Inc. provides therapy to disabled children and adults by having them ride horses with the assistance of horse handlers. An outdoor garden area is maintained by 7 master gardener volunteers with the assistance of many Wisconsin Department of Corrections minimum-security inmates. Every Wednesday throughout the spring and summer 7 to 10 individuals plant, water, weed, maintain, and improve the annual flower gardens, trees, shrubs and perennials. This year we added several containers of annuals for added color. The garden provides disabled persons and their families areas to stimulate each of the senses including touch, taste, smell, sound, sight, and humor. A butterfly area is located on the west end and a bird sanctuary is found on the east side. The Fond du Lac Master Gardeners fund an annual budget of over \$1000. For more information go to www.FreeSpiritRiders.org

This was the second year the Day in the Garden educational program was co-sponsored with Calumet County this year. Members from both groups contributed to the success of this year's seminar. Speakers for the day were: Jeff Epping, Dr. Robert Tomesh and Dr. Mark Renz. Topics included Rose Gardens, Raspberry harvest, Garden inspirations, Invasive species, and Fruit tree grafting. The 88 participants also enjoyed a buffet lunch included with the seminar fee.

Members assisted with Prairie Fest held on July 26 at the UW Fond du Lac Campus. Erika Jensen and Connie Ramthum gave tours of the prairie. Fond du Lac MGV provide an annual donation of \$1000 to continue the development and maintenance of the UW campus prairie and arboretum.

Our 2008 plant sale included both annuals and perennials this year. It was held on May 17th at the UW Fond du Lac campus in the art building. This is our major fundraiser for us and achieved net sales of over \$4000.

Cindy Risvold arranged Master Gardener Educational Bus tours this year. Three trips were: Green Bay area on June 17th, Milwaukee area on July 29, and Madison area on September 16th. Many members attended all three educational trips.

Submitted by
Lyle Mercer, Local Representative
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