

# Rock Prairie Master Gardener Association

At the end of the 2006 gardening season we had 77 recertified MGVs and 53 interns.

In 2006 we volunteered	756	hours in youth education
	786	hours in community education
	5609	hours in support services
and participated in	1624	hours of continuing education



The Rock Prairie MGA keeps in close contact with each other and current projects with monthly newsletters, monthly meetings and casual coffee chats at many Rock Co. coffee shops. MGVs contribute to various horticultural projects at Rotary Gardens in Janesville and many communities in Rock County. This is a group of dedicated volunteers who work very well with the UW-Extension horticulture educator and have been able to take his direction and make it their own.

## Major Accomplishments or Projects:

1. MGVs help each Sunday at Rotary Gardens with the needed watering to give the staff a day off. A different pair of volunteers came each week to water hanging baskets, urns, planters, window boxes and any other area instructed by the director of Rotary Gardens.
2. The RPMGA had a booth at Janesville's weekly farmers market each Saturday morning from June 3 to Oct 28. Different MGVs answered questions the shoppers had about their own gardens or what was on the calendar at Janesville Rotary Gardens. The booth had a table full of literature to help the MGVs with the current concern of the week and to distribute to shoppers to take home and review.
3. The diagnostics program continues to grow. Currently we have 4 RPMG volunteers who recorded over 600 community questions this year, with everything from the simple queries that could be answered immediately to more complex ones that required a little research.
4. Five youth and community gardens have been developed to make the gardening experience available to all who wish to participate.
5. A "Healing Garden" was built at the local assisted living facility, where the residents can enjoy gardening again, thanks to the new raised flower beds where no more kneeling and squatting is required.



## Highlighted Project: Tomato Fest

When Rotary Gardens decided to trial 100+ heirloom varieties of tomatoes, with a back up plot planted at the Rock County farm, the RPMGA was asked to take on the responsibility of maintenance and promotion for the project. With the fine organization of our President, Deb Grams, 6 "Tomato Teams" of 4 people each were created to care for a plot of plants — watering, weeding and harvesting.

The culmination of the project was *Tomato Fest*, held August 19, 2006 at the Rotary Gardens. The goal of this event was to educate and expose area gardeners to the vast variety of heirloom tomatoes that are available. On the day of the event 50 volunteers gave tours of the tomato plots to show the different sizes, shapes and colors of plants. Several booths were set up to give visitors a chance to see all the sizes, shapes and colors of tomatoes themselves and taste the different varieties. The fruits ranged from tiny pea size to dinner plate size, in a rainbow of colors. Other booths offered cooking demonstrations and sampling the finished product. The taste testing was a huge hit. There were presentations on seed saving, recipes and preserving to keep the great tastes all year long. There were even games for children. Other groups that helped make the day such a success were the UWEX nutrition educators, RECAP (Rock County Education and Criminal Addictions Programs), and Janesville Area Herb Society, and Rock County Home Community Educators.

*Tomato Fest* was originally planned as a one time event for approximately 250 guests, but with the surprising success of over 500 visitors in 2006, the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Tomato Fest is already being planned for August 18, 2007 due to popular demand!