

**Urban Gardens and
Junior Master Gardener Program 2004
UW-Extension Fond du Lac County Wisconsin**

The Community Gardens got off to a horrible start this year with several families withdrawing completely. Several of the gardens were under water for most of May and half of June. The gardeners who did stick with it did some of their planting in the mud and ended up with fairly good crops after all. There were a total of 180 plots planted this year with 85 gardeners participating. This total was slightly down from last year, but better than with the rainy season.

Looking at percentages of who uses the gardens:

56% White

41% Hmong

2% Hispanic

2% African American

The majority of plot usage is still being utilized by the Hmong community. They use larger garden areas to grow their produce as they have plots with extended family.

There was not a huge response for our Garden Mentoring Program this year also because of the extremely wet spring we had to deal with. The people who were interested, changed their mind after waiting long past our normal spring planting date for the ground to dry. It will be promoted next year and hope the weather cooperates. Being able to teach people how to grow their own produce, is a very worthwhile endeavor.

A community garden newsletter was established this year. It was sent to the gardeners on a regular basis. This helped them to know the different activities we had going on and also informed them on timely garden information. Many of the Hmong have children who can translate the mailings for them and others asked friends to tell them the information they needed. The Hmong Community is sharing information on a regular basis and always learns of items of importance they need to know.

A Community Garden Advisory Committee was formed this year. Members included several neighbors and gardeners. Several meetings were held this year and the information was used to help the neighbors get a better understanding of the Community Garden rules and goals. We plan to continue holding meetings to be able to address any issues that might arise before they get to be problems.

Our annual Garden Walk / Open House was held again in mid August. The public was invited to view the different garden plots. People that attended the garden walk learned about different vegetables and how to utilize them. The people also viewed and learned about the different Hmong vegetables that that they grow in the garden and how to use the vegetables. All in all our gardens looked very well and produced a good amount of produce even with the shortened growing season. Most of the gardeners who sent back surveys plan to continue with their garden plots next year. The Junior Master Gardener program was very successful this year reaching over 100 youth.

The Fond du Lac County Junior Master Gardener Program involves different program areas in the Fond du Lac County UW Extension Office. The UW Extension Educators that oversee the program and provide educational programming are:

Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program – Michelle Tidemann
Community Resource Development – Jim Hovland
4 H Youth Development – Denise Retzleff.

Michelle Batterman, UW Extension 4-H Staff Assistant; Patty Percy, UW-Extension Urban Garden Coordinator; and Sharon Woolhether, UW Extension Nutrition Educator, Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) teamed together to bring programming to the WNEP Food Group, the Boys and Girls Club, 4-H members, 21st Century youth, Salvation Army, Cobblestone Daycare, and ADVOCAP Even Start at Prairie View which represents families from Green Lake, Ripon, and Waupun.

The program was divided into several groups, locations, and garden plots, each focusing on something different. At the Boys and Girls Club garden, the youth focused on beautifying the schoolyard where the club is located. The youth worked on three beds--a flower bed, an herb bed, and began cleaning out a bed that has not had attention given to it in a very long time. We were unable to have meetings at the club every week throughout the summer because of the number of gardens and children that we were working with. But we had two young ladies who stepped forward to weed and water the plants all summer. We were really impressed with their dedication to the project.

The UW-Extension group, which we call the "Base Group", began programming in March with classroom instruction. In April, the group attended a fieldtrip along with some of the Fond du Lac County Master Gardeners and the JMG members from the Boys and Girls Club. The youth went to a large greenhouse in Denmark, Wisconsin followed by a visit to the Orchid Greenhouse near Neenah, Wisconsin. The youth were very impressed with what they saw and learned at both locations. They were especially intrigued with the toads that they found at the orchid greenhouse.

In April we started programming with Head Start (a Federal program found in all states) and the ADVOCAP (Community Action Program) in Ripon, Wisconsin. This was a unique program because it was a family-based program. Our teaching methods changed because we not only educated the youth but we also educated their parents. The parents participated in the hands-on activities along with their children, and each family had an opportunity to plant a garden plot at the class site in Prairie View. The families did very well with their gardens and they shared their produce with the whole group.

By June, our "Base Group" was joined by two other youth groups—20 youth from the Salvation Army Day Care, and 25 youth from the Cobblestone Learning Center daycare. This made our group at the UW-Extension extremely large; we had 75 youth on our roster for the summer program. Most meetings averaged 25 youth. The youth maintained two garden plots, learned about nutrition and the food guide pyramid, and did many hands-on activities—they made stepping stones, leaf prints, and took plant cuttings and potted them.

The Base Group and Boys and Girls Club youth were able to participate in the Fond du Lac County Fair. This gave them the opportunity to meet with a fair judge, discuss their project, and learn a little bit more about the foods and gardening areas. We did not have Prairie View, Cobblestone Learning Center and Salvation Army participate in the fair because transportation was an issue, as well as the time of the day that judging took place.

Youth who participate in the fair developed a number of skills, including:

- Completion of a project over a span of time. The projects are started in March and completed it in July.
- Evaluative decision-making. Each child prepared a number of nutritious food items. Then, using information provided on what to consider, decided which item to take for judging.
- Following directions--from completing the forms, and reading a recipe, to the judging process.
- Positive new experience. This is best described in the quote of a seven year old after face-to-face judging, "I was really scared, but I did really well."

The educators observed that these youth, many of whom are low-income, 1) saw projects with a better understanding of the steps involved to complete something; 2) received reinforcement on what they had learned as they answered the judges questions; and 3) were successful in a middle class environment.

Almost all of the children's parents attended the judging process, and appeared to be bursting with pride. In a questionnaire completed at the end of judging, all parents gave participation in the fair the highest rating as a positive experience for their child. This is further illustrated by comments such as, "My girls feel good about themselves.", "It is helpful to learn in a group.", and "They love to show off what they have learned."

In August, our youth gathered for the final session which was taking the produce from the garden and using the produce to make pizzas. The youth prepared pizzas for themselves, the UW-Extension Office staff, parents attending the session, and Master Gardeners. This day also included their certification as Junior Master Gardeners, and discussing what they learned in the program.

At the end of September, the youth will harvest the produce and donate it to local charities as one of their community service projects. The Beacon House, Salvation Army, and area food pantries are just a few of the possible donation sites. Due to the start of school, our Cobblestone Learning Center and Salvation Army youth will not be able to help harvest the produce. As for our Prairie View location, the families will be able to harvest the produce for their own use because most are low-income.

Finally, our year will end with the "Base Group" making holiday swags and donating them to various charities to help celebrate the spirit of sharing.

Program Percentages

The educators of the Junior Master Gardener Program made contact with 100 students 9-17 years of age. The program statistics changed this year. We had a ratio of 71% female to 29% male in 2003. This year, we saw a 55% ratio of female versus 45% male. The race/ethnicity of program participants was: Caucasian (60%), African American (7%), Hispanic (30%), and Hmong (2%). The educators used the following teaching methods: 33% outside gardening including planting, weeding, and harvesting; 57% classroom setting including instruction and cooking, hands-on experiences; 17% community service projects; and 3% other strategies.

Survey Results/Testimonies

Each year we do a survey to get feedback from our participants. This is what some of our youth had to say about the program:

- "I was able to learn about gardening."
- "I enjoyed the cooking and pulling weeds."
- "I enjoyed making ice cream in the cooking class."
- "I learned a lot, lot, lot, lot of things in the JMG program."

From a parent: “My two girls really enjoyed the variety that JMG offers-(my kids). I feel it’s very educational and is important for kids to have variety to learn better. The leaders are awesome. The kids enjoy them a lot. The leaders always have really great ideas. I also like the fact they try different foods. Sometimes my kids will try some new food with someone else than if I make it. They have really enjoyed this year and look forward to continuing in JMG. I know they like it because they have told some of their friends and asked them to join this coming year!”

Final Thoughts

This year we were able to grow and include youth that are not normally involved with UW- Extension. This program is unique because it integrates three UW-Extension program areas. We feel we are able to teach the youth a variety of gardening activities which included weeding, maintaining, taking the produce and cooking with it, and finally, sharing our produce with others through community service efforts. The youth we served had a better understanding of gardening, food safety, and community service.

Plans are already underway for next year. We will again offer the program at the same sites plus an additional site at the Cobblestone Learning Center daycare. By adding Cobblestone as a separate site we will be able to include more of their youth in the program.

The coordinators are very satisfied with the outcome of this program because it has touched so many youth and given them an opportunity to grow plants at home, either in gardens or pots (we do discuss container gardening). We look forward to planning new and exciting activities in 2005.