



2008 Annual Master Gardener Program Impact Report

As of 12.31.08 we have 301 ACTIVE volunteers. "Active" means volunteering 20 or more hours in 2008. A 10% increase from 2007.

- * 30,862 hours
- * FTE (Full Time Equivalent) 16.95
- * \$ DVE (Donated Value Equivalent). * \$617,240

The 2008 intern class had 105 students and to date they have:

- * 4290 hours (a 10% increase from 2007)
- * FTE 2.35
- * DVE \$85,800

39% of the class of 2008 has now earned a Blue Pin and the title of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Master Gardener (EMG).

In 2008, 177 active volunteers completed 2788 hours of educational time. This amounts to about 58% of all active volunteers. Most of these hours were completed with special programming by the URI Master Gardener Association (MGA) or by the URI Master Gardener (MG) program. Several people completed the Tree Steward Program and the URI Master Composter & Recycler Program.

URI Extension Master Gardener Program Impacts:

Our Active EMG volunteers work in a wide variety of activities throughout the year and around the state. The following is a summation of the types of activities we are involved in. Over 9,400 people were directly contacted by Master Gardeners. The attendance figures at large-scale fairs and events added up to 40,000 or more. Media contacts in local and regional newspapers, television, and magazines swelled the potential contacts to over 1 million.

1. Campus programs and projects: These include the Learning Landscapes Program, Plant a Row for the Hungry, Master Gardener hotline, Healthy Landscapes, Know Where It Goes, GreenShare Garden School Day, and joint projects with URI Department of Natural Resources and Sciences.

- * 4555 hours
- * 142 volunteers
- * FTE 2.50
- * DVE \$91,100

This year, the **Learning Landscapes Program** hosted 30 schools from across the state. EMG volunteers (36) helped coordinators, Cathi Cote and Vanessa Venturini, educate 1357 students about the natural environment with many exciting new hands on activities. The winter program was held at the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center in Providence and had 294 students enrolled, some of which were from Title 1 schools (defined as 40% of its student body coming from low-income households).

* FTE = \$1820 * DVE = \$20 (this Value of Volunteer time ranges nationally from a low of \$9 to a high of \$27. Master Gardener value nationally averages \$17-\$22)

Plant a Row for the Hungry is a national EMG effort with participation from almost every state. Donations as officially reported to and recorded by Master Gardener Sue Scotti for the Plant a Row for the Hungry:

- * East Farm Vegetable Garden - 1038 pounds. This reflects an 8% gain over last year.
- * East Farm Apple Orchard -8000 pounds to the RI Community Food Bank
- * Individual Master Gardeners - 600 pounds
- * Prescott Farm - 80 pounds.
- * Total –9718 pounds of food grown, harvested and delivered to community food banks.

Our toll-free **Hotline** received 3,201, or an average of 400, calls per month from March through October. Volunteers (19) staff the hotline which is open 4 days a week from 9AM to 2PM March 1 through October. This reflects a 9% reduction in calls as an ongoing decrease of hotline calls. The service will be rigorously reevaluated after the 2009 season.

Email responses: Garden questions totaled 1,160 emails or an average of 96 emails per month. Although the number of emails declined from 2004, the general trend over the years is upward. Email questions are answered from the Channel 10 Plant Pro site, the URI Mallon Outreach Center’s website and the MGA. Currently, one volunteer does this remotely from her home. This volume has grown nearly 5 times from the first year when the average was 29 emails a month.

In 2008 a second email address was created for the MGA website. These emails were answered by volunteers staffing the hotline. The total number of gardening questions received from the new email address is factored in the total number of emails received by all addresses.

Speakers Bureau: Volunteers (15) and staff speakers reached over 1,055 people from across the state in 30 separate venues. Environmental concerns like pesticide use, composting, Healthy Landscapes, and Sustainable Landscaping were discussed in 17 of the presentations. Venues for presentations included several garden clubs in RI and nearby MA, the Cumberland, Narragansett, Warwick, Lincoln, Cross Mills, Johnston, Riverside, and Burrillville public libraries, New England Association of Retired Teachers, Save the Bay Green Landscaping Workshop, Hamilton House, RI Dietetic Association, Atria Lincoln Place, Whispering Pines Conference Center “Spring Relaxation Retreat”, Appalachian Mt. Club, and Narragansett Bay Research Reserve Sustainable Landscaping Workshop.

URI CELS Outreach Website: <http://uri.edu/cels/ceoc> The Outreach Center website had 6,367 “Absolute Unique Visitors” in total. Out of this total the Master Gardener link had 2,778 “Absolute Unique Visitors.” These numbers reflect the first complete calendar year of data. Every program at the Outreach Center has a link on the home page directing visitors to specific pages about the program.

2. MGA administration and its programs: This includes board, committee and Master Gardener Foundation duties, mentors, and website maintenance.

- 6,437 hours
- 133 volunteers
- FTE 3.53
- DVE \$128,740

The URI MGA sponsored 2 high school scholarships to students from the Narragansett High School. The two students attended the Master Gardener core training program. Unfortunately, the students were unable to volunteer. It is hoped that the 2 from Exeter West Greenwich High School in 2009 will be able to complete the volunteer requirement.

The URI MGA also reorganized and revitalized the free pH soil testing service. Volunteers (22) served 188 hours total in 8 separate events around the state. They completed 602 soil tests. Reorganization continues for this project including a SOP manual, training and equipment requirements.

3. Statewide Community Outreach:

- * 14,617 hours
- * 282 volunteers
- * FTE 8.03
- * DVE \$292,340

These volunteers have worked on statewide projects like flower shows, information booths, and community projects. These events helped to reach out to nearly 50,000 people.

37 “Ask a MG Information Kiosk” events from February to October were held. Events ranged from one-day programs to multi-day events such as the Rhode Island Flower Show. Participation included 65 volunteers working 811 hours at these events, representing a 7% increase in participation over last year.

Kiosk events provide excellent opportunities for exposure of the Master Gardener program to the general public, recruiting new class prospects, advising and problem solving with gardeners, presenting environmental and sustainability education, and supporting our corporate and educational sponsors. The blend of education and public relations requires an outgoing, approachable environment at the booth. Our display kiosk improves the image and seems to motivate the volunteers to move outside of protected space.

The Regional Team concept is under development in the East Bay area and in 2009 will see if it can develop in a manner similar to the Cumberland Monastery program. The goal is to organize and utilize local volunteers for local events.

Several new Community projects were established in 2008. Chief among them was the Garden at the Ronald McDonald House in Providence and the Hunt House Museum in East Providence.

4. CELS/East Farm Activities: This includes the greenhouse and the vegetable garden teams.

- * 2839 hours
- * 52 volunteers
- * FTE 1.55
- * DVE \$56,780

In 2009 the 5,000 square-foot vegetable demonstration garden at East Farm continued as a GAP-certified garden (Good Agricultural Practices). GAP is part of a voluntary food safety program developed by the Federal Department of Agriculture and United States Department of Agriculture for fruit and vegetable growers. The goal is to help reduce food borne illness. The GAP program describes key steps that growers can use to help reduce or minimize contamination of produce by disease-causing organisms. Food safety is everyone’s responsibility from the farmers to consumers.

In mid-August, MG volunteers (20) hosted a one-day Vegetable Gardening Open House at URI’s East Farm. Over 400 gardeners attended and were able to ask gardening questions, have their soil tested and listen to MG’s on composting, organic gardening techniques and water resource protection and conservation.

5. Roger Williams Park Botanical Center: This includes MG’s trained as Docent tour guides and kiosk workers.

- * 376 hours
- * 24 volunteers
- * FTE .20
- * DVE \$7520

In our second full year at the park, we ran two docent training series of 3 sessions each. A total of 21 volunteers participated. We also ran one kiosk training session which consisted of 2 sessions. 10 volunteers participated.

37 docent guided tours were led from January through December. This reflects a 60% gain. May and October were the busiest months. Participants totaled: 763 adults and 195 children. A three fold increase from the year before. 12 different MG docents participated on these tours. The average tour had 25 people. MG's led the groups 75% of the time.

Several out-of-state groups visited: Hobby Greenhouse and Indoor Gardeners Society of Boston, Day Trippers UCONN League, Castle Island Tours from Boston, Historic Landmark Foundation of Indiana, and garden clubs from Rehoboth, Bourne, and Mattapoisett and Shrewsbury (MA). Other groups included Girl Scout Troop # 390, Genesis Center, Epoch Assisted Living, Trudeau Center, Hamilton House, Jonah Community Center, and Providence College Intro to Botany class, Brown University Honors Environmental Studies class, and Birch Vocational School.

Master Gardener volunteers acted as docent tour guides of the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center for middle and high school participants in the Providence After School Alliance's (PASA) summer program. The PASA program provides a variety of after-school activities where they can learn new skills, discover and enhance artistic and athletic talents, explore nature, make healthy social contacts and develop a positive self-image which will help them to avoid alcohol, drug use and other harmful behaviors. The volunteers who participated gave approximately 50 hours of their time to make this program work. Note that of the 7 volunteers, 3 are new MG grads from the class of 2008. The docents toured approximately 125 participants, including PASA staff.

The continuing challenge to developing a recurring kiosk schedule is finding volunteers to regularly be involved every week throughout the spring, summer and fall.

Citizen Science Projects and Partnerships.

1. **Tick Day.** Master Gardeners were invited to assist with the public event. This was sponsored by the Center for Vector Borne Disease (CVBD) at URI. In addition, 12 MG volunteers assisted the CVBD in a research project. This consisted of each member receiving a pair of permethrin-treated gardening gloves. They were to use them regularly in the garden during the time period. At the end of the garden season, they logged how often they were used and washed. This would help to determine how well the gloves kill ticks.
2. **Warwick Neck Coastal Buffer Planting.** Five Master Gardeners helped Kate Venturini, Coastal Landscapes Program Coordinator, with this conservation and storm water protection project. Wetland plants had been selected for planting in this area adjacent to a marsh.
3. **FFA (Future Farmers of America).** Master Gardeners were invited to judge the landscape exhibits at the Washington County Fair and the Foster Fair. 5 Master Gardeners judged 5 exhibits by high school students.

4. Two new community projects taken on by the URI Master Gardener Association included the **Ronald McDonald House** in Providence and the **Hunt House Museum** in East Providence.
 - a. At the Ronald McDonald House a Master Gardener, Maria Tocco, developed a plan with the help of the Exec. Dir. of RMH, to renovate the inner courtyard. This is an area that provides an outdoor respite for host families. The courtyard project recreated an area where guests and volunteers may sit and enjoy a multi-sensory experience – sight, smell and sound.
 - b. At the Hunt House Museum, Master Gardener goals were to engage and educate the historical society membership, Hunt House museum visitors, East Providence High School students and the East Providence community about designing, planting and maintaining heritage plants with an emphasis on sustainable plants.

General Gardening Programs

Our Garden Schools expanded this year to include sessions at Roger Williams Park Botanical Center in Providence during the evening. The sessions focus on sustainable practices of soil and water conservation, plant selection and pest controls. Overall, the 3 schools had 137 registrants, a 63% overall increase from 2007.

2008 Spring Gardening School

39 attendees came from around the state. This was an increase of 66% over last year's attendance which was at RWPBC during the day. This year's sessions occurred on 6 evenings in April and May on the Kingston campus. Topics included: Sustainable Plants for Sustainable Landscapes, Growing Healthy Vegetables, Eco-Lawn Care and IPM/Organic Pest Controls.

2008 Summer Gardening School

This was our fourth year of this gardening series. We held 6 weekday sessions in the late afternoon in the URI Botanical Gardens from late May to early September. The 73 registered attendees represent an increase of 68% in individual registrations from the previous year.

Surveys were handed out at the end of each class. The general responses from the surveys indicated that the information given in each class was very helpful. Staff and certified Extension Master Gardeners lead the classes. Topics this season included Backyard Composting, Healthy Vegetables, and Detecting Invasive Species with the RI DEM coordinator of the Invasive Species program.

2008 Fall Gardening School

This was the fifth year of the fall school program, a series of 6 evening gardening lectures with an emphasis on sustainability and environmentally-friendly practices. Staff led the classes. This season it was held at the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center.

25 paid registrants attended, a 44% increase from 2007. Topics included: Soils and Fertilizers, Vegetables, Intelligent Plant Management, Organic Strategies for Gardeners, and Protecting Water Resources and Composting.

Advanced Training

As part of an on-going expansion of advanced education training opportunities for Extension Master Gardeners, the URI Master Gardener Coordinator developed a year-long training program for the Hotline volunteers. 2008 was its second year of operation.

A group that ranged from 10-20 regular hotline volunteers and exhibit booth staffers participated in the monthly 3-hour training session. Each session covered in depth a topic of relevance such as Fruit, Lawn, Disease and Insect ID, Organic Practices, and Pruning and Propagation. We added 3 field trips this year: a campus walkabout, Ninigret Wildlife Refuge for invasive plant ID, and the greenhouses at RWPBC.

Three specific goals are:

- Learning Goals - to increase the volunteer's knowledge of gardening and resources
- Skills Goals - to help the volunteers become more comfortable with computer information retrieval as we transition this service to more computerization.
- Service Goals - to measure the impact and value of training on volunteer service

Late in 2008, the Landscape Design Mini Series was developed. The series consists of 3 classes (a total of about 8 hours). The goals of the class were to increase the MG's knowledge of the design process, give them hands-on opportunities to work with designer tools of templates and graph paper, and to work with the actual conditions of their home landscape. A potential service goal in the future would be to utilize these trained MG's to consult on landscaping project requests. We will continue to offer this series (one class each season) until all interested MG's have been trained.

In 2009, we will also offer a second mini series will be added on Native Plants/Invasive Plants. The goal of this training will be to educate Master Gardeners in invasive plant identification, management and in restoration of native ecosystem following invasive plant removal. The training parallels a certification program run by URI Extension for green industry professionals.

We anticipate that both the landscape design and native/invasive plants mini series will be offered to the general public in the future. Trained Master Gardeners may be enlisted to run the general public education programs.

The URI Master Gardener Association (MGA) has greatly enhanced their advanced training courses bringing a number of regionally and nationally known speakers to Rhode Island. Over 15 separate classes on a range of popular horticultural topics were held in 2008. Volunteers received educational credit for attending the classes.