Extension Master Gardener Program:
Beautifying and Feeding ND Communities

The Situation
Gardening is in decline as more Americans spend time indoors. The average American child can identify more than 1000 corporate logos but cannot identify 10 local plants. As a society, we know this condition is not healthy for children or adults as the phrase “nature-deficit disorder” has entered the lexicon. The Extension Master Gardener Program is attempting to draw children and adults to outdoor spaces.

Extension Response
Each year, NDSU Extension offers a 40-hour Master Gardener Core Course. The course covers a wide variety of topics such as botany, bedding plants, herbaceous perennials, trees, fruits, vegetables, soils, plant pathology, and entomology. In exchange for this education, Master Gardeners agree to volunteer in cooperation with the NDSU Extension Service in communities around the state. To become certified Master Gardeners, interns must complete 48 hours of volunteer service over two years. Certified Master Gardeners must then volunteer 12 hours per year to maintain their certification.

Impacts
In 2015, Master Gardeners planted and maintained 75 public gardens in 21 counties. These include gardens at churches, cemeteries, museums, New American gardens, community orchards, libraries, city parks, veterans memorials, nursing homes, schools, and universities. In addition to volunteering in these gardens, Master Gardeners frequently use their own money to purchase plants for these gardens. Master Gardeners are also very proud of their volunteer work at the International Peace Gardens, the NDSU Horticulture Research and Demonstration Gardens, three zoos, the former governor’s mansion, Bonanzaville, Frontier Village, and interior plantings at West Acres.

Master Gardeners also feed the hungry. In 2015, they donated 4,338 lbs. of fresh garden produce to local food pantries through the North Dakota Department of Agriculture’s Hunger Free Garden Project. This is a 227% increase over 2014.

In total, 151 Master Gardeners in 32 counties volunteered 6752 hours. Using a commonly used formula for valuing volunteer hours1, Master Gardeners contributed $169,684 in horticultural services to North Dakota. The number of volunteer hours is up 151% from 2013.

Feedback
92% of recent graduates of the Master Gardener Core Course are either very confident or moderately confident that they can teach gardening practices to home gardeners.

Sources
1Independent Sector’s Value of Volunteer Time for North Dakota

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