

2006 PROGRAM WORK TEAM ANNUAL REPORT FORM

1. Full name of your Program Work Team (PWT):

Community Horticulture Program Work Team

2. PWT Co-Chairs (* the co-chair responsible for finalizing this report):

*Lori Bushway (ljb7@cornell.edu) Department of Horticulture
David Chinery (dhc3@cornell.edu) CCE Rensselaer County

3. Member list is in separate excel document.

4. PWT activities, accomplishments and outcomes and impacts:

“Special needs” support of \$1000 from CCE helped us explore how to enhance our main communication tool (www.gardening.cornell.edu). This site for county staff, CCE volunteers and our stakeholders is a portal to finding answers to questions related to gardening and the care of environments around a home. It is well passed the life expectancy of any website and has become cluttered with our growing bounty of factsheets, programs and emerging issues updates. We used the special funds to partial cover the fee of a consultant with program expertise to identified and customized an open-source content management system that assistants, staff and others without programming skills could use with relative ease and efficiently. With this new architecture we will be able to add content in just one single place but tag it to appear in multiple locations. From the users (county staff and stakeholders) perspectives this will facilitate easier access to the information they seek to secure their success in garden and home environments. We are in the process of transferring content to this new structure and will need to tap internal resources for laying out the web design but the plan is to launch the “new” site in time for the 2009 growing season.

There are over three million acres of turfgrass in New York State, and 82% of that area is home lawns maintained by homeowners/residents. Consequently it should come as no surprise that CCE educators report that up to 50% of all home care inquires their county offices receive are about lawn care; for high volume counties that approaches 800 lawn related questions per year. To maintain our expertise in this area nearly 20 educators attended our July Lawn Care In-service held at the Rensselaer County CCE in Troy. Turf expert, Frank Rossi led this day-long event and participants report:

- It was interesting to learn that although we stress pH testing, that most turf will grow in a rather broad range of pH. I will also lighten up on soil pH at least in regard to turf failure.
- The current thinking on nutrient management will be helpful when dealing with homeowners.
- Great information about not using manure-based materials on existing lawns (phosphorous overload issue). I will no longer recommend compost additions unless they are incorporated into the soil during establishment.
- Appreciated learning more about 'coring' and it being more suitable for sport turf since there it's done on a regular basis (as opposed to home lawns).
- NEVER had anyone show me grass ID- always fumbled through books w/o confidence. I feel more confident about grass & weed ID.
- Better knowledge of different types of lawns and how to ID. Very good (great!) hands-on exam and i.d. of different lawn grasses.

Further, we gathered an improved understanding of the needs of stakeholders in counties as participants reported on lawn concerns in their county which include:

- Educating lawn owners about proper lawn care practices. So many are determined to apply lime, fertilize and apply grub control out of habit rather than necessity.
- Increasing questions and interest in organic lawn care.
- Proper nutrient management; some over fertilize, some under fertilize, some fertilize at the wrong time, some don't return grass clippings

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- Weeds are the biggest issue; people want to have a green lawn--without having to resort to using weed killers. I've seen some of these folks who claim to fertilize at least twice a year, return the clippings, and do occasional overseeding (if they're truthful) but still seem to be losing the battle with the weeds.

We organized a total of 3 meetings (2 face to face and 1 polycom) to discuss emerging issues related to community horticulture and volunteer program management and implementation. These meetings are open to all interested county educators and campus staff. We specifically invite specific stakeholders including a garden writer. More than 30 different people participated in these meetings. Considering how we create a plan of work and conducting a SWAT analysis to help us decide what to include in our POW was a particularly important topic this year. We continue to struggle with this and are considering the role our PWT has taken on and how we might create different structures within our community horticulture network to meet our bottomless pit of need including connecting with colleagues around the state, professional development to stay informed on emerging issues related to gardening and environmental stewardship as well as program management and volunteer resource administration as well as our need to build partnerships with campus staff, faculty and programs as our community horticulture program does not fit neatly into any single priority area.

Other issues that were discussed at length in our meetings included a growing frustration that updates to the Cornell recommendation books Pest Management around the Home have not happened in a number of years and the replacement book for these is going to be at a price that is unreasonable. We are also planning for our July 2009 state Master Gardener Volunteer conference as well as inviting more people from other PWTs and campus programs to attend our meetings and discuss how we can partner. This has led to us working with the Greenhouse PWT coordinating the planning of field days and conferences.

Our Community Horticulture e-newsletter is distributed 2 to 3 times per month and directs recipients to a blog. This newsletter serves to keep our larger network of 100 plus interested educators and campus staff connected. It highlights relevant county and campus press releases and research as well as those from other organizations. It also includes workshops, conferences, and grant opportunities in NYS and beyond. Local educators often use many of the items in their own newsletters. The blog can be found at blogs.cce.cornell.edu/community-horticulture.

A small group of campus experts continue to commit to two Cornell sponsored Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) trainings each year which are on a 4 year rotation to eight regions around the state. They attend these trainings on their own program funds. In 2008, a 12 week 100 hour core training involving local staff and a dozen campus and county experts reached about 50 MGV trainees in Suffolk and Nassau counties. Another 11 week 45 hour core training involving local staff and 9 campus experts reached about 70 MGV trainees in Broome, Tioga, Tompkins and Cortland counties.

Our statewide Master Gardener Volunteer report was released in July 2008. CCE has 2,000 active MGV in 46 counties that spend more than 110,000 hours working to bring gardening success to New York State citizens and communities. That volunteer time is equal to 62 FTEs and is estimated to be worth more than \$2 million to the outreach effort of CCE. Through their service MGVs helped CCE make more than 140,000 direct citizen contacts. That averages out to about 71 direct citizen contacts per MGV. See the full report and specific county outcomes: www.gardening.cornell.edu/education/mgprogram

Our youth development focused Garden-based Learning team (www.hort.cornell.edu/gbl/) continues to provide in-services and regional training for educators in the field; developing innovative new projects within the GBL arena; publishing articles in peer-reviewed journals; meeting with key educators to determine the future direction for our program, and to lay the groundwork for implementing a plan of work.