



MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

University of Minnesota Extension
Master Gardener Volunteer Program
is growing with the University of Minnesota
Landscape Arboretum.

Renville County Extension Master Gardener volunteers guided hands-on learning activities for kids participating in the Children's Garden in Residence program. Watch the video about this and other projects at 2.umn.edu/MG-action.

3,283
MASTER
GARDENERS

195,670
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

147,824
MINNESOTANS
REACHED



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

extension.umn.edu/master-gardener

A MESSAGE FROM TIM KENNY, DIRECTOR

Stories of discovery, growth and connection are embedded in the work Master Gardener volunteers do every day. This report highlights the depth and breadth of the initiatives by Master Gardener volunteers to engage with and serve communities across Minnesota. Guided by the seven priorities of the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program and a can-do attitude, these volunteers effectively respond to local needs and make a significant impact.

In 2024, this included:

- sharing ways to successfully grow produce
- engaging kids to grow a vegetable or flower garden
- replanting shorelines to preserve clean water
- removing buckthorn and other invasives to protect plant biodiversity
- creating healing garden spaces at a community center

In 2024, we were also pleased to share a video series that shines a light on a few community projects, such as giving gardens that donate produce to food shelves, healing gardens that promote well-being, and educational programs for children and seniors. Take a moment to enjoy (and share!) these videos. z.umn.edu/MG-action.

You can imagine how far the reach extends when you consider that in 2024, 3,283 Master Gardener volunteers dedicated 195,670 hours all around Minnesota!

Please join me in congratulating the volunteers for their achievements.

-Tim Kenny



PROGRAM PRIORITY: HORTICULTURE SKILLS

Master Gardener volunteers share current research-based information and promote recommended practices for successful gardening in Minnesota.

Itasca County Master Gardeners revitalized The Learning Garden, an outdoor space at the YMCA, to educate area residents of all ages. Volunteers used this prime location for hands-on demonstrations and classes and presented youth learning sessions on a variety of topics like planting, watering, weeding and harvesting. Additionally, Master Gardeners provided funding and grew plants to be used in the garden. New this year, Master Gardeners collaborated with a local TV station to produce television programs based on the classes held at the garden. Master Gardeners look forward to continuing the expansion of this garden space in future years.

The Damiano Center, the largest emergency meal provider in northeast Minnesota, provides services for disadvantaged families in greater Duluth. In 2024, **St. Louis County Master Gardeners** provided garden space and taught gardening skills to low-income middle and high school students. These lessons have been enthusiastically received and the produce they grew was used in the Damiano Kids' Kitchen meal program. Youth have reported that because of the program their families have planted gardens at their homes. Originated eight years ago, this program has served countless families. Plans are in place to continue the program for the foreseeable future.



St. Louis County



PROGRAM PRIORITY: LOCAL FOOD

Master Gardener volunteers promote sustainable practices to grow local food on multiple scales and in different types of community locations.

The cost of purchasing plants can limit people's efforts to grow fresh vegetables. Because of this, a **Goodhue County Master Gardener** propagated and donated over 600 vegetable plants to the food shelf at the Community Action Center in Northfield. Potted plants were delivered in May to the food shelf, which supports around 100 low-income families per day. Labeled plants were made available to food shelf clients along with written planting and care instructions in English and Spanish. Per their feedback, plant recipients were very appreciative, and the Master Gardener plans to increase the number of donated plants in future years.

Dodge County Master Gardeners were instrumental in the relocation of a community garden in Dodge Center. After assessing sites, volunteers found an ideal location at Fairview Care Center. Under volunteers' guidance and hands-on assistance, the site was prepared and amended. Garden plots rented by community members were planted with a variety of vegetables. To educate the public, an informational sign was added to the garden. Survey results showed that plot renters appreciated the garden and the ability to grow food. Due to the success of the garden, additional plots will be made available next year.

PROGRAM PRIORITY: CLEAN WATER

Master Gardener volunteers teach about water-wise landscaping practices to conserve water, minimize runoff and protect wetlands, rivers and lakes.

Minnesota is the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" and all of those lakes are surrounded by miles of shoreline. Plants along shorelines directly impact lake health and water quality. **Crow Wing County Master Gardeners** collaborated with county-wide lake associations to deliver education to lakeshore property owners, recommending native plantings that stabilize the shoreline, provide wildlife habitat, and minimize stormwater runoff. For example, a Master Gardener intern distributed educational materials and plant lists at the North Long Lake Association's annual meeting. The Master Gardener engaged dozens of lakeshore residents in just a couple of hours.

When they received a request from the county Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office, **Pennington County Master Gardeners** developed and facilitated a presentation on watering wisely to dovetail the SWCD's make-n-take rain barrel workshop. At a well-attended outdoor educational program, the Master Gardeners' presentation focused on selecting plants based on their watering requirements, as well as understanding different types of soils and different sunlight requirements. The presentation also covered the topics of wind protection, the proper use of mulch and garden design. Master Gardeners have been asked to collaborate with the Soil and Water Conservation District office again on future projects.





Chisago County

PROGRAM PRIORITY: PLANT BIODIVERSITY

Master Gardener volunteers support invasive species management and native species conservation and restoration in home and community landscapes.

Efforts by **Chisago County Master Gardeners** at the Clayton Anderson Family Memorial Nature Park in North Branch resulted in restoration of native oak savannah and prairie vegetation, as well as removal of invasive buckthorn. This site, which borders the Sunrise River, was a great opportunity to demonstrate how to safely manage invasive species while protecting downstream ecosystems. While working with city and park officials, volunteers coordinated and hosted planting sessions and buckthorn removal events. The public was invited to attend all onsite sessions to learn about the benefits of native plants and the need to eradicate invasive species on public lands.

Anoka County Master Gardeners collaborated with Eisenhower Elementary School staff in Coon Rapids to create a native flower garden. Responding to students' interest, they also planted a vegetable garden. During several educational sessions facilitated by the volunteers, students learned about the importance of native plants in relation to pollinators and the food supply. Guided by Master Gardeners, students learned about a concern, planned a solution, and executed a project. Not only was a beautiful native garden created, but fresh produce was donated to students' families as well. Students were proud of what they were able to achieve while working together.

PROGRAM PRIORITY: NEARBY NATURE

Master Gardener volunteers' projects around the state increase access to plants and encourage connection with green spaces for health and wellbeing.

Al-Maa'uun is a community center in north Minneapolis that provides access to meals, education and more to area residents. This growing season Al-Maa'uun invited **Hennepin County Master Gardeners** to develop gardens in underused areas of the center's grounds into spaces for healing. A Master Gardener worked with residents to plant vegetables and flowers. Residents attended weekly meetings at the garden site and shared the harvested produce with members of the affiliated mosque. Master Gardeners helped fund additional raised beds for 2025 and plans are in the works to expand the gardens and offer gardening and cooking classes to enthusiastic residents.

Crow River Senior Center, in partnership with Senior Community Services, approached **Wright County Master Gardeners** to create a program to ease the burden of Alzheimer's. This new program offered caregivers the chance to meet separately with Community Services to gain knowledge and support, while individuals with Alzheimer's enjoyed a gardening project under the guidance of volunteers. From April to June, Master Gardeners facilitated nature-themed, hands-on activities followed by presentations and discussions. Clients shared stories of their garden experiences and their love for pollinators. Based on feedback received from everyone involved, Master Gardeners will continue to facilitate these engaging sessions in future years.



Wright County



PROGRAM PRIORITY: CLIMATE RESPONSIVENESS

Master Gardener volunteers' work promotes ways to create and maintain resilient landscapes that mitigate and adapt to our changing climate.

Washington County Master Gardeners engaged the public in many ways while collaborating with tree-focused organizations. Volunteers facilitated many educational events, including classes on recommended trees for a changing climate, and tree planting sessions. They also maintained a gravel bed tree nursery demonstration garden at the fairgrounds, showcasing an innovative way to grow bare-root tree species that are projected to do well in future years. Educational offerings focused on climate-ready trees reached 1,232 youth and 920 adults. Volunteers planted 22 trees on school grounds and 26 trees in the City of Oakdale. In addition, 30 gravel bed-grown trees were donated to nonprofit organizations.

To promote climate-resilient trees, **Rice County Master Gardeners** donated 200 trees during what has become an annual event on Arbor Day. With funds from a grant and trees from the Soil and Water Conservation District, volunteers coordinated and hosted a drive-through event at the fairgrounds. Each of the six recommended tree species that were distributed included written information about the tree species along with planting and care instructions. This year's event was the most successful ever, with volunteers giving away all trees in less than an hour and turning away many vehicles. Volunteers will be hosting the event again in 2025.

PROGRAM PRIORITY: POLLINATOR HEALTH

Master Gardener volunteers promote ways to help pollinators thrive in home and community spaces through intentional landscape practices.

The S.M.A.R.T. (sustainable, medicinal, artistic, resourceful, therapeutic) Garden, a perennial garden space in Rochester, served as an outdoor classroom for youth and adult classes facilitated by **Olmsted County Master Gardeners**. Summer educational sessions, attended by over 200 participants, exposed people to various aspects of gardening, particularly recommended plants and practices that promote pollinator health. Each adult session included a tour of the garden highlighting best gardening practices. Youth classes included hands-on learning activities. Children became increasingly comfortable using their observational skills to explore the garden, demonstrated by the many questions they asked.

Nobles County Master Gardeners worked with staff at Golden Horizons Assisted Living facility to create and maintain a pollinator-friendly garden to be enjoyed by residents, their guests and employees. To increase their enjoyment, residents were encouraged to participate in all aspects of the garden including planting and maintenance. Community members using the adjacent bike trail were also able to enjoy the beauty of the flowers and pollinators. In addition to perennial and annual flowering plants, a few vegetables were also planted. An educational "Pollinator Cafe" sign was added to the garden.



GARDENS PROVIDE A LIVING LABORATORY FOR YOUTH

In the 1980s, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum began a garden project for children and youth in urban neighborhoods of the Twin Cities. The garden sites grew in engagement and number. After a decade of success, the McKnight Foundation provided funds to document lesson plans, reproduce the well-used, hand-drawn materials, capture unique factors of the project and create a curriculum that became the Children's Garden in Residence program.

Beginning in 2015, training sessions were developed to equip Master Gardener volunteers to use inquiry-based learning methods and the curriculum to engage children and youth throughout Minnesota. Volunteers use their expertise and passion for horticulture to help educate and inspire young gardeners and foster a sense of community and environmental stewardship.

During weekly sessions, youth plant and care for their own garden plots, as they learn about horticulture, science and nutrition while experiencing wonder, curiosity and the joy of discovery. A favorite activity each week is enjoying a garden-based treat, such as the purple pollinator snack, made up of blueberries, blackberries, raspberries and fresh herbs. Tasting and enjoying the harvest from their gardens helps children understand how important plants are in our lives!

The impact of the Master Gardener volunteers in establishing Children's Gardens in Residence programs in Minnesota communities cannot be overstated. Currently, there are over 300 volunteers that have worked at over 40 garden sites to provide a living laboratory for children to explore nature and develop a deeper understanding of the natural world.

