

Greater Harmony Between Agriculture and the Environment

Environmentally Responsible Gardening in Maricopa County

Issue

With close to 3 million people in Maricopa County, a large percentage of them newcomers to the Sonoran Desert, there is a tremendous need for public education regarding appropriate selection, placement and care of plants. The Master Gardener program seeks to improve the health of plants and people while promoting environmental responsibility in the garden. It includes the efficient use of water, fertilizers and pesticides and the reduction of green waste.

What has been done?

Two 17-week training sessions were held in 1999; 101 new Master Gardeners were trained. Using the multiplier effect, training

of Master Gardener volunteers expands the coverage of County Extension agents to fulfill needs throughout Maricopa County.

Impact

Master Gardeners immediately give back to the community by teaching others what they've learned themselves. In 1999, four hundred twenty participants changed their gardening behaviors to reflect environmental concerns, and influenced others to do the same. Maricopa County now has hundreds of Master Gardeners who perform this valuable service in the community.

Based on pre/post evaluation, students who completed the Master Gardener program reported that they were more likely to apply

water properly, select the best plants for transplanting, use soil amendments properly, prune appropriately and identify some common insects and arthropods correctly. They were less likely to attempt to control harmless or beneficial insects and more likely to tolerate some plant damage before attempting control (IPM). Participants said they improved their general gardening knowledge about soils, turf, pruning, vegetables, citrus and fruit trees, ornamentals and botany.

Passing on what they've learned: 420 Master Gardener volunteers donated 28,000 hours fielding 23,000 telephone calls at the main Extension office and three satellite locations in 1999.

Funding
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