



2023 Master Gardener Impact Report



Introduction and data points

University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener volunteers continue to go above and beyond to meet the mission of helping others learn to grow. During the year, 2,348 Master Gardeners from across the state contributed 165,508 hours of service and focused on continuing their education. The program welcomed 496 new volunteers who participated in various Master Gardener training options, including online, in-person, and hybrid models of learning. These methods allow Extension to expand reach, access, and inclusion to all who wish to become Master Gardener volunteers in their local communities.

A few highlights from the year include:

- The State Master Gardener Conference hosted by the Peoria, Tazewell, Mason, and Fulton county volunteers in September.
- Several informational webinars were presented by Extension experts to keep the education growing for all Master Gardener volunteers.
- Extension launched a new volunteer reporting system to assist with tracking the volunteer efforts locally and around the state.



2,348
active volunteers



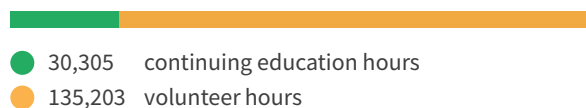
410
online training participants



86
hybrid training participants



165,508
total hours contributed



30,305
Continuing Education

4,657
Indirect outreach and education

2,473
Citizen Science

13,303
Information services

17,404
Direct General Education

23,631
Program Support

5,748
Direct Youth Education

2,941
Stewardship

60,181
Extension supported gardens

Volunteer hours breakdown



\$5,408,793
Value of Time Contributed



75,205
Hours of information services provided by Master Gardeners

Master Gardener exemplary teamwork projects acknowledged with award

Recognizing the impactful, innovative, and replicable work of Master Gardener volunteers is essential to growth. The purpose of the State Master Gardener Teamwork Award is to show appreciation to those who provide opportunities for learning in their communities. Enjoy these summaries of the seven award-winning projects from 2023.



Lake Katherine Heritage Garden Team

Cook County

The Lake Katherine Heritage Garden Master Gardener team has evolved over the years, and the new team has been instrumental in educating the public through their improved demonstration vegetable garden. The team implemented and demonstrated new garden techniques to grow food and support pollinators with native and pollinator-friendly plants. The team has added a variety of grow bags, built a cedar-raised bed, installed weed barriers for pathways, applied natural pest control using physical barriers, and constructed a vertical trellis for growing vining crops in small spaces. The spaces not used for food production are used for flowers to support beneficial insects.

Together, the team brought in new ideas and expanded learning in and out of the garden in Cook County.



April in Paris Garden Seminar

Edgar County

Through attention to detail and the enjoyment of working together, the Edgar County Master Gardeners have continued to improve the April in Paris Garden Seminar through perseverance, laughter, and dedication to the program. Though they are older than when the program began in 2003, they have not let the progress of time stop them from presenting a fun, educational, well-organized, and instructional program every year since its inception, excluding 2020 and 2021 due to COVID.



Vandalia Little Community Garden

Fayette County

The Vandalia Little Community Garden was started over 20 years ago, beginning in early 2002. What began as a hobby and passion has turned into a strong partnership with Extension's 4-H program, SNAP-Ed, local YMCA, area elementary schools, Kaskaskia College, Vandalia Beautification Committee, Fayette County Hospital, and numerous food pantries.

The garden was originally home to vegetables but has expanded to include an herb garden, native plants garden, flower garden, pollinator garden, Darcy's Memorial Garden, and most recently, a wheelchair-accessible raised bed garden, all situated on 2.5 acres of land donated by the City of Vandalia. Through financial support, the Master Gardeners have added fencing, irrigation, and a pavilion equipped with a solar power generator for hosting educational programs. Over the past two years, nearly 6,000 pounds of produce have been harvested and donated to local food pantries.





Master Gardener Plant Sale

Lake County

Being the local plant sale neighbors look forward to every year is one way to feel part of the community. The Lake County Master Gardener's Plant Sale is their annual fundraiser for the program. With the ongoing threat of jumping worms, the plant sale planning team pivoted from accepting Master Gardener plant donations to selling wholesale plants. This redesign of the Plant Sale to focus on native and hard-to-find perennials has proved to be very successful and the event has now become one of the largest and most successful, events in Lake County.

VFW Peace Garden

McHenry County

A garden can be a place of quiet reflection or a pause from the world. McHenry County Master Gardener Joe Menotti recognized the need for a community garden designed for those who have and are struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder. After numerous planning meetings with the local VFW and obtaining grants from a Home Depot program, Joe, Lauri DiGrazia, and fellow volunteers planted 22 fruit trees, created multiple raised beds, and started planting vegetables and flowers to bring the garden to life and provide a safe and calming space for everyone who passes through their community.



Sow to Grow and Phoenix Community Gardens

Peoria County

The space to work in a garden gives people the opportunity to grow. The Sow to Grow Garden is a fenced area that provides food and gardening opportunities for the residents of Glendale Commons, a supportive housing complex for homeless veterans, individuals, and families. The adjacent Phoenix Community Garden is designed to provide produce and green space for community members in the area surrounding Glendale Commons. Both gardens provide residents the opportunity to learn about planting, growing, and harvesting nutritious and healthy foods and growing flowers that attract pollinators as they participate in the gardening process from seed to the distribution of produce.

The Sow to Grow and Phoenix Community Gardens are located in the North Valley neighborhood near downtown Peoria. The gardens were developed through a collaborative effort with the City of Peoria, Phoenix Community Development Services, the Junior League of Peoria, and the Illinois Extension Master Gardeners.





2023 Illinois Master Gardener State Annual Conference

Bringing together gardeners from across the state is always an event for learning from each other, discussion, and a great opportunity to make new friends. During the 2023 conference, Master Gardeners and staff gathered in East Peoria to network together and recognize volunteer achievements. Conference attendees enjoyed a keynote presentation about designing and planting a resilient, ecologically vibrant home garden with author Kelly Norris, as well as numerous breakout sessions covering numerous horticulture topics. The conference was hosted by volunteers in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties.



35
outstanding Master Gardener awards



15
sustained excellence awards



7
teamwork awards

Idea Garden Renovations

Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby counties

The Idea Garden volunteer team devotes its time to managing a variety of plots within the Idea Garden, including a children's garden, keyhole garden, cottage/pollinator garden, and bulb garden located at the partner site at Sarah Bush Lincoln Hospital. Since this garden is over 20 years old, updates were needed, especially since it had suffered during the pandemic due to a lack of access for most of the summer. The Master Gardener co-chairs worked closely with their team to plan ways to upgrade the gardens, decrease the amount of labor needed to upkeep the garden, and introduce new garden features and techniques that the public could easily replicate in their home gardens.

With the garden being at a hospital, the volunteers wanted to reach the goal of increasing accessibility as well as establishing a sensory garden to help visitors and hospital employees relax and de-stress.



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Learn more about the Master Gardener program

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