Master Gardeners and Horticultural Therapy

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Summary. Horticultural therapy programs can benefit from the services of Master Gardeners. Trained through the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service, Master Gardeners are skilled in practical plant sciences and committed to volunteerism. A nationwide survey has determined that 374 Master Gardeners in 21 states are helping to bring structured horticultural activities to individuals in nursing homes, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, prisons, and other special service facilities.

Master Gardeners are a specialized group of volunteers trained through the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service. From its simple beginning in 1972 in Washington state, the program has spread to 45 states and four provinces and now includes more than 45,000 Master Gardeners in the United States and Canada (Master Gardener Intl. Corp., 1991a, 1991b).

Owing to their connection with land-grant institutions, Master Gardener programs are supported and enriched by modern technology and research data generated by state universities and agricultural experiment stations nationwide (Rasmussen, 1989).

In New Jersey, Master Gardeners receive 100 h of formal classroom and field laboratory training from faculty at Rutgers Univ. The subject matter includes soil science, botany, landscape construction, pest management, propagation, and many related horticultural topics.

In return, each Master Gardener is obligated to give 100 h of volunteer service, although many continue long after that requirement has been met. Traditional Master Gardener services to the community include a garden hotline, speakers bureau, town beautification, and plant clinics (Norman, 1986). An increasing number of Master Gardeners return their volunteer time by working in new settings.

Master Gardeners, as a group, appear to be well qualified to serve in horticultural therapy programs. They are trained in plant sciences and dedicated to sharing their knowledge and time. Their long-term commitment makes them ideal assistants, working alongside professional horticultural therapists in diverse settings, including "sensitive" facilities such as prisons and mental health centers.

In 1990 a survey was sent to Master Gardener coordinators across the United States and Canada. The survey, funded by two Rutgers Univ. Junior Faculty grants, requested information regarding the growth and develop-

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ment of horticultural therapy programs facilitated by Master Gardeners. Mailing lists and state coordinator names were supplied by Master Gardener International Corp. (MaGIC) in Alexandria, Va.

The results of the survey have increased our understanding of the total contribution and geographical distribution of Master Gardeners involved with horticultural therapy. Of the 45 states that have Master Gardener programs, 39 responded to the survey as follows:

States responding to survey	39
States with Master Gardener-assisted horticultural therapy programs	21
States with no such programs	18
States with planned programs	11
Facilities served by Master Gardeners	126
Clients served by Master Gardeners	3591
Master Gardener volunteers involved	374

Of the 39 states reporting, 21 have Master Gardeners working as horticultural therapy assistants. Of the 18 that do not have Master Gardener-assisted horticultural therapy programs, 11 report popular interest and plans to initiate such programs. The survey has given us some interesting information concerning the national picture. There are at least 126 facilities and 3591 clients served by some 374 Master Gardener volunteers. The populations most frequently served in Master Gardener-assisted horticultural therapy programs are shown in Table 1.

The majority of the reported programs operate during the growing season, from May or June through September. About 25% operate on a weekly basis throughout the year. These year-round programs are typically located in nursing homes, senior citizens' centers, and facilities for developmentally disabled individuals.

Comments from program coordinators regarding the effectiveness of established horticultural therapy programs facilitated by Master Gardeners have been very positive. Host facilities consider the programs to be extremely valuable. Further, faculty administrators consider the Master Gardener volunteers to be useful, dedicated, and knowledgeable.

No simple answer exists regarding what motivates people to volunteer, although psychologists have studied motivation for many years. Motivation is likely a combination of factors. Master Gardeners can derive tremendous satisfaction from facilitating people-plant interactions. By helping to deliver horticultural activities, Master Gardener volunteers can satisfy the desire to share their love and knowledge of plants and gardening. Also, the human di-

mension of the horticultural therapy process enables Master Gardeners to engage in a bonding experience-teaching, helping, and sharing with others.

I implemented nine new horticultural programs in Bergen County, N.J., from 1988 to 1991. All have been staffed by Master Gardeners trained through the Rutgers Univ. Cooperative Extension Service.

The program at the Hackensack Jail has been particularly successful. The sheriff reported that \$10,000 was saved by a reduction in food costs, the result of a large fruit and vegetable garden. The year after the garden was established, the jail erected a greenhouse, which inmates manage throughout the year. Additional funds have been generated as inmates sell poinsettias and holiday plants grown in their garden and greenhouse. While the economic benefits are important, the primary objective of this program is to rehabilitate and train the inmates for green-industry employment in their post-prison lives. A Master Gardener team visits the prison each week and works with the inmates. The Master Gardeners bring new ideas, different varieties, and information on culture and pest control, as well as guidance, friendly support, and positive reinforcement.

Another program that has been particularly well received was started 2 years ago at New Jersey's largest hospital, Bergen Pines. This 1200-bed county hospital provides in- and out-patient services for diverse populations, including long-term and acute care, psychiatric, geriatric, physically disabled, substance abuse, and pediatric. The weekly horticultural therapy sessions are delivered by trained Master Gardeners who have made a long-term commitment to work with the program. The medical and administrative staffs have been so impressed with the program's success that a \$150,000 therapy greenhouse is being constructed as part of the hospital's main building. The intent is that the various patient populations will use the greenhouse as a tool for rehabilitation and healing.

Programs like these demonstrate the role Master Gardeners play in horticultural therapy settings. By bringing structured gardening and nature craft activities to special populations, they help to provide stimulation and enjoyment and, in many cases, rehabilitation and training.

Economic realities have made it difficult to implement new horticultural therapy programs and to expand existing ones. Program budgets are frequently restricted and far less than optimum. Professional horticultural therapists nationwide must use alternative manpower to assist in program delivery and management. It may be volunteer power in the coming years that allows programs to improve and reach greater numbers of individuals. Owing to their connection with the land-grant institutions, Master Gardeners are an available resource to horticultural therapists in every state.

Table 1. *Populations served in Master Gardener-assisted horticultural therapy programs.*

Population	No. clients served	% Client total
Able elderly	913	25
Geriatric	760	21
Mentally disabled	697	19
Physically disabled	428	12
Prisons/correctional	211	6
Other ^a	582	17

^aIncludes schools, blind, substance abuse, youth-at-risk, head injury.

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