

University of California Garden Information Center Project

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Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino Counties are home to 13.6 million people, 42% of the population of California. Although data on home gardening activity in these areas is limited, a random telephone survey conducted by Cooperative Extension researchers in demographically-similar San Diego County found that 68% of households considered themselves to be gardening households (Pittenger and Lazaneo, 1989). A 1994 Gallup survey found that nationally, 74% of households garden (National Gardening Assn., 1995). Clearly, there are likely to be millions of enthusiastic home gardeners in this three-county area, all of whom could potentially benefit from University of California Cooperative Extension gardening expertise.

However, home gardeners must be motivated enough to seek out Cooperative Extension and visit the office or call with questions for Master Gardener volunteers. Rather than taking U.C. research to the people, we often wait for people to come to us. All too often, they don't.

Two studies conducted by Cooperative Extension researchers suggest that only a tiny percentage of home gardeners take advantage of current services. In the San Diego study cited above, only 2% of home gardeners used U.C. Cooperative Extension resources. Another survey of home gardeners in Southern California (Stamen *et al.*, 1989) indicated that only 1.6% of gardeners who seek information from printed resources use U.C. publications.

Where do gardeners get their information? Both studies indicated that large numbers of home gardeners seek their gardening advice at full-service nurseries. The study by Stamen estimated that more than 50% of Southern California home gardeners look to nurseries for answers to their gardening questions. The San Diego study indicated that 22% of gardeners use nurseries as their primary source of information.

The Garden Information Center Project is designed to pilot-test a method of taking U.C. Cooperative Extension gardening information directly to where people are most likely to find it—at local nurseries.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Garden Information Center Project is to develop 12-15 bilingual brochures addressing common gardening questions. The brochures will be placed in displays near the check-out line at selected nurseries. They will be rotated seasonally and as important gardening issues change. Nursery staff, rather than attempting to answer every question themselves, will refer customers to the appropriate U.C. brochure. This pilot project will provide at least 10,000 people with research-based gardening information while raising the profile of U.C. Cooperative Extension in three of California's largest counties. As part of the project, the investigators will conduct an evaluation of whether nursery displays are an effective means of communicating U.C. gardening information to the public, and if those who receive the information adopt the suggested technologies.

Discussion

In order to select the topics for the brochures, the team analyzed two years of questions to Master Gardener telephone help lines in San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties. We reviewed the topics and frequency of questions asked, and came up with approximately 20 brochure ideas.

We then held a focus group meeting with 10 local nurserymen to solicit their input. Our discussion with them focused on possible brochure topics, placement of displays, and how the project could best be tailored to their needs and those of their customers. Our focus group members also agreed to provide the sites for pilot-testing of the displays.

Based on our review of Master Gardener Help Line data, and input from our industry focus group, we selected the following topics for the initial brochures.

1. Pines and other Conifers—Their Selection, Planting and Care
2. Roses—Their Selection, Planting and Care
3. Palms—Their Selection, Planting and Care
4. Pruning Trees and Shrubs
5. Trees—Their Selection, Planting and Care
6. Growing Tomatoes in Your Garden
7. When and How to Amend Landscape Soils
8. Vertebrate Pests of the Garden
9. Soil and Water Management for Vegetable Gardens
10. Household Ants and their Control
11. Common Diseases of Garden and Landscape Plants
12. Green Waste Management and Grass Cycling
13. Lawn Watering Guide

14. Basic Lawn Care
15. Management of Garden Insect Pests
16. Safe Use of Pesticides.
17. Avocados— Their Selection, Planting and Care
18. Lemons— Their Selection, Planting and Care
19. Peaches— Their Selection, Planting and Care
20. Beneficial Insects in the Landscape
21. Basics of IPM
22. Eugenia Psyllid Identification and Control
23. Pine Pitch Canker Identification and Control

The topics were divided among the investigators based on their areas of expertise. Currently, we have completed writing the text of 10 brochures, which are now being reviewed by our industry focus group. These will go to the consultant handling graphic design and printing by mid-November, 1999. The other brochures are still being written by the investigators, and the timeline for completion is December 1, 1999.

Our timeline is to complete printing and production of displays by January 2000, have displays placed in nurseries by February, and conduct our follow-up and evaluation process in the spring months of 2000. If the brochures are determined to be a successful tool for reaching the public, we plan to work with the retail nursery industry to expand the program in the future.

Literature Cited

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- The National Gardening Association, Inc. National Gardening Survey, 1994-1995. Burlington, Vermont.
- Stamen, T., Chamber, J. and Mamer, J. 1989. Marketing Study of California Lawn and Garden Consumers. Self-published manuscript, University of California Cooperative Extension.

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