

**Educating Home Gardeners:  
Building on the Garden Information Center Model**

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**Introduction**

Previously, the Slosson Endowment funded the U.C. Garden Information Center Project, developed to deliver U.C. research-based gardening information to home gardeners via displays at local nurseries. The investigators developed 15 brochures addressing gardeners' most common questions along with a display rack. Twelve Southern California nurseries worked with the investigators to pilot test the project. Project evaluation indicated that this is an effective method for disseminating information to home gardeners and at the same time, provides a valuable service for nurseries. The model shows potential for use throughout the State. In the currently funded project, we proposed to develop new brochures, translate materials into Spanish, and more widely disseminate Garden Information Center materials.



## Goals/Objectives

1. Exploring and implementing an industry/University partnership and other options for making the Garden Information Center self-supporting.
2. Developing at least five new brochures for the series based on feedback from participating nurseries.
3. Translating key brochures into Spanish and other languages.

We have completed goals two and three and we are making progress on goal one. We have received an extension on our project, so the following is a progress report, not the final report.

## Discussion

With Slosson Endowment funding, in 1998 the investigators initiated the Garden Information Center Project to pilot test a method for providing home gardening information directly to consumers. Several UCCE studies indicate that home gardeners are most likely to seek out gardening information at nurseries, therefore our goal was to provide consumers with gardening



information at the retail nursery level. The Garden Information Center Project consists of colorful displays stocked with 15 brochures answering gardeners' most common questions. The displays are intended to be placed near the check-out line at nurseries, where nursery personnel can readily refer their customers to the appropriate topic.

As planned, five new brochures were developed, printed and distributed during this program year. The new brochures are:

Citrus Fruits: Oranges, Lemons, Limes, Grapefruit and Mandarins  
Deciduous Fruits: Peaches, Nectarines, Plums, Apricots, and Apples  
Biological Control for the Home Gardener  
Integrated Pest Management for the Home Gardener  
Lawn Care for Southern California

We have had all of the original 15 brochures translated into Spanish. Five of those have been selected for immediate printing, and more will be printed as funding permits. The five Spanish brochures to be printed first are:

Soil and Water Management for Vegetable Gardens  
Pesticides: How to Handle, Apply, and Store them Safely

Household Ants and their Control  
Roses: Their Selection, Planting and Care  
How to Save Water in your Garden and Landscape

We are waiting for the final version of the Spanish translation from UC ANR Communication Services. Printing and distribution to the participating nurseries will then proceed in the coming months.

We have begun to explore methods to promote industry adoption of the Garden Information Center model. Before delving into this area, however, we wanted to address some problems with the original Garden Information Center design brought to our attention during pilot testing. Nursery staff liked the brochures and their content, but experienced structural problems with the display. The heavy-duty cardboard display panel tended to warp and become unusable after one season. While we saw that the Garden Information Center Project had potential to be used more widely throughout the State, we wanted to resolve these structural issues before pursuing broader industry support.

Accordingly, as part of our current project, we redesigned the displays to make them more durable and user-friendly. The new display is a wire rack that can be rotated. It holds more brochures, and customers or nursery staff can more easily access the brochures. We provided either a tabletop or stand-alone option depending on the preference of the nursery. Eight nurseries participated in 2001/2002 in the Garden Information Center project using the redesigned display. Peter Beaudoin, a UCCE-Los Angeles staff member, along with Master Gardener Volunteers from the other participating counties, set up and regularly stocked the displays.



In spring, 2002, we conducted a survey of managers and staff at the eight participating nurseries to assess the success of the redesigned project. Survey respondents at all eight of the participating nurseries said that the customers benefited from this service, said we provided satisfactory service in stocking the displays, and said that the display was attractive and functional. All participants said they would like to continue participating in the project. Participants gave suggestions on new brochures, and those that would be helpful if available in Spanish. Half of the participants said that they would be willing to purchase the brochures at approximately 5-7 cents each to continue making them available to their customers.

With this information in hand, we have had some preliminary discussions with industry representatives. They have expressed willingness to distribute the PDF versions of the brochures on their websites (the Nursery Pest Management Alliance and the California Assn. of Nurserymen (CAN) in particular). The current poor economic conditions in the nursery industry have made CAN reluctant to fund new initiatives. However, in a promising recent development the Metropolitan Water District has expressed interest in helping to fund the brochures, and we are planning a meeting with MWD officials to discuss this possibility. Our work with industry representatives to continue exploring industry adoption will continue over the next several months. Our hope is to have the nursery industry handle printing and distribution of the brochures, and production and distribution of the racks. UCCE environmental horticulture advisors would continue to develop the content of new brochures as needed.