



Anoka County Extension Master Gardeners

2022 Year End Report



Figure 1: Anoka County Master Gardeners tour All Good Organics Farm in Lino Lakes. All Good Organics was awarded Farm Family of the Year in Anoka County in 2022.

Summary

The Extension Master Gardeners of Anoka County are trained community volunteers who teach, engage and inspire residents to promote healthy landscapes, healthy people

and a healthy planet. Priorities include horticulture skills, local food, plant biodiversity, pollinator health, clean water, nearby nature and climate responsiveness.

All volunteers participate in the Core Course when they join the program, which teaches horticulture and community engagement principles from university educators. First year volunteers are also required to serve 50 hours in the community to develop their skills. After they complete these requirements, volunteers become certified Master Gardeners. Once certified, Master Gardeners commit to serving 25 hours per

By the numbers...

139 Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

18 new Master Gardeners certified

8,547 Volunteer Hours Served

3,414 Community Members Served

year and participate in ongoing continuing education to maintain their certification.

The number of volunteers in the Anoka County program has steadily been increasing. Since 2020, 50 new members have joined and remain active in the program, which represents over a third of the total membership.

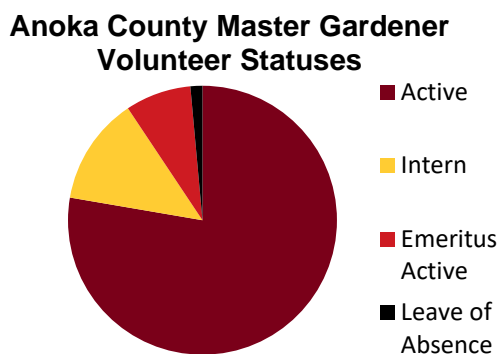


Fig. 1: Active Master Gardeners commit to volunteering at least 25 hours per year. Interns serve 50 volunteer hours in their first year to become certified Master Gardeners.

Successes

Many successes defined this program year. While in 2020 and 2021 several established projects had to adapt or were postponed due to the Covid pandemic, 2022 saw the return of in-person meetings and traditional projects and activities. New projects that developed *because* of the pandemic proved to be worthy of continuing as an established core offering of the program in 2022. Innovative projects also defined 2022 with many interesting activities reaching new audiences.

Core projects & events resumed in 2022

- **Ask a Master Gardener Booths.** Master Gardeners set up Q & A tables at 30 events throughout Anoka County and talked to 719 people. New community events were added including Columbia Heights' Monarch Festival and Fridley's

Environmental Fun Fair.



Figure 2: Master Gardener Penny Johnson “talks plants” with a resident at the Anoka County Fair.

- **Home Landscaping and Garden Fair.** Anoka County Master Gardeners hosted the educational event again after a two-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2022 event, hosted annually at the Bunker Hills Activities Center in Andover, featured 112 attendees, 23 classes and 17 vendors. Speakers included Julie Weisenhorn, other University of MN educators and Master Gardener volunteers. They spoke on topics such as edible landscaping, Minnesota native butterflies and moths, and ornamental grasses. Participants built beeswax luminaries, kokedama planters, and tasted recipes using culinary herbs made by local chef Aric Meich.



Figure 3: Building beeswax luminaries at the Home Landscaping and Garden Fair in Andover. From left: Pam Mulvihill, Mary McClintock and Lydia Hu.

- **Plant Sale.** Thousands of locally grown plants were sold at the Master Gardeners annual plant sale fundraiser on May 17 and 18, held at the Anoka County Fairgrounds. Shoppers found plants at a great value while receiving customized guidance and education from volunteers at the event.
- **Plant And Insect Diagnostic Clinics.** Master Gardeners answered 74 client questions over 10 public clinics held June - August. Common questions include tree and plant identification, mosaic virus and drought related issues.



Figure 5: Master Gardener Tim Baland investigates a leaf sample at a diagnostic clinic.

- **Speakers Bureau.** Master Gardeners spoke on priority topics to nine community groups in 2022. Audiences learned about growing orchids, composting, starting seeds indoors, lawncare during drought, pollinators, food preservation and more. Groups such as the Anoka Area Garden Club, Rum River and St. Francis libraries, Linwood Senior & Community Center learned healthy garden and environmental practices from the presentations.
- **Walk in the Garden classes.** Six public classes were offered on the topics of herb gardening, landscape design, water-wise

practices, planting for all-season color, and growing vegetables for donation.



Figure 4: Master Gardener Chris Hughes hosts a Walk in the Garden class in Coon Rapids on growing vegetables for donation.

Classes were held at various locations throughout Anoka County.

- **Writers Guild.** 20 educational articles were written by volunteers and published in local print newspapers in 2022. Featured topics included *Gearing up for Spring Gardening*; *Succulents for Minnesota Landscapes*; and *Creating a Drought Tolerant Vegetable Garden*. Articles are printed 1-2 times per month in Quad Cities Press and the Anoka Union.

Thriving New Projects

- **Ask a Master Gardener Online.** Born out of the need to offer a virtual question and answer format in 2020, Master Gardeners continued this year to host weekly Zoom sessions on Tuesday evenings for residents, May - August. Common



questions included dealing with tomato diseases, flower and weed identification, and evergreen tree die-back.

- **Giving Gardens.** A vegetable production garden started in 2021 at Bunker Hills Activities Center in Andover. In 2022, the garden area expanded by 74%, and a



Figure 6: Summer intern MaQ Dlamini prepares freshly harvested vegetables for donation.

storage shed, new fencing and compost bins were installed. Master Gardeners grew 797 lbs. of food in the garden. Peace Community Garden in Coon Rapids was also maintained by

Master Gardeners who grew 500 lbs. of fresh vegetables for donation. All produce was donated weekly to Anoka County Brotherhood Council's emergency food shelf in Anoka.

- **Yoga in the Parks.** Six free outdoor yoga sessions were offered to the public on Saturday mornings. Before each class



Figure 7: Yoga in the Parks class at Locke Park in Fridley. Practicing physical exercise in a natural setting can reduce stress and increase a positive sense of wellbeing.

began, Master Gardeners shared information and experiences on the mental and physical healing benefits of gardening and caring for plants.

- **At-Home Projects.** During the pandemic, at-home projects became a new low-

contact option for Master Gardeners to reach new audiences in their neighborhoods. In 2022, 20 Master Gardeners **participated in one or more approved at-home projects:**

- 21 pollinator gardens were developed or maintained.
- Seven giving gardens were grown. 479 lbs. of produce or cut flowers donated to community organizations.
- Two volunteers grew vegetable plants or houseplants for donation to community organizations.

Project Spotlight: Public engagement at Blaine Memorial Park Gardens

In the Master Gardeners' second year of a thriving partnership with the City of Blaine, there is much to celebrate. Over the course of the 2022 season, 28 Master Gardener volunteers served 156 hours to beautify, maintain and educate residents through the gardens at Tom Ryan Park.



Figure 8: Spring Clean-up Day. Master Gardeners sit by the flagpole garden bed at Tom Ryan Park in Blaine: From left: Andrea Krist, Lee Utecht, Pam Mulvihill, Paula Ponto, Sue Peterson.

Colorful perennials enhance several large monuments that recognize military veterans and inspire rest and reflection. Other demonstration garden beds grow pick-your-

own vegetables for nearby senior apartment residents and feature Minnesota pollinator plants and natives.

The most impactful outcome of the project this year was the overwhelming public response. Master Gardeners hosted weekly drop-in days when the public was invited to come and ask questions. An estimated 187 residents talked with a Master Gardener while visiting the gardens. Anoka County

Master Gardener Julie Gustafson remembers talking with a little boy while she was volunteering in the gardens. He commented on the flowers. Julie asked him what his favorite flower is. He replied, “Tomatoes. Red ones and green ones.” This sweet and fun exchange made Julie feel that she was helping plant for the future.

Project Spotlight: Youth garden education at Northgate Woods

Master Gardener Peggy Sorenson Parks spent her summer volunteering with 15 youth residents of Northgate Woods apartments in Blaine. Anoka County Master Gardeners partnered with Anoka County 4H and SNAP educators to host eight sessions, during which Peggy and other Master Gardeners



Figure 9: A Northgate Woods summer program participant examines a compost sample and identifies micro- and macro-organisms.

shared plant-themed lessons in a summer camp-style setting. Youth participants learned about soil, plant biology, water cycle,

pollinators’ role in plant health and composting. Kids also planted green beans in outdoor patio pots and helped them grow.

Peggy noticed that the most impactful and successful activities for the kids were the outdoor group games. “The kids loved the scavenger hunt activity that asked them to find trees surrounding their apartment building and identify the trees using their leaves”, Peggy said. “Kids were really engaged and interested in this activity, which gave names to the natural features that surrounded their home.” Peggy hopes to create more learning games and outdoor activities for the kids next year.

Increased Public Visibility

To increase public awareness of Master Gardeners services and events, several new volunteer-led initiatives were developed or expanded.

Educational Videos

Several educational and informational videos featuring Master Gardeners were created in 2022 with the production help of Quad Cities TV (QCTV). Educational topics included:

- Create your Own Compost
- Emerald Ash Borer protection
- Tips to Grow a Healthy Tree
- Growing Great Ginkgo Trees
- Vegetable Gardening at Bunker Giving Garden

All videos and more can be found on [Anoka County Extension Master Gardeners YouTube channel](#).

Social Media

Anoka County Master Gardeners expanded social media presence in 2022 to reach new and emerging audiences.

- **Instagram account created** to share photos and build awareness. Follow: *anokacountymastergardeners*.
- **Plant of the Week articles on Facebook.** Master Gardeners wrote and shared 19 articles on various plants including Virginia bluebells, Butternut squash, and Anise hyssop. Follow: *University of MN Extension-Anoka County Master Gardeners*

Float in the Anoka County Halloween Parade

For the first year, Anoka County Master Gardeners built a float and participated in the Grand Day Parade held in Anoka every Halloween. Volunteers designed and built a mums-filled, harvest-themed float that resembled a Master Gardener booth. On the day of the parade, volunteers wore garden costumes and handed out candy and seeds to parade-goers, which numbered in the thousands. The float took 3rd place of all non-royalty floats, as recognized by the Anoka Parade Committee.



Figure 10: Anoka County Master Gardeners and prize-winning float at the Anoka Halloween Parade.

Looking ahead

In 2023, the program anticipates bringing on 28 new members —about one-fifth of current membership. With significant growth continuing, the program will have more capacity than ever to keep expanding public offerings and strengthening existing projects. The 2022 strategic plan of the Anoka County Master Gardeners identified two major goals for the program: 1) create and build community within the volunteer membership through social-learning experiences, and 2) outreach to new and diverse audiences to serve those that match the demographics of Anoka County. Both goals will continue to be a focus in 2023, and much planning is already underway.

Visit extension.umn.edu/local/anoka for more information about this county-based program. Contact anokamgs@umn.edu for program support.



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MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

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