

Promoting and teaching IPM as smart gardening

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Making it happen

“Our commercial landscapers are doing a great job implementing MSUE research for environmentally friendly gardening and lawn care, but not homeowners – why not?”

That was the challenge one of our professors made to an MSU Extension educator. Her response was to propose Smart Gardening – a campaign for Extension educators and Master Gardeners to focus on simple changes people could make to have healthier plants, lawns and soils using environmentally friendly practices. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a natural fit within these goals. A collaboration between Michigan State University Extension’s Consumer Horticulture team, the Extension Master Gardener Program and the MSU IPM Program resulted in the launch of the Smart Gardening initiative in February 2013. **The strategy** became to communicate three messages as simple ways to start “Smart Gardening.”



1. Smart lawns - Mow at the highest setting to promote deep roots that can better resist grub damage, crowd out weeds and require less water.



2. Smart plants - Select plants, trees and shrubs that are native or well-adapted to challenges by pests and local conditions.



3. Smart soils - Test the soil to use money and soil wisely by fertilizing only as needed per test results.

Impacts, indicators of success

2013 launch year

- Smart Gardening exhibits drew people from more than 50 of Michigan’s 83 counties and two surrounding states. Master Gardener volunteers documented 1,789 discussions about Smart Gardening at the two big home garden shows.
- Surveys of the participants in the Grand Rapids Smart Gardening conference and apprentice program indicate 69 percent used a soil test, 90 percent raised their mowing height, and 91 percent installed native plants.
- MSU sales of home soil test kits grew by 203 percent with 3,433 sold in 2013.
- Extension educators’ time was used efficiently as information developed for a show presentation was used for an online news article which became a print tip sheet. Master Gardeners, who previously answered random questions at booths, are excited to be trained on a focused message with new, related tip sheets to share.

2014-2015

- The team now supports additional Smart Gardening exhibits at garden shows in Lansing, Michigan and Marquette in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Master Gardeners are organizing their own displays at farmers markets, summer festivals and other outlets.
- In 2014, we distributed 133,000 tip sheets (15 titles) and 45,000 promotional bookmarks. We have 8 short videos online.
- MSU horticulture professors collaborated to develop 40 “Smart Plant” tip sheets featuring trees for communities to plant when replacing ash devastated by emerald ash borers.
- Page views for some of the articles written in 2014:
 - » 3,866 views “Drought-tolerant plants save water, money and time.” January 2014.
 - » 1,037 views “Smart flower borders to attract beneficial insects.” February 2014.
 - » 1,655 views “Home gardeners can compost to build soil organic matter and smart soils.” June 2014.
 - » 3,940 views “New tip sheets on smart tree selections for communities and landowners.” July 2014.
- The Ohio State University is launching its own initiative based on our Smart Gardening effort.
- Smart Vegetable Gardening added in 2015.

Delivery and promotion

We set up landscaped exhibits featuring native plants at two large home and garden shows (attendance each 20-40,000) in Novi and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Master Gardener volunteers were trained on the “smart” topics and how to work in the exhibit, greeting people walking by and encouraging them to look at the native plants. The volunteers offered people our one-page Smart Gardening tip sheets and answered any gardening questions. At a small stage adjacent to the exhibit, MSUE’s consumer horticulture team presented 30-minute talks on topics throughout the three-day shows. A large screen TV at our display continually looped three short videos about our messages.

The success of the activities at the two garden shows led to spin-off efforts by the MSUE consumer horticulture team throughout 2013 using many of the same promotional display and educational items at additional workshops and events. More shows and resources were added in 2014 and 2015.



Examples of Smart Gardening tip sheets



Front of Smart Lawns and Smart Plants promotional bookmarks.



Back of Smart Soils bookmark.



First year statistics

Home
soil test
kit sales
up 203%

Website
visits
up 25%

Calls to
statewide
garden
hotline
up 20%

MSU Consumer Horticulture Team: Bob Bricault, Diane Brown, Karen Burke, Elise Carolan, Rebecca Finneran, Mary Gerstenberger, Hal Hudson, Rebecca Krans, Carol Lenchek, Gretchen Voyle, Linda Whitlock and Mary Wilson

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Information about Smart Gardening and more at: www.migarden.msu.edu