**A Gift That Grows**

Twenty-three individuals recently completed the UW-Extension Master Gardener Level 1 training course offered by the UW-Extension Horticulture Program in Kenosha and Racine Counties. The training course was provided through flipped instruction which required the trainees to view online instructional videos prepared by state specialists and horticulture educators and to read chapters from the Master Gardener training manual before attending the in-person training sessions. At the sessions, trainees were involved in hands-on, interactive activities which allowed them to apply what they had learned from the videos and readings. These interns join the 140 certified Master Gardner volunteers of Kenosha and Racine Counties in bringing research-based information and educational programs to our area.

The training course was held this past fall at Festival Foods in Somers, a somewhat central location between the two counties. The 36 hour training was offered at 3 hour sessions scheduled one day each week for 12 weeks in both the afternoon and the evening to accommodate work schedules. Topics taught included: general gardening practices, botany, vegetables, fruits, herbaceous plants, woody plants, entomology, plant pathology, integrated pest management, soils, turf, weeds, and invasive plants.

Each intern will need to volunteer 24 or more hours from now through Oct. 1, 2018 at an approved Master Gardener project or event to become a certified Master Gardener volunteer for UW-Extension. They have been equipped to share their horticultural knowledge throughout local communities at community gardens, schools, summer camps, demonstration gardens, and many other places.

The Master Gardener volunteers are gifts to our local gardens and plant communities. From classrooms to phone lines, they disperse research based information in different formats to meet the needs of their audiences. In community gardens and teaching gardens, they plant, tend, and harvest to fill food pantry shelves. They provide education in demonstration gardens by displaying planting methods and proven plants that may promote successful gardening efforts in home gardens. In natural areas, they battle invasive plants and increase awareness of protecting our native ecosystems. The therapeutic gardens they tend offer benefits beyond the intended audience. They are garden guardians who have mastered the art of giving.

The UW-Extension offices in Kenosha and Racine Counties work together to offer Master Gardener Level 1 training once per year. The schedule for the 2018 training has not yet been released, but updates on the training will be posted on the UW-Extension websites for both counties: <https://kenosha.uwex.edu> or <https://racine.uwex.edu>. Additional information on the Master Gardener Program can be found on the Wisconsin Master Gardener website at [www.wimastergardener.org](http://www.wimastergardener.org).

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Photo 1: Master Gardeners at the Kenosha County Center till in the winter rye cover crop in preparation for spring planting.

Photo 2: Master Gardeners plant the display gardens at the Kenosha County Fairgrounds.