



INTERNATIONAL MASTER GARDENER

2009 Search for Excellence Award Application

Edited version - to protect sensitive information.

*Further details may be obtained by contacting the Placer MG office: (530-889-7388).
Ask to speak to Calendar Chairpersons.*

Name of MG Program: UCCE Master Gardener Association of Placer County

County: Placer

State/Province: California

Master Gardener Completing Application:

Name: Pauline Sakai and Peggy Just Peterson (Calendar Co-Chairpersons)

Master Gardener Coordinator/County Extension Staff:

Name: Kevin Marini

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Category for Submission: Innovative Projects

Name of Project: A Gardener's Companion Calendar

2009 - Water-wise Gardening: Saving water has never been prettier

2008 - A Guide to Sustainable Landscaping: 13 months of earth-friendly gardening

2007 - 13 months of Gardening Wisdom

Description of Project

Description and Goal: The annual Gardener's Companion is a full-color, 13-month calendar. Each year, a two to three page article introduces a theme. Each month's spread contains a 250-word article that supports the theme, an attractive color photo, a "What to plant this month" box, daily reminders of what to do in the garden and contact information for our local MG Hotline and the university's IPM website. An extensive list of references used in researching the calendar and resources for further study is included.

Our primary goal for this project is to present research-based information that is appropriate for the time of year and local conditions to people of all knowledge levels, from those with no gardening experience to long-time garden enthusiasts. Secondarily we seek to increase visibility of our Master Gardener Program and raise funds to support other outreach efforts.

Partnership: A monthly "Did you know..." box often provides related information from, and contact info for, organizations such as the Invasive Plant Council, Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and California

Native Plant Society. Photos for the 2007 calendar were solicited from a local high school; subsequent calendars have included photos taken by non-MG members of the gardening community. The 2009 calendar, with its water-wise theme (chosen even before Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger announced that the state is in a drought), is being distributed by local water agencies.

Location and Target Audience: The primary targets are gardeners in the California counties of Placer, Nevada and El Dorado, but because the calendar is so attractive and prominently displayed in homes, we know non-gardening family members and visitors will view the information it contains as well and become more educated about gardening.

Methods

The Gardener's Companion Calendar project could easily be adopted by other MG organizations, large or small.

In February each year, a kick-off meeting is held to determine the following year's theme and assign the 13 related article topics. The writers have about two months to research and pare down the wealth of information to approximately 250 words of concise, easily read and absorbed educational material. Typically a writer will take on one or two assignments and volunteer 5-10 hours per article. Photographs are solicited and selected to accompany each article.

The most challenging aspect is the editing and layout process, which starts in late May. Facts are checked, holiday and event dates are verified, and articles are edited for consistency of voice, style and presentation. Several grammatical, typographic and technical review cycles are executed.

Concurrent with final editing and review, calendar mock-ups are readied in June for our salespersons to show to local nurseries and other entities to persuade them to pre-order calendars for resale. This year we included local water agencies in this process. These pre-sales, and past experience from direct sales allow us to determine the proper number of calendars to print.

The layout for the top page of each monthly spread is done in Microsoft Word; the bottom is produced in Calendar Creator™. The whole calendar is then converted to pdf format with Adobe Acrobat for delivery to the printer in late July or early August.

Publicity is primarily accomplished via local radio stations, our MG quarterly newsletter and several local newspapers. Local water agencies have included information regarding our calendar's availability in their bills' informational inserts.

Results

Being a small group of only 53 MGs, we needed an outreach project that would distribute as much pertinent knowledge to as many people as possible in an efficient manner. Unlike demo garden visits or workshops that present single topics to a limited number of contacts once in awhile, **our calendar provides a wide variety of research-based information, practical reminders, and contact information for acquiring even more knowledge, in an attractive, useful resource that people look at and can refer to every day.** In addition to the initial impact, our customers tell us they save their calendars from year to year as a valued reference source.

The Gardener's Companion Calendar has become a "must-have" in many households, with customers returning to buy copies for themselves and to give as gifts year after year.

Additionally, after viewing our calendar, at least four county organizations in California, and one in New Jersey, have been inspired to consider creating or improving their own locally appropriate versions. We have been honored and happy to provide them with our timelines, past topics and project-related documents.

Significant Learning and Impacts

Between 1350 and 1500 calendars are sold or donated each year and we estimate that each is seen by an average of at least three people, for total contact count of well over 4000. Multiply that by the hundreds of times over the year a contact looks to see what to do each day, and we certainly get maximum education delivered for the approximately 400 hours volunteered by the 20 member calendar team.

By incorporating university information in a friendly, familiar calendar format, households are exposed to concepts and knowledge in easily digestible chunks over an extended period of time, making learning almost effortless. Hanging on the refrigerator or over a desk, the information is accessible and viewed repeatedly, enhancing the educational impact. Owners of the calendar may initially look to the calendar to find traditional gardening information such as when to plant vegetables and how to plant and prune trees, but they are then exposed to newer concepts such as non-toxic weed and pest control and the advantages of replacing lawns. Local gardening issues such as planting under oaks, finding deer resistant plants, incorporating native plants in the garden and fire-resistant landscaping are addressed. With a drought looming in California, we introduce water-wise alternatives to traditional plantings and explain irrigation strategies.

With so many calendars on the market, many given away as free promotions, the fact that our customers choose to buy the Gardener's Companion is a testament to its value. Quotes from those who have seen and used our calendar explain it best:

"I won last year's calendar in a raffle and it was so good that I just have to buy one this year." —Unsolicited comment from an attendee at a recent speakers bureau event.

"The Placer Co. Master Gardeners' Water-wise Gardening Calendar for 2009 is beautiful, informative and easy to read. I especially appreciate the practicality of the calendar. It is meant for hanging on a wall, for everyone to view. And it has the two most important criteria I look for in a wall calendar: room to write in each of the daily squares (either garden chores done or dental appointments) as well as smaller versions of the previous month and the following month on each page. This is a calendar the whole family can use!" —

"Farmer Fred" Hoffman, local radio producer-host, and University of California Cooperative Extension Lifetime Master Gardener

"This calendar is an absolute necessity for all Placer County gardeners!!!" —Wayne Turrell, Green Acres Nursery

Budget

The budget varies from year to year, and is developed by examining sales projections—both pre-orders from nurseries and estimates of sales at Master Gardener events based on previous years' totals. Profits from each year provide the seed money for the next. In terms of cash flow, money is collected from resellers upon calendar delivery, allowing us pay printing costs immediately. Subsequent sales through the cooperative extension office and by MGs at Fairs, Festivals, and other venues are all profit. This profit has helped support other outreach efforts, buying such items as a laptop computer and projector for our speakers bureau, promotional handouts such as fans and pens with hotline contact info on them, and portable signs to better direct the public to our booths at fairs, festivals and farmers' markets.

This year, our cost for 1400 calendars was \$5600, including printing and marketing expenses. Income is estimated at \$8500, for a profit of \$2900. Per piece cost of each calendar is \$4.00 or less. Calendars are sold to resellers; these vendors then set their own selling price. Sales by MGs through the extension office and at fairs, festivals and other events are made at \$10 apiece or 5 for \$40. Some calendars are donated: to local garden editors and radio hosts for promotional purposes, to each county supervisor to heighten awareness of what we do, and to each organization visited by our speakers bureau to foster relationships in the community.