



WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

Cultivating Plants, People, and Communities since 1973



Master Gardener Program

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

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Tribal Lands Acknowledgement

It is essential that we take time as a community to acknowledge that the land we are so fortunate to call home is the ancestral territory of Native American First peoples. The Puyallup, a Coast Salish tribal people, have called this area home since time immemorial. We recognize that the privilege of being on this land came at a great cost to the Coast Salish peoples. We acknowledge the injustices of the past and present, and we support justice for indigenous people here and around the globe. We express gratitude and respect for the land, the tribes, their wisdom, and their generosity.



Pierce County includes 1,806 square miles of ceded lands of four Federally-recognized Tribes: the Puyallup Tribe, Nisqually Tribe, Muckleshoot Tribe, and Squaxin Island Tribe. These Tribes are sovereign governments that predate the founding of the United States, and their sovereignty is an inherent right that has existed since time immemorial, recognized with a government-to-government relationship by the United States.

WSU as a Land Grant Institution

As a land grant institution, WSU is required by federal acts to research, teach, and extend knowledge to Washington State people. The Morrill Act of 1862 established land-grant institutions by providing each state with "public" and federal lands, which trace back to the disposition of Indigenous lands. In 1890, Washington State received 90,081 acres of Indigenous Lands designated to establish Washington State University (<https://strategicplan.wsu.edu/acknowledgement-of-americas-first-peoples-4/>). WSU retains most of these lands to this day.

In 1887, the Hatch Act created funding for the agriculture experiment stations. In 1892, Washington Agriculture College and School of Science opened its doors to fifty-nine students and became Washington State University in 1959. Today's WSU Extension Master Gardener Programs have demonstrations gardens.

The 1914 Smith-Lever Act established the partnership between land grant institutions and county governments, paving the way for the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program to be born. Today there are 39 county offices and one tribal office, making WSU Extension the front door to the University by offering non-credit education to people throughout the state. WSU Extension empowers people, organizations, businesses, and communities to find solutions for local issues through programs like

4-H Youth Development, Master Gardeners, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Health and Nutrition, and Economic Development.

Letter and Introduction from Leadership

Dear WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program Volunteers,

Thank you for your dedication and efforts to help WSU serve its land-grant Mission through the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program. We want to express our gratitude to all those who took the time to participate in the strategic planning process. From meetings to surveys and everything in between, your input and feedback influenced this plan and will shape our Program's future.

Although we faced many challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to discuss the successes. 2020 and 2021 were filled with uncertainty, hardship, and fatigue, but we persevered through difficult times. We found innovative new ways to bring resources to those in need and came together to support each other. WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardeners built a pavilion, sold thousands of tomato plants, improved our garden accessibility, delivered numerous horticulture presentations, and answered homeowner questions from afar. We are strong; we are resilient; we are dedicated.

WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardeners recognized the need to better adapt to the needs of our community, especially considering the disruptions and new challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging our membership, community partners, and those we serve in the Strategic Planning process positions us to fulfill our Mission better and provide relevant support to our community. The continued updating and refinement of this Strategic Plan sets us up for success now and in the future.

It is important to remember that this is a living document and a living process. This is the first time we have created a strategic plan, and there will be a lot to learn. We will assess and adapt and, through mistakes and successes, learn what works best for us. Your participation and feedback are integral to making this a continued success.

We are committed to creating a healthy organization for our volunteers, delivering programs that connect residents and communities to research-based horticulture information. We also strive to create healthy and sustainable environments while improving personal and collective quality of life. Thank you for your commitment to our Program and to serving our communities.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Marquis, WSU Extension Master Gardener Program Leader

Jim Kropf, WSU Extension Pierce County Director

Caitlin Sprague, WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program Coordinator



VISION, MISSION, VALUES, AND PURPOSE

The WSU Extension Statewide Master Gardener Program serves the WSU Extension educational outreach Mission and goals. It aligns County WSU Master Gardener Programs and local foundations in a shared purpose. Values statements define who we are and describe the character traits and skill sets we seek in our volunteer educators.

Our Vision

Highly recognized, diverse, and fully supported, WSU Master Gardener volunteers are the go-to resource for communities seeking research-based, innovative solutions for their ever-changing horticulture and environmental stewardship needs.

Our Mission

Engaging university-trained volunteers to empower and sustain diverse communities with relevant, unbiased, research-based horticulture and environmental stewardship education.

Our Values

We value personal and professional research and discovery because it encourages us to stay current about horticulture and environmental stewardship to meet the unique educational needs of our communities.

We foster and benefit from an atmosphere of diversity and inclusivity because our differences inspire creative thinking and innovative solutions.

We act with integrity because trust, truthfulness, and respect create a healthy and positive culture.

We are committed to stewardship and sustainability by serving as ethical and responsible agents of our natural resources, human resources, and University resources.

We collaborate because together we empower healthy and resilient communities. We are a dynamic and responsive Program where knowledge inspires change.

Our Purpose

The WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program connects residents and communities to research-based horticulture information, creating healthy and sustainable environments while improving personal and collective quality of life.



WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Programs

The WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program (PCMG) is a volunteer-driven organization that provides a fulfilling and productive connection between volunteers, staff, and the community.

We make an impact by connecting with community members and partner organizations to educate and share knowledge on research-based horticultural practices for a healthy, sustainable environment. However, we know the value of WSU Extension Master Gardeners goes beyond the impact of our horticulture education, providing a more resilient and connected community.

We strengthen understanding and knowledge about the following priorities of the PCMG through our efforts and services. Community members ranked these priorities in order of importance (from left to right below) when responding to the 2021 Pierce County Master Gardener External Strategic Planning Survey.





Pierce County Master Gardener Program and Healthy Organization Goals

The WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program identified Program Goals and Healthy Organization Goals as key Strategic Plan focus areas.

Program Goals center on the community-focused delivery of educational outreach services to ensure the purpose of the WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program.

Healthy Organization Goals center on creating and supporting a healthy organizational (Program) culture that ensures programs achieve their objectives.



Program Goals

Demonstration Gardens: Effectively use Demonstration Gardens as valuable teaching and learning assets, developing measurable approaches to attract and engage visitors.

Educational Outreach Programs: Improve and expand current educational outreach programs to meet community needs during this planning and implementation cycle.

Community Connectors: Shift our focus from "horticulture experts" to "community connectors for horticulture information".

Diverse Membership and Accessible Program: Promote accessibility and inclusion to recruit and retain a more diverse membership.

MG Training & Mentoring: Update training procedures and mentoring efforts to meet community needs, draw from a more extensive base of our community, and successfully retain interns.

Marketing and Outreach: Develop a robust marketing and outreach campaign to reach our audience and achieve the Program Mission.



Healthy Organization Goals

Volunteer Input on Program Direction: Effectively engage volunteers in determining Program direction.

Leadership Training & Transition: Conduct effective succession planning and leadership training.

Internal Communication: Develop and deploy effective and measurable internal communication tools.

Celebration & Connection: Strengthen member relationships and regularly highlight Program and individual accomplishments.

Program Identity: Establish and communicate the foundational components of our Program.

Innovative Space: Develop a creative and innovative environment that embraces change and reflects best practices

Program Goals

Program Goals center on the community-focused delivery of programming to ensure the WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Purpose is achieved.

Goal 1: Demonstration Gardens

Context: Pierce County Master Gardeners have valuable teaching and outreach assets, as reflected in the two demonstration gardens (outdoor classrooms).

Goal Statement: *Effectively use Demonstration Gardens as valuable teaching and learning assets, developing measurable approaches to attract and engage visitors.*

- Utilize software to map the infrastructure of the gardens and retain map/data for future reference.
- Create and maintain an effective record of program activity information to improve internal communication, keeping participants informed about various programs within the garden.
- Collect and maintain volunteer contact information, making it readily available to interns and others.
- Onboard and establish effective mentorship of interns and volunteers to create a clear path for learning about various aspects of the garden.

Goal 2: Educational Outreach Programs

Context: Pierce County Master Gardener programs equip community members with horticultural and environmental stewardship skills.

Goal Statement: *Over the next three years, improve and expand on current educational outreach programs to meet the community's needs.*

Puyallup Demonstration Garden

- Build the concept of the Demonstration Garden as an outdoor classroom into all activities and events.
- Complete signage project to include the front kiosk, individual beds, and individual plant identification using welcoming wording in multiple languages.
- Create a list of Demonstration Garden workgroups and areas, with contact information and hours/days that each group is at the garden. Provide the list to Marketing and Communications for distribution as appropriate.

- Identify and train Demonstration Garden liaisons to work with interns, community gardens, and other outreach projects/groups.
- Research feasibility of offering plant clinics in conjunction with Saturday Talks and youth programs. Coordinate with Clinic Lead, Marketing and Communications, and Speaker's Bureau.
- Create an effective and efficient means for obtaining feedback about the Demonstration Garden, taking suggestions to the membership for analysis and action.
- Identify individuals to write regular reports of activities and discoveries at the Demonstration Garden, then work with the Marketing and Communications Team to share across various MG media platforms.
- Increase accessibility at the garden by maintaining and improving existing paths, offering clear signage and handouts, and redesigning the Accessible Garden area. Develop a plan for the identification and installation of an accessible parking area.
- Effectively engage in activities and events that welcome and connect volunteers in the Demonstration Garden.

Sehmel Demonstration Garden

- Work with appropriate partners to produce permanent signage for Sehmel demo garden, improving overall publicity and marketing.
- Expand the young gardener program by actively engaging with camps, school groups, and homeschoolers. Create a young gardener seasonal calendar of events and activities.
- Expand and improve the container garden program to demonstrate the possibilities and benefits of small space gardening. Take examples of container gardens to existing farmers' markets and clinics to demonstrate small space gardening.
- Expand the Heritage Garden demonstration area by purchasing, planting, and maintaining native plants in the area. Create signage for the new native plantings.
- Increase access to the garden by eliminating barriers to participation for groups such as adults and youth with developmental and physical disabilities.

Clinics

- Reopen Office Clinic to pre-COVID operating hours. Increase the number of PCMG volunteers participating in staffing the Office Clinic to fill 95% of the shifts.
- Open, staff, and conduct 15 community clinics at farmers' markets and garden centers.
- Fulfill 95% of pop-up clinic requests, including those for the State Fair.
- Provide interns in-class clinic training and support to staff a minimum of 3 clinic shifts as part of their intern requirements.

Community Gardens

- Recruit five new MGs as teachers and mentors in community gardens.
- Create and implement a method for gathering and sharing horticulture knowledge with each partner community garden and the surrounding neighborhood.

Rain Gardens

- Expand the focus of Rain Garden programming to include current practices in stormwater management.
- Create and implement a mentor/mentee program for volunteers, looking outside the Pierce Conservation District for Rain Garden opportunities.

Young Gardeners Program (YGP)

2021 Objectives

- Continue succession planning by clearly documenting position descriptions; elect YGP leaders each fall.
- Continue family video and kit experiences for July and August; move to in-person events as WSU guidelines permit.
- Work to make the Children's Garden in the Puyallup Demonstration Garden easier to maintain; investigate new ideas for family learning within the garden.

2022 Objectives

- Get back into the garden with the children. Provide family-oriented gardening experiences for children and families to gather and explore nature. Continue the summer Saturday family experiences.

- Recruit more leaders to conduct YGP tours
- Recruit additional MG interns into the program
- Develop a mentoring program in our YGP where each MG intern has a one-on-one experience with a veteran MG.
- Develop a mentoring program for committee leads (garden, tour, communications, etc.)
- Investigate kid mentoring, where older kids learn to mentor younger kids.
- Continue outreach to unique places, such as school fairs and the Washington State Spring Fair booth.

2023 Objectives

- Explore alternative ways to work with families, such as drop-in days in the garden during the week or group gardening experiences on specified days.
- Implement kid mentoring.

Speakers Bureau

- Fulfill 95% of requests for Master Gardener speakers at public events.
- Enhance community awareness of PCMG speakers' program and Saturday Garden Talks at the Demonstration Gardens, hosting 100 talks annually.
- Provide annual presentation and PowerPoint training to PCMGs to enhance presentation skills. Create an evaluation tool that measures the content and effectiveness of presentations.
- Sponsor an annual Speaker Bureau project for the intern class.

Propagation

- Study the various propagation techniques to share knowledge with fellow master gardeners and the public via presentations, workshops, and clinics.
- As individual members, learn general horticulture, pest and disease management, plant identification, and greenhouse management techniques, sharing the information with fellow MGs and the public as appropriate.

- Explore ways to conserve water when watering plants and share the knowledge with interested parties.
- Contribute propagated plants in support of the Annual MG Foundation Plant Sale.

Women's Correction Center of Washington

- Expand horticulture skills and knowledge that increase employability and generational learning by maintaining a community/ demonstration garden within the walls of WCCW.
- Increase access to diverse knowledge and strengthen personal and professional relationships by providing guest speakers, direct access to outside instructors, and partnerships with local community organizations.
- Increase confidence and skills in seeking employment through mentorship in horticulture-centered resume-writing and mock interview training.
- Increase MG and public awareness of innovative solutions to preventing recidivism while reducing stigma for women with histories of incarceration.

Continuing Education

- Offer 25 annual hours of high-quality continuing education, ensuring MGs have sufficient horticulture knowledge to share when staffing community events.
- Conduct an annual full-day gardening education workshop open to both MGs and the public. Increase public participation at the event and provide ten scholarships for low-income individuals.

Goal 3: Community Connectors

Context: While WSU Extension Master Gardeners receive rigorous training, this does not qualify them as "gardening experts." Many other organizations share and promote horticulture information; indigenous and immigrant communities also have helpful and valuable knowledge.

Goal Statement: *Shift the focus from being "horticulture experts" to "community connectors for horticulture information".*

Objective 1: Create and evolve partnerships with other community organizations, working collaboratively to address shared priorities that respect indigenous and cultural practices.

Objective 2: Actively participate in community-sponsored events, especially in underserved areas of Pierce County. Listen to and report on community needs to better target programming.

Objective 3: Participate in community gardens as members and mentors, sharing horticultural and food growing knowledge.

Objective 4: Develop programs to be delivered in community garden settings and coordinate with other speakers from the garden to build shared experiences and knowledge.

Objective 5: Expand and promote public plant and garden start sales using both online and in-person methods. Coordinate with other existing sales to leverage the success of all similar efforts.

Objective 6: Identify and engage with community leaders to learn about their communities and how to best address their needs.

Objective 7: Continue to nurture and grow partnerships with entities such as Pierce County and Pierce County Planning and Public Works – Solid Waste to ensure strong collaboration and cooperation into the future.

Goal 4: Creating a Diverse Membership and Accessible Program

Context: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is a central tenet of a successful organization. The WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program strives to have a membership base reflective of the Pierce County community, offering physical spaces and inclusive practices to all.

Goal Statement: *Promote accessibility and inclusion to recruit and retain a more diverse membership.*

Objective 1: Acknowledge racism exists in our communities, identify exclusionary areas of our program, and build a more inclusive space for Program participants.

Objective 2: Build our membership capacity to recognize and appreciate differences in science, gardening, and education approaches.

Objective 3: Require baseline DEI training for all Master Gardener volunteers.

Objective 4: Implement practices to recruit volunteers from diverse communities.

Objective 5: Actively recruit diverse speakers for training sessions and programs.

Objective 6: Survey volunteers annually about accessibility needs within the Program and work with program leads to implement improvements.

Objective 7: Assign DEI committee members and others interested in serving as mentors/connectors to PCMG programs.

Objective 8: Engage membership in reviewing, refining, and adopting an equity statement using the guiding principles drafted by the Pierce County Master Gardener Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Team.

Goal 5: WSU Extension Master Gardener Training and Mentoring

Context: The PCMG provides comprehensive training for interns and assigns mentors to help guide intern trainees through their learning process. The current MG Training format does not accommodate the needs of many trainees.

Goal Statement: *Conduct effective Master Gardener training and mentoring that addresses and supports intern needs.*

Objective 1: Provide flexibility in completing classroom training modules.

Objective 2: Define and further develop the role of mentors in supporting new intern training. Develop training modules for prospective mentors to include leadership, outreach, learning support, DEI, and conflict resolution.

Objective 3: Create a forum for curriculum collaboration and knowledge sharing between county MG Programs.

Objective 4: Expand intern and veteran education beyond horticultural knowledge to include emotional intelligence, community ambassadorship, encountering

racism, intercultural competency skills, conflict resolution, and other relevant topics.

Objective 5: Identify "Learning Pathways" that connect to the 10 State Program Priorities.

Objective 6: Develop an MG training program that minimizes barriers to participation.

Goal 6: Marketing and Outreach

Context: Master Gardeners are community conduits for horticulture information. If we cannot reach our audiences, we cannot achieve our Mission.

Goal Statement: *Conduct effective and measurable marketing, communication, and outreach activities.*

Objective 1: Use resources (e.g., GIS mapping) to determine how best to target specific communities.

Objective 2: Develop outreach methods and marketing outlets to reach target audiences (e.g., plant sale participants or children and families).

Objective 3: Develop a press release kit that includes branding guidelines and unified messaging. Regularly update kits with material featuring events, activities, and services; distribute to identified contacts.

Objective 4: Develop a marketing plan that includes social media, traditional media, and word-of-mouth outreach.

Objective 5: Verify audience needs and annually evaluate PCMG Program outreach efforts to ensure relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Objective 6: Create and implement ways to communicate the schedule and location of community and office clinics to enhance services, improve responsiveness, and increase awareness among the public.

Healthy Organization Goals

Healthy Organization Goals center on creating and supporting a healthy organization to ensure the Program Objectives can be achieved.

Goal 1: Volunteer Support and Input on Program Direction

Context: WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener volunteers are valued contributors and should have a role in helping to shape its future.

Goal Statement: *Effectively engage volunteers in determining Program direction.*

Objective 1: At quarterly meetings, engage the Leadership Team in decision-making and directional planning activities.

Objective 2: Provide all volunteers the opportunity to be involved in strategic planning activities through surveys, meetings, or other forms of engagement. At a minimum, update the strategic plan every three years.

Objective 3: Develop and begin to implement tools to evaluate the impact of the Master Gardener Program. Use these tools during strategic planning activities to create new and improved goals and objectives.

Objective 4: Create an effective model for mentoring all interns and those new to volunteering in a particular program (e.g., Rain Garden, Propagation, Demonstration Gardens, Speakers Bureau). Hold regular mentor training sessions. Survey those receiving mentorship to determine the effectiveness of efforts and ways to improve support for both mentors and mentees.

Goal 2: Leadership Training and Transition

Context: The WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program has strong leadership across and within its programs. Our programs could not function well without effective leadership.

Goal Statement: *Conduct effective leadership and succession planning.*

Objective 1: With the support and assistance of WSU staff and volunteer peers, create a succession plan for each leadership position.

Objective 2: Create a resource binder for program chairs that includes, but is not limited to, chair responsibilities; program documents; WSU policies and procedures; the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program's Mission, Vision, and Values; and contact lists.

Objective 3: Develop leadership training that includes but is not limited to team development, meeting facilitation, conflict management, DEI training, first aid, and other leadership development opportunities.

Objective 4: Develop a process for prospective leaders/chairs to indicate interest in, learn about, and assume leadership roles.

Goal 3: Internal Communication

Context: Effective internal communication is essential to a well-oiled and functioning organization.

Goal Statement: *Develop and deploy effective and measurable internal communication tools.*

Objective 1: Review internal communication methods regularly and when frequent and consistent concerns are noted.

Objective 2: Conduct an annual communications survey with the membership to determine how communication preferences have changed.

Objective 3: Create and maintain a clear and accurate organizational chart with supporting documents such as program descriptions, locations, contact information, and leadership.

Goal 4: Celebration and Connection

Context: The WSU Extension Pierce Master Gardener Program is successful because of the time and dedication of its volunteers, who thrive on positive connections with the community and each other.

Goal Statement: *Strengthen member relationships and regularly highlight program accomplishments.*

Objective 1: Host at least one event annually focused on celebrating accomplishments and fostering volunteer relationships.

Objective 2: Offer additional social gatherings during slow Program periods.

Objective 3: Be deliberate about making volunteer opportunities fun for volunteers.

Objective 4: Highlight group and individual accomplishments in internal communications and through external media.

Goal 5: Program Foundations

Context: The WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program (PCMG) functions under and alongside multiple agencies.

The PCMG has Mission, Vision, and Values statements and defined program priorities to give the program direction. Our purpose is clearly outlined in these documents. The PCMG is housed under WSU Extension in the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS). As such, PCMG volunteers agree to follow the policies and procedures set forth by WSU.

The WSU Extension PCMG Program also functions with support from the Master Gardener Foundation of Pierce County (MGFPC).

Goal statement: *Establish and communicate the foundational components of our Program.*

Objective 1: Ensure the internal communication plan and marketing campaign visibly and contextually reflect the connection to WSU Extension.

Objective 2: Ensure that all new program leaders and MGFPC Board members understand the relationship between WSU and the PCMG Program and clearly and articulately communicate the importance of our connection.

Objective 3: Create regularly scheduled meetings with all volunteers to discuss how our programs and activities move our Mission forward.

Objective 4: Ensure all PCMG volunteers understand the structure, purpose, and the role each volunteer plays in delivering on WSU Extension's outreach Mission.

Objective 5: Cultivate and maintain a mutually beneficial partnership between the PCMG and the Master Gardener Foundation of Pierce County.

Objective 6: Ensure all volunteers understand, agree, and comply with the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program's Code of Conduct.

Goal 6: Innovation Space

Context: New ideas to the WSU Extension Pierce County Master Gardener Program are always welcomed and encouraged.

Goal Statement: *Engage members in innovative and creative idea generation to ensure relevant services reach the Pierce County community.*

Objective 1: Develop an innovation process to encourage the generation of new ideas for consideration by the Leadership Team.

Objective 2: Recruit a "Futures Team" to look for program and outreach opportunities that meet the changing needs of the Pierce County community.

Objective 3: Provide incentives for the development of new education and outreach tools and processes.

Summary

In 2023 the Washington State Master Gardener Program will celebrate 50 years of accomplishments. As with many volunteer organizations, how the Program functions, plans, and envisions the future evolves and grows. The creation of this strategic plan provides a means for measuring success, discovering areas in need of improvement, establishing a strategic planning model available to other MG Programs in Washington.