

2013 Search for Excellence Award Application

Name of MG Program: Eau Claire Area Master Gardener Association

County: Eau Claire **State/Province:** Wisconsin

Master Gardener completing Application:

Name: Nina Logan & Lori Kempen

Email: ninalogan@centurylink.net / lorikempen@charter.net

Address: Nina E3370 Spruce Rd., Eleva WI, 54738
Lori 2624 Calumet Rd., Eau Claire WI, 54701

Phone: Nina 715-878-4585 / Lori 715-832-8088

Master Gardener Coordinator/County Extension Staff:

Name: Erin LaFaive

Title: Horticulture Educator

Email: erin.lafaive@ces.uwex.edu

Address: 227 First St. West, Altoona, WI 54720

Phone: 715-839-4712

Category for Submission:

- Youth
- Demonstration garden
- Workshop or presentation
- Community Service
- Innovative Project
- Special Needs Audience
- Research (applied scientific methodology)

Name of Project: Ready, Set, Grow! Winter Garden Seminar

Description of Project:

The Ready, Set, Grow! Winter Garden Seminar (WGS) is held in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, at the Chippewa Valley Technical College. A WGS has been organized every February for several years including 2010, 2011, and 2012 by members of the Eau Claire Area Master Gardener Association. Topics in the past 3 years include: composting, organic gardening, indoor plant care, tree care, bird feeding and identification, landscaping, lasagna gardening, permaculture, vegetable gardening, blue-birding, Emerald Ash Borer preparedness, art in the garden, and bee keeping.

The goals of the WGS are to educate Master Gardener Volunteers and the general public from surrounding counties. Another goal is to increase interest in gardening as well as expand awareness to the public of the resources available from UW Extension and the Master Gardener Volunteer Program.

Many partnerships help create a successful WGS: green industry businesses including local and distant, Chippewa Valley Technical College, and Eau Claire County UW Extension office. Local green industry businesses provide door prizes and become vendors at the event. Distant green industry businesses provide free catalogs to hand out to attendees. Chippewa Valley Technical College provides an affordable fee to rent their facilities and provides useful help from staff. Eau Claire County UW Extension office staff takes registrations and phone inquiries from the public and the Horticulture

Educator reaches out to the media and requests speakers from UW Extension specialists.

Methods:

A committee of nine members coordinates the WGS. Each member is responsible for a subcommittee. At monthly meetings, if help is needed by subcommittee members the committee as a whole helps to decide. Planning begins in September for the next year's seminar.

The Co-chairs are responsible for reserving the venue, contacting speakers, and selecting the menu, however the entire committee has input. Other subcommittees include: vendors, door prizes, promotional items (brochures, etc.), finances, free publications, and book sales.

Registration opens over a month in advance of the seminar. Walk-in registrations are welcome at an increased fee. Advertising of the seminar is through press releases, local news interviews, flyers, postings on the Eau Claire Master Gardener Association website and newsletter, Eau Claire County UWEX website, the Horticulture Educator's Green Pages newsletter, and word of mouth.

The day before the event, MGVs assist with setting up the vendor layout of tables and chairs. During the day of the seminar over 30 Master Gardener Volunteers are at hand to help vendors bring in display items, help with the registration table, and technical support. Each attendee is provided a folder which distributes a lunch ticket, seminar schedule, evaluation, and Song Sparrow catalog.

Vendors are set in the hallway which runs from large speaker room to small speaker rooms downstairs. The committee gets together after each seminar to discuss what worked and what didn't in an effort to improve each year.

Results/ Significant Learning and Impacts:

The seminar has reached 453 attendees and provided 26 workshops since 2010. Over 30 MGVs assist with the WGS the day of the seminar.

A total of 261 evaluations have been returned since 2010. An evaluation is provided in every attendee's folder. We use a rating system (on a scale of 1-5 from excellent to poor) to rate location of seminar, room arrangement, food, traffic flow and time allowed, month/date for Winter Seminar. Each presentation gets rated in the same way. Over 90% of the evaluations show excellent ratings for the all aspects of the seminar.

A comment section includes questions about: what was the best thing about the conference? How will you apply new ideas from this conference that will improve your gardening skills? What topics would you like to see next year? The comments indicate that attendees are learning new varieties that work for our area's climate; enhancing environmental consciousness; excited to try new gardening techniques; increasing knowledge of gardening techniques; and increasing awareness of local gardening business.

Quotes from 2010-2012 Winter Garden Seminars

<p>Try new varieties that work for our area's climate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "good to know about 'best choices' for our area"• "How to get started on a new garden"
<p>Increased knowledge of gardening techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "my compost is gonna get cooking, and I may invest in a tree peony!"• "plan early, budget"• "move my daylilies to a new location!"• "tell sister not to cut her grasses in fall-wit until spring, waiting to plant certain plants until June"• "winterizing my bulbs so they don't rot!"
<p>Gets people excited to try new gardening techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "renewed my interest in Bee-keeping"• "very fun-gets me excited about gardening for spring"• In 2012 many participants reported that they were enthusiastic to try lasagna gardening.• "Encourages me to explore gardening opportunities"• "using rope to map out areas of the property for landscape design"• The Bluebird presentation in 2011 many bluebird houses were sold at the bluebird vendor booth
<p>Enhancing environmentally consciousness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "understand my surroundings"• "think more about permaculture"• "layering mulch for soil integrity"• "greater awareness of environmental issues and will try new plants"• "working with bees instead of against them"
<p>Increase local business:</p> <p>"We're planning road trips to a couple of vendor nurseries"</p>

Budget Narrative:

The \$30 registration fee and \$20 vendor space fee haven't increased in the last 3 years. In the past book sales brought in money too, but sales have declined dramatically while sales to vendors haven't.

The registration fees pay for meals and refreshments, venue rental, speaker fees, and promotional materials. Meals are the greatest expense to the WGS budget.

MGVs also pay the registration fee, even if they are volunteering for a portion of that day. This practice keeps the seminar fiscally sound. With over 30 volunteers at \$30 that would equal a \$900 loss for the Association. Vendors have the option to pay a meal price or bring their own lunch. Presenters eat free.

The main speaker is usually our highest paid speaker. Then we try to find local presenters which bring down the cost because of reduced travel costs. MGVs and UW Specialist are typically free of charge. By using a variety of types of speakers we are able to keep costs down while attracting great speakers to provide excellent presentation.

The funds made from the WGS provide enough money to host monthly educational events for the public and MGVs throughout the year.

Names of All Active Master Gardeners Directly Involved in the Project:

Nina Logan, Lori Kempen, Sue Kaul, Jo-Ann Clark, Cindy Ferver, Carol Cox, Sharon McGeorge, Sue Wagner