

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Plants grown and sold by the Master Gardeners of Cumberland County at the WheatonArts Ecofair. Photo: Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station

All Green Thumbs

...and you can be too, if you take advantage of programs and expertise offered by the county's Master Gardeners

By J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

The history of Master Gardeners in New Jersey is intertwined with the history of Rutgers University and in many ways is historically tied to three major federal acts.

Rutgers was founded as Queen's College in 1766. It was one of the original colonial colleges established even before the American Revolution. In the beginning it was a private institution with Dutch theological roots, but in 1825 it was renamed in honor of Colonel Henry Rutgers, a Revolutionary War hero and patron of the institution, and became Rutgers College.

In 1862 the Morrill Act was passed, requiring that 30,000 acres of public lands be allotted to each state senator and Congressional representative with the intent of establishing colleges to focus on "agriculture and mechanic arts."

In 1864 George H. Cook successfully lobbied Congress to have Rutgers become New Jersey's "land-grant college," and it became known as Rutgers Scientific School. Through this development the institution realized a little over \$5,000, which today would be valued at \$159,819 (Morgan Friedman Westegg Inflation Calculator).

There is at least one land-grant institution in every state and territory of the United States

The concept behind the Morrill Act was that the College would provide at least one free lecture in every county each year. Farmers' demands for more materials led to the

program supplementing the available information with additional bulletins, reports, and articles. Rutgers even invested in train exhibits with lectures that traveled around the towns of New Jersey.

As a result of the Morrill Act a 100-acre farm being purchased on the outskirts of New Brunswick as an experimental farm in 1880. Today it is the heart of the Cook campus: "The Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Studies."

In 1887 the Hatch Act provided each land-grant college funding to support their experimental stations. Rutgers realized \$15,000 – today's value \$479,457 (Morgan Friedman Westegg Inflation Calculator). Ten years prior to the Hatch Act, Rutgers and 13 other states had established agricultural experimental stations, the Hatch Act further bolstered their research and development.

The continual travel was a drain on resident professors, so in 1912 the farmers of Sussex County joined forces with the Lackawanna Railroad, and a local chamber of commerce established the State's first formal cooperative extension program.

In 1914 the Smith-Lever Act launched a national cooperative extension service. Today the United States Department of

Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) provides oversight to the national Cooperative Extension System (CES). Rutgers guides these activities in New Jersey.

CES is a non-credit educational network that provides support to farmers, ranchers, communities, families, and youngsters around the country. Depending on the state and county the programs vary greatly. NIFA describes CES as the largest educational system of its kind in the world, offering not just agricultural and home economic programs but also initiatives that address social and economic problems and offer cultural, recreational, and leisure-time activities. Keep in mind this is a non-credit network that stresses inclusion, interest, knowledge, and enjoyment. The idea is to get the general public actively involved in their community in a meaningful way – a way that relates to needs and resources.

I often look up extension service website articles when preparing accounts for you the reader, because their material is developed by professionals at educational institutions with learned information.

We are drilling down to the particulars of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service of Cumberland County, New Jersey and

ultimately to the Master Gardeners program. In Rutgers' description of the Cumberland County CES, they note, "Agriculture has been the major industry in Cumberland County since colonial times! The county has the climate, soil, topography, water supply, and human resources ideal for agriculture and is located in the geographic center of the largest metropolitan market area in the United States, between Washington D.C. and Boston, MA. Cumberland County is the 'Garden Spot of the Garden State.'"

The Cumberland County Extension Center is divided into four departments: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family Community Health Sciences, 4H Youth Department, and Lawn & Garden – Home Horticulture and Master Gardeners.



Master Gardeners propagation team. Photo: Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station

In New Jersey 17 of 21 Counties have a Master Gardeners program.

Each year many folks attend WheatonArts EcoFair. I am one of those folks and I am not a Master Gardener. The Master Gardeners host a booth that sells spring plants for home gardeners and where they also provide a small army of experienced horticulturalists, most of whom are engaged with visitors throughout the day. It is their largest single event. When I was at the booth I counted 23 Master Gardeners all assisting folks with their questions and purchases.



The WheatonArts Ecofair is the Master Gardeners of Cumberland County largest festival. Photo: Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station.

In addition to plants, the Extension Service offers a plethora of literature on a myriad of

topics. Those of greatest interest include pesticides and herbicides, insect and plant identification, planting and transplanting techniques, and spotted lanternfly natural history and control.

I first became aware of the Master Gardeners through my own volunteer contributions at CU Maurice River. Master Gardeners often come out to help with our rain garden installations and maintenance, and they always display a great attitude and a helpful nature. A number are very active in CU activities as well.

In recent years the Master Gardeners have placed more emphasis on the importance of native plants and their role in our ecosystem, stressing how you can integrate these plants into your own landscape.

Lest you think their commitment is slipshod they have a high bar of achievement each year. They are trained in horticulture and learn from experts. To maintain their certification they need to complete 25 hours of service and 10 hours of continuing education annually. Most exceed these minimums and they look for opportunities to share their knowledge with the general public. Master Gardeners offer school programs and a children's table at events. A number of them are retired teachers and other professionals.



Children's table WheatonArts. Photo: Rutgers.



Master Gardener Patti Klem Sheppard paints a child's arm at the Children's Table, Greenwich Craft Faire. Photo: Scott Sheppard

They maintain a Lawn and Garden helpline at 856-451-2800 ext. 4 and a newsletter "to promote best practices in horticulture, such as soil and water management, pest and disease control, and plant selection." They help identify pests and provide expertise on pruning, planting, harvesting, composting, and more. And the Rutgers Cooperative Extension hosts a monthly speaker and other educational programs.

Maybe you have an interest in getting involved with the Master Gardeners. Kaylynn Hyson, the Master Gardener Coordinator and Home Horticulture Educator, can be reached at Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cumberland County, 291 Morton Ave., Millville, NJ 856-451-2800, ext. 4, or email her at kaylynnhy@cumberlandcountynj.gov

I was unaware of the history of land-grant colleges and the extension services although I make use of their informative services all the time. You will find them helpful as well.