Small is Beautiful Report Summary 2014

Gardening has become a leading activity among educators, volunteers, and a host of community organizations and agencies. Within Cooperative Extension, garden programs are growing at a seemingly exponential rate. Many gardens struggle to sustain themselves, often feeling pressure to develop new garden programs rather than enhance current ones. Many CCE horticulture and 4-H youth development educators have stated that it is challenging to secure funding for their garden projects, both to kick-start the project, or keep it going and secure specific supply needs. Cornell Garden-Based Learning (CGBL) responded to this need by offering a mini-grant program to NYS CCE Garden Educators, called Small is Beautiful.

The Small is Beautiful project made available funds of $250 to $400 to 8 garden projects across New York State. While these amounts may seem so miniscule, the request for proposals surfaced a number of other opportunities including encouraging applicants to think intentionally about their proposed garden program. Applicants were required to consider ecological gardening techniques, cross-CCE-program collaboration, inclusion of youth leadership, and to explain their documentation and evaluation methods.

CGBL received 23 requests for proposals applications. The eight selected projects were instructed to document successes and challenges, ecological strategies utilized, the number of people their garden reached during the 2014 season.

Although the growing season, and thus formal project reporting have ceased, project leaders continue to keep projects active. Some gardens are under a winter cover crop; some educators are planning spring tours and program expansion in 2015. We look forward to continuing to hear about the successes of each project. Unfortunately, we will not be able to offer Small is Beautiful again in 2015, but stay tuned to our blog and website for other funding updates.

Small is Beautiful Recipients
The eight gardens from around the State were each unique in scope, goals and capacity. As of December 2014, over 800 youth and adults engaged in a Small is Beautiful garden.
Chenango County – SIB funding enabled this technology-focused garden project to happen. Funding reimbursed the purchase of pumps, piping, timers and electrical supplies to build an aeroponic growing system. Teens from the 4-H program worked together as a self-directed group to design and build the aeroponic unit, learning to wire, plumb, and balance nutrients to successfully grow potatoes. The unit has been on display at the CCE office. Additional funding allowed for the purchase of enough supplies to give each student the materials to build their own small unit at home.

Columbia/Green Counties – Funding was used to build nine 3’ x 3’ raised vegetable garden beds, which were needed to participate in the Vegetable Varieties Trial and provide an outdoor setting for the newly establish Jr. Master Gardeners to learn about plants, soil, biodiversity and vegetables. Though funding covered the cost of materials, the established beds will continue to be used by the Jr. Master Gardeners and the Master Gardener Volunteers. Approximately 70 community members attended an annual open house of the garden and read informational signage about the garden beds and ecological gardening techniques employed in them.

Putnam County – A raised garden was built at five childcare facilities in the county and CCE staff and volunteers provided childcare staff training on growing vegetables and engaging children in gardening and related activities. Due to the success of this pilot program, additional funding from other sources has been secured and the program will be expanded to ten childcare centers in 2015.

Rockland County – This garden program engaged youth, Master Gardener Volunteers and a RISE volunteer to establish and maintain a native plants pollination garden and a compost project. The whole school of 450 students and 6 teachers enthusiastically took part in the projects. Composting lessons will continue in the classroom throughout the winter. The projects will continue in 2015 and expand to include planting bulbs, fruit trees, monitoring weather and rain and integrating the activities into math class.
Schenectady County – RISE Volunteers, Master Gardeners Volunteers and Roots n’ Wisdom youth contributed to this intergenerational demonstration garden. An unused cold-frame was revitalized as a raised garden bed and an additional 9, 3 x 3 raised beds were built as part the Vegetable Variety Trail garden project. A large sign was made to draw attention to the demonstration garden as well as fencing and children’s gardening tools. Community engagement and newspaper articles made the project well known and over 300 people attended the garden’s Earth Day event in April.

Sullivan County – Highlights of the 2014 season was starting a Jr. Master Gardener Program in the county and using the CCE demo garden as an outdoor classroom. Youth participated in the county fair and one gave a public presentation on how to get started with vermiculture (composting with worms). Four family-oriented public gardening workshops were led by Master Gardener Volunteers at the CCE demonstration garden and over 40 parents and youth attended each one. Workshops like these will be continued in 2015, as will the Jr. MGV program.

Tompkins County – SIB funding enabled the purchase of soil/compost to fill three new garden boxes and plant the new beds with perennial herbs to enhance the gardens beauty, attract pollinators and add fresh flavor to the meals the After-School Garden Club make. Over 55 youth were involved in planting, maintaining and eating from this garden. The involved youth gave public tours of the garden during the town’s Harvest Festival.

Yates County – The 4-H gardening club built two vegetable garden beds with SIB funds. The 23 club members decided what to plant, prepared plots, planted seeds and transplants and cared for the plants during the season. Harvest was cooked at home to engage families and recipes were shared at monthly meetings. Ecological gardening methods were used such as sheet mulching and companion planting. The 4-H youth are already looking forward to planning the garden again in 2015.