

DE Junior Master Gardener Program Provides Youth Education and Outreach

Issue (Who cares and why?)

Students in grades K-12 in New Castle County, Delaware schools are required to have lessons in the natural sciences. Many teachers, however, do not have this science training, nor the time to allow them to research and prepare science lessons beyond the basics. Teachers and administrators also regularly transfer out of schools, making a consistent natural sciences program difficult to maintain.

What has been done?

Cooperative Extension at the University of Delaware developed an outreach program to encourage parents to request additional natural science programming for their schools, such as interactive, hands-on and outdoor activities. The New Castle County Master Gardener Youth and Education and Outreach--Junior Gardener program was formed especially for grades K-4. In 2002, Master Gardener volunteer educators ran a series of 15 different programs at 97 area public and private schools and home-schooling groups. Topics included vermicomposting, soil sciences, seeds, insects, butterflies, trees, topiary and spring bulbs.

Impact

More than 8,000 students, teachers and other adults associated with the school participated in the Junior Gardener program. Reports from 150 teachers indicated that these natural science programs supplemented and even went outside of the mandated school curricula. They also reported that students welcomed the change of pace from the regular school day and these programs also exposed many urban children to a natural world they did not know about. Requests for future Junior Gardener programs increased by 150 percent over the previous year.

Funding

Extension
User fees

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