



Creative Excellence

Mark J. Platton, County Extension Director, Colorado State University

Mark has helped his community garden at 7,500-10,500-foot elevations and 90-day maximum frost-free days. His creativity since 2008 includes:

1. Renovating a greenhouse at 9,500 feet and starting a Junior Master Gardener program, educating hundreds of youth and becoming the state representative for the National JMG program.
2. Conducting research on high elevation gardening raised bed covers and season extending that was used statewide. Working with a NASA scientist to test a proprietary biochar to replicate growing on Martian soil for use in future Mars exploration.
3. Developing a 120-page month-by-month high elevation garden planning book. Over 450 have been sold and multiple mountain counties have replicated it.
4. Covid prevented us from training in person. Mark created an online course that can be viewed at any time and there are over 50 pdf attachments spread throughout the lessons. Course Link: <https://teller-county-extension.thinkific.com/courses/gardening-in-teller-county>
Online evaluation: <https://forms.gle/2iMEfPiPWAXrRyTt6>
5. Mark compiled a list of specific fruit and vegetable varieties, receiving over 60 submissions and 128 varieties. It has been downloaded or handed out over 1,500 times and is a key resource for success for high elevation counties.
6. Mark started a greenhouse and garden tour in 2016 with 14 sites and 450 visitors each year. During Covid he conducted video interviews of gardeners which are available on his website: <https://teller.extension.colostate.edu/programs/gardening-horticulture/> receiving 2,741 visits so far.
7. Mark developed a free Colorado Woody Plant App identifying the 200 native woody plants and can be downloaded using CO Woody Plants with over 1,000 downloads.



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Vanessa Venturini, State Program Director, Extension Master Gardener Program, University of Rhode Island

In 2015, while participating in the “Celebration of Cultures” at the Roger Williams Botanical Center in Providence, Vanessa was embarking on a journey that would lead her to issues of DEI, creating ‘belonging’ within the MG Program of URI. This event collaboration was a wonderful display of various cultures through performance, music and tours of the Botanical Center. It was a

wonderful experience and much was learned about the need to create a place of belonging for all people.

As part of the movement towards social progress and social justice, the University of Rhode Island Master Gardener Program (URIMGP) proactively initiated the JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Task Force in February of 2020 with a mission to focus on attracting and retaining volunteer educators, representative of the diverse population of Rhode Island, so that collectively we may better serve our community. The JEDI Task Force consists of a learning community and working group of 40+ Extension volunteers and staff, initially meeting monthly and currently bimonthly amongst four sub-teams: Access, Volunteer Education, Reciprocal Relationships and Systemic Change.

The JEDI task force hosted the following training sessions in 2020:

- Equity and Inclusion in the Community Garden
- Foundations of Multicultural Competence
- Multicultural Organizational Change
- Disrupting Implicit Bias with Inclusive Behaviors
- Understanding Social Identity Power and Privilege
- Combating Microaggressions with Inclusive Language

The ultimate goal is to have JEDI permeate all facets of services, teachings and offerings within and throughout the URIMGP. “*As we’ve been reflecting, we’ve accomplished much and this work is an ongoing effort,*” states Vanesa Venturini. In this movement of equity, diversity and belonging there is a richness and profound beauty for all people willing to work together and create the beloved gardening community. Community starts (the U in commUnity), as in literally, with you, the individual. The creation of the beloved gardening community is the work of a lifetime. It is the work we have intentionally committed to as URIMG JEDITES.



Distinguished Coordinator

Marjorie Peronto, Extension Educator, University of Maine Cooperative Extension

It is hard to imagine the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and especially the Master Gardener Volunteer Program without Marjorie Peronto. For the last thirty-one years, Marjorie has been the coordinator of programs in iconic “Downeast” Maine. Maine is a large state with an agricultural legacy that Marjorie has built on and added to over three decades. But that is really only part of what distinguishes Marjorie. Her calm balanced and pragmatic approach means not only **can** something be done but also assures you why it **should** be done. If this makes Marjorie sound like she is some

staid-by-the-book educator there is nothing further from the truth.

Marjorie wrote the book, literally on Gardening in New England, and still, she doesn’t take herself too seriously. Her volunteer management style focuses on fun and passion for her volunteers, this state, and its people. Marjorie is always looking for the fun part of even the most mundane task and her smile tell you it’s okay to enjoy it even if it is a serious and

important topic. Although she is committed to her work, pollinators, and native plantings in very serious ways her hobby is Steel Drum Playing! Marjorie shies away from the limelight and she might be embarrassed to know we are nominating her. We all know what an honor it is to work with her and have her in our lives.



Distinguished Coordinator

**David Rodriguez, County Extension Agent,
Horticulture, Texas A & M Agri-Life Extension**

David Rodriguez became the Extension Horticulture Agent in Bexar County, Texas in 2006. There are 204 active Master Gardeners under his tutelage. Three original members remain from the class of 1989 and two have 25 years of continued service. This longevity is a testament to David's leadership.

David promotes the Texas A&M University Earth-Kind® Environmental Stewardship Program focusing on environmentally friendly practices to produce low-maintenance

and sustainable landscapes.

David is a driving force behind the Texas Superstar® Plant Program where plants undergo extensive field trials and must be super-performers under Texas growing conditions with minimal care and preparation. Ninety percent of the designated Superstars come from Bexar.

David works closely with a large water purveyor in water conservation in lawns and landscapes which provides financial support to the MG Program. Bexar receives a grant for youth efforts from the San Antonio Livestock Exposition. Many projects have been done with plant trials and demonstration results displayed at the San Antonio Food Bank and San Antonio Botanical Garden.

Outreach Educational efforts held in person pre-pandemic continued virtually, reaching thousands of people. One-acre of land produced 24,000 pounds of produce for donation.

David hosts and conducts Advanced Trainings for Master Gardeners from across the state, hosted the State Conference and twice hosted the International Master Gardener Conference.

Every weekend David is on the local radio answering horticulture questions. He provides expertise through interviews, print articles and presentations on gardening and landscaping countywide and beyond.



Distinguished Early Career

Missy Gable, Statewide Director, Extension Master Gardener Program, University of California, Ag & Natural Resources

Missy Gable exemplifies the characteristics outlined in the criteria for the Distinguished Coordinator - Early Career Award. Throughout her nine years with the program, she has worked diligently to ensure the program makes an impact and follows its mission to support gardeners and sustainable gardening across the state.

Through her leadership, Gable has provided a clear vision for the future of the program while advocating and supporting county-based programs with 6,216 volunteers across 53 counties in California. Gable's impact on the UC Master Gardener Program, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and its national and local partners has been transformational. Her passion for the UC Master Gardener Program's mission is evident in her tireless advocacy for support and continued recognition of its volunteers.

Nationally, Gable served as the Southwest Regional Representative for the EMG National Committee in 2016. This role grew to include an appointment as Secretary, Vice-Chair, and Chair. Since 2018, Gable has served on the National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) Executive Committee, on the inaugural Board of Directors, and the NICH Farm Bill Committee. In her national leadership roles, Gable has been involved in strategic planning efforts, collaborating with colleagues to provide vision and future direction.

National Extension Master Gardener Coordinators Committee

<https://mastergardener.extension.org/>