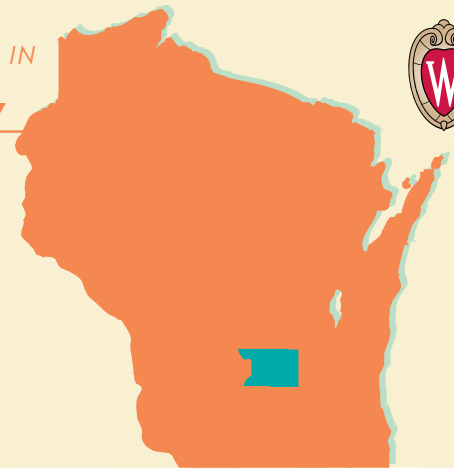




*In 2018, Columbia County Master Gardener Volunteers reported 1,475 hours of community service, worth a value of over \$35,400.**



* Using the current estimated dollar value of volunteer time in Wisconsin of \$24.69 per hour from Independent Sector (independentsector.org).

FEATURED PROJECTS

Educate the public with the 10th annual Gardening Conference

Thirty Columbia County Master Gardener Volunteers provided a spring learning experience for 200 gardeners at 10th annual Let's Get Green and Growing gardening conference at the Rio High School. Through a variety of over 30 presentations, topics addressed new garden plants, bonsai trees, tomatoes, horticultural therapy, and plant diseases to name a few. With the exception of a few guest speakers, Columbia County MGVs taught most of the sessions.

Participants reported they learned practical information they could use right away, such as how to start and maintain a compost bin, how to prune their trees and shrubs, and how to utilize LED lights for growing plants indoors. There was strong interest in topics that helped gardeners think about the future: gardening in a changing climate, what to look for in anticipating invasive plants, insects and worms, and how to recognize and prevent plant diseases. Columbia County MGVs are challenged to think of timely topics and new information for their annual event since many of the audience repeat attendance from year to year.

Engage students in microgreen farming

One hundred eighty students in five elementary schools grew and tasted microgreens in their classrooms. As part of the Microfarm Project, MGVs take a portable unit into classrooms and teach the students what plants need to grow, and show them how to plant seeds. Teachers are provided with a variety of activities to conduct with the students during the growing period, such as journaling about the changes the students observe, and measuring or graphing plant growth. Students are responsible for monitoring and watering the plants, and help harvest the greens with MGVs who return six weeks after planting. The students rinse the greens with a salad spinner and everyone samples their work. Student ages ranged from kindergarten to 4th grade, but all are able to do this project. The MGVs make sure every student helps fill the tray with planting mix; kids love to feel the mixture and make their own rows for planting. Students add

row markers and love to see how the seeds they planted are growing. When the volunteers return to the classroom, there are good discussions as they prompt the students to think about why some plants did not grow as well as others, or why a radish might form a radish on the root, but not the carrots. When it comes to tasting, even the most (self-proclaimed) "choosy" eaters are at least willing to smell a leaf, put it in their mouth, and feel for the texture on their tongue. Then, if they are willing, they can also eat it—and most actually do. We often hear comments such as "I've never eaten a salad like this before," or "I'm going to ask my parents if we can grow plants at home." The Microfarm Project is a delicious way to teach science and nutrition!

Microfarming with senior citizens

MGVs grow a microfarm with residents at an assisted living facility. The MGVs decided to add a new twist with this audience, since it was nearing spring. They planted two trays with seeds for greens such as lettuces, spinach and kale, and planted one tray with flower seeds and tomato seeds to transplant outdoors later. Some differences in the teaching: many of the seniors wanted to wear gloves (because they had manicured nails!) and even though the seniors were seated around tables, they were not as mobile as kids, so the volunteers moved the trays to each person—but the seniors were more patient than kids! While introducing the project to the residents and planting, there were great discussions of gardens they had planted and memories of things they liked to grow. They discussed what vegetables they liked or disliked, and it turned out that the kale they were planting was going to be a new veggie for many of them. One resident was quite adamant that flower seeds and vegetable seeds should NOT be grown in the same tray! They grew an amazing crop of greens and even after each participant had a small salad to sample, they offered the rest to the food service staff who were happy to add the greens to the salad being served to the rest of the residents at dinner that day. One of the goals of the residents was to grow some tomatoes for their outdoor raised bed; the tomatoes and flowers grew almost too well;

because of the early planting date, they were very tall, but the residents had fun transplanting them into larger pots; some survived to be planted outside.



The Master Gardener Program in Columbia County started in 1999. Over 620 people have been trained since that time, and there are currently 29 certified Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) for 2019.

Where you can find activities by MGVs in Columbia County

- Columbia County Fair
- Ladies Night at the Portage Do It Center
- Portage Public Library
- Portage Community Garden
- Historic Indian Agency House
- Pauquette Park, Portage
- Museum at the Portage
- Wycena Public Library

