

Posters Section

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Creating Demonstration Gardens: Steps to Success

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A tool often used to illustrate horticulture techniques is the use of demonstration gardens. Demonstration or teaching gardens offer visitors ideas to adopt into the individual's landscapes, a platform to learn plant identification for a specific region's climate, and a respite from a busy lifestyle. Specialty gardens can illustrate various themes like pollinator, sensory, edibles like vegetable, fruit or herbs, tropical, cactus, rose, bulbs, perennials, or children's gardens to name a few. Besides acres of plant material, demonstration gardens include hands-on activities, educational workshops, interactive experiences, interpretative signage, and art. Developing demonstration gardens requires financial and material resources, extensive planning, timely construction, effective marketing, and a long-term maintenance plan. Extension agents hired to coordinate activities involving the Florida Master Gardener or Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Programs are usually requested to create or maintain an existing demonstration garden (Fig. 1). When researching the process to create demonstration gardens, on-line resources, although numerous, focus on specialty gardens and the plant material. Comprehensive guidelines discussing the financial planning, development, construction, marketing, or maintenance of the established gardens are rare. Thirty-four websites were researched and not one offered a detailed process

for the creation of demonstration gardens. Without comprehensive guidelines, extension agents cannot conceive of the magnitude of the process. Failure occurs when one phase of development is missed, skipped or the financial resources were not sufficient. Demonstration gardens must appeal and serve a purpose to visitors to ensure the garden's success, the visitor's return or the sharing of their experience with others. Wikipedia lists forty successful botanical parks (Wikipedia, 2014) and another website lists 145 demonstration gardens in Florida attracting visitors from around the world annually (Floridaplants.com 2014). Surveys, personal interviews, and record searches of Florida demonstration gardens will be conducted to compile a comprehensive manual for the creation or maintenance of a demonstration garden. Outcomes will include the step-by-step process, failure and successful planning tips, administrative challenges, and resolutions and improvements suggested by the experts if they were to start over today. The first expected impact is the adoptability of the manual by any county extension office, local garden club, school, or public community area in Florida or United States. Second, the manual should facilitate the process to create a successful demonstration garden when an extension agent receives a request to install a garden or maintain an existing garden.



Fig. 1. When designing demonstration gardens for children, everything is colorful and small-sized; garden tables are shortened, blooming flower pots are at eye level, and painted rain barrels add color. Pictured is the Manatee County Extension Office demonstration garden, a view of the children's sensory garden.

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