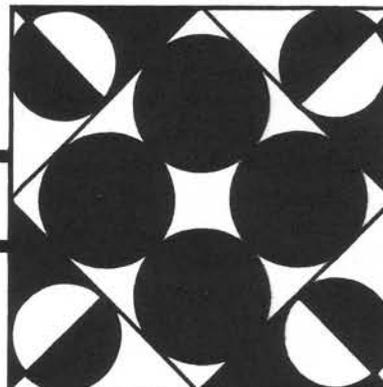


Idea Corner



Extension's Role in Beautification Programs

Modern technology, economic affluence, and increased leisure time have made it easier to dispoil the environment. So, many people are organizing at both community and state levels to preserve the natural beauty that surrounds them. Community development and Extension personnel often work either directly or indirectly with many of these beautification efforts.

A recent evaluation of North Carolina's statewide beautification program focused on three different dimensions of beautification: (1) simple clean-up and beautification projects that require little supervision and organization, (2) complex beautification projects that take organization, supervision, and sometimes legal skills, and (3) educational projects that focus on disseminating information and training workers.

The findings indicate that most current efforts are directed

toward simple clean-up and beautification projects. This emphasis reflects the types of information being supplied to local beautification leaders (volunteer lay leaders). However, when comparing what was being done with what beautification leaders wanted to do, the results showed that leaders wanted to start more complex beautification projects—establishing recycling centers, controlling water pollution, and removing commercial signs and dilapidated buildings.

Clean-up programs weren't overlooked, but placed at a lower priority. When the leaders were asked where Extension resource help was most needed, they indicated the need for educational programs about complex beautification projects.

Three major ideas can be drawn from the study. First, in action programs such as beautification, past efforts can't be interpreted as guidelines for future programs. New efforts should build on past experiences, but

should not stop there. Educational programs based solely on analysis of what was done will likely fail to meet the needs of the changing times and expectations of those working in the field.

Second, beautification leaders need feedback that documents past efforts and outlines future possibilities. In short, a two-way communication mechanism is needed. Usually data are made available only to Extension leaders and administration. There's a need for a feedback mechanism that can complete the action-research cycle.

Local leaders also need feedback. Information and evaluation should flow from and to beautification participants and local leaders, local community development and Extension agents, and state program leaders. Such feedback can serve as a framework for assessing the local situation. It can demonstrate the broad range of possible projects. It can give local leaders a basis for evaluating their present efforts in light of what was done. This way it can serve as a motivational force to excel past efforts.

Third, Extension needs to provide educational help for complex beautification undertakings. Minimal educational help is needed for simple projects but for leaders to broaden their beautification efforts more resource help is needed.

The present research indicated local leaders wanted to move

into broader areas of beautification. And local leaders said they want Extension to help them do this. The concerns of environmentally minded citizens may offer insights to future possibilities. But beautification efforts can only prosper and expand with viable leadership and proper educational help.

Each year new projects are added to beautification programs. The most urgent need for improving beautification efforts is a feedback mechanism that will document efforts and suggest future possibilities. Such a feedback mechanism will provide a basis for program planning and motivation at the local level. It will provide perspective for regional and state leaders who supply resource help to local beautification leaders.

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Retired Chefs Unlimited

Among the facilities and services available for senior citizens in Milwaukee County are senior centers where citizens over 60 participate in a variety of recreational and educational programs. I capitalized on this opportunity to offer a cooking class exclusively for men.

The objectives of the course were:

- To determine the need for education in nutrition and food selection among older men.
- To give men experience in selecting foods for good health and in providing variety in their diet.
- To give men practice in preparing single dishes suitable for one or two.
- To help widowed men remain independent and in their homes for as long as possible.
- To give retired men the enjoyable experience of meeting together, exercising their creativity, and sharing their accomplishments.

The course outline was planned for five sessions, each three hours long. In each session we discussed one key concept, plans for working together in the kitchen, and the fun of cooking, eating, and cleaning up. Handout materials were prepared for each class, incorporating the theme of that day's lesson.

The content for the lessons was divided this way:

Bachelor's Basics: Subscribed to the Basic Four method of meal planning, and included measuring as a basic concept of cooking. Simply-prepared menus for each of six days were also provided.

Tailored to Size: Dealt with family size, giving suggestions for cooking for one or two. It included weight control and

provided a package of low-calorie menus.

Scientifically Yours: Stressed ways of saving the nutrients through acceptable methods of cooking.

Eating Off a Shoestring: Was a lesson in comparative shopping. This included a cost analysis of frozen and canned vegetables as well as national and store brand labels.

One of the objectives of the senior chefs' course was to determine the need retired men feel for help in learning about food selection and preparation. Although before the class there was probably no felt need to learn to select nutritious food, comments written at the end indicated some changed behavior.

One man wrote, "I got a lot of helpful hints for preparing food on my own. Without these hints, I probably wouldn't have a properly balanced diet."

Another wrote, "We should be alert to including all four groups in the diet."

A third man wrote, "The need for drinking two cups of milk or its equivalent I knew was important, but I never did it, now I do." This same man at an evaluation session four months later expressed it this way, "We learned how to mix dry milk in class, and I have been doing it ever since."

Another indication that the participants became more conscious of nutritional values is seen

in this statement, "Orange juice should not stand open or uncovered for any length of time as it loses vitamin C rapidly. Heat accelerates loss." Or, "I have cut down on buying vitamin pills since learning about food."

Although concepts of good nutrition were incorporated into each day's discussion, the lesson was always planned to give the men actual cooking experience. The menu, simple and inexpensive, was chosen to reinforce the Basic Four Food Plan, using low cost goods and providing ideas for small, but nutritionally, adequate meals. Emphasis was placed on preparing food for one or two with a minimum of leftovers.

No written evaluation was necessary to know that the group really enjoyed their weekly rap with a newly acquired domesticity. There was never a dull or awkward moment. The men engaged in the clean-up session with as much enthusiasm as they shared with each other the food they had prepared.

The preparation of food wasn't confined to the class periods. One man commented at

the end of the session, "It has been an informative class, and the wife and I have made each and every recipe we have received and hope we have more sessions."

An 80-year-old widower called the office several months later to ask me if I could stop at his house some day to help him with a problem. He wanted to serve a meal to his son and daughter-in-law, but before setting a date for it, he wanted to practice. He was having trouble controlling the heat on his electric range.

He took advantage of my visit to get answers to other questions, such as how to schedule the steps in preparation to have all parts of the meal ready at the proper time.

The response of the men toward the class was enthusiastic. Their comments at the end can be summarized in this: "All seniors need stimulation and the course provided that, a new line of thought and, of course, lots of fun!"

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