

idea corner

Neighborhood Plant Clinics

A reservoir of more than 5,000 women has been tapped by Virginia Tech Extension to help meet the educational needs of an audience of 650,000 in an urban county of metropolitan Washington, D.C. Use of volunteers from the reservoir in a program of Neighborhood Plant Clinics has enabled Virginia's Fairfax County Extension Service to make maximum impact on an urban clientele. The program is in its second year.

The reservoir is the National Capital Area Federation of Garden Clubs, members of community garden clubs in Washington and suburbs in Virginia and Maryland. The Fairfax County Extension agent informed the group through one of its members of Extension's problems in serving the rapidly expanding needs of the area. Together, the federation and Extension planned the program of clinics.

The federation agreed to recruit members with knowledge and interest in horticulture to receive intensive training as plant consultants from Extension horticulturists.

In March, 1976, 45 volunteers were trained by 5 Fairfax County Extension horticulturists. During the 1976 growing season, these 45 consultants manned 5 neighborhood clinics: 3 in Fairfax County, 1 in Alexandria, Virginia, and 1 in Montgomery County, Maryland. A team of eight consultants

staffed each clinic, with two on duty for a four-hour period each Saturday.

Questions the consultants can't answer are referred to Extension agents and solutions are then relayed to the homeowner via the plant consultant. Immediate backup is given the consultants by Extension agents. More than 2,000 people attended the 1976 clinics. Lawn-care calendars from the Extension Service and a monthly gardening guide compiled by one of the consultants were popular handouts.

This year, 28 returning consultants were given advanced training by specialists from Virginia Tech, and 53 new consultants completed the basic training program conducted by the agents from Fairfax and 2 Maryland counties.

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