

# home gardening teaching aids

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Home food production is an area of increased interest for many families as the economy tightens. A home garden offers the family a significant return on the financial investment and a viable alternative to costly, gas-consuming forms of recreation.

As horticultural and agricultural problems are traditional areas of expertise for the Extension Service, increasing numbers of homeowners have been turning to Extension for gardening help, but the help needed differs greatly. The urban, suburban, and new-rural homeowner commonly seeks "total-approach-to-gardening" information, while many experienced gardeners are more concerned with specific problems or crops.

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The agents and technicians called on to supply answers to these diverse problems may not have had the needed plant science training or experience. They rely on the state specialist staff to supply the information, publications, and other resources needed to efficiently answer client questions.

To meet agent needs for ready reference and homeowner needs for basic gardening information, a comprehensive home food production education program was developed at Virginia Tech.

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**Program Objectives**

The following objectives guided development of the program:

1. To supply agents and technicians with the basic information and publications needed to answer the majority of home gardening questions.
2. To develop sufficiently flexible materials that offer a variety of programming options including mass media.
3. To develop relatively inexpensive materials that may be readily used in agent programs.
4. To provide visual aids for enhancing agent programs.

**Program Components**

After evaluation of home gardening programs at other land-grant universities and meeting with Extension agents throughout Virginia, a four-part educational program was devised. (The first 3 parts were made available for the 1979 growing season and the last for the 1980 growing season.)

*Part 1:  
Production  
Guide*

A comprehensive reference book was published in loose-leaf binder form to permit updating and addition of material by individual agents. One copy of the guide is in each unit office. It contains all fact sheets and publications from USDA, materials from other land-grant universities, and garden supply company materials (see Table 1). The total cost of producing each guide was \$12.00.

**Table 1. Contents of Virginia home food production guide.**

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- Plant Growth Factors
- General Gardening Procedures
  - Planning a Garden
  - Caring for the Garden
- Vegetable and Fruit Culture
- Cultural Notes for Selected Food Crops
  - Cultural Sheets
  - Harvesting and Storage
  - Nutrition
- Problem Diagnosis
  - Environmental Disorders
  - Diseases
  - Insects
  - Weeds
  - Controls
  - Safety
- Extending the Season with Year-Round and Innovative Production Techniques
- Available Resources

**Part 2:  
Fact Sheets**      Seventy-six individual fact sheets were prepared to answer the most frequently asked questions on gardening as identified by Extension agents. These were produced at a cost of 1.2 to 3 cents each for the 2- to 6-page publications.

**Part 3:  
Slide  
Library**      Slide sets were developed for agent use at gardening schools. They were added to the slide loan library maintained by the home horticulture Extension specialist. Slide sets (with scripts or comment sheets) in this series were available on several topics (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Virginia home food production slide sets.**

Title	Number of copies	Audience (1979)
<i>General</i>		
Constructing a Small Plastic Greenhouse (20 slides)	2	400
Judging Fruits and Vegetables (40 slides)	5	800
Starting Early Plants (20 slides)	5	1,500
<i>Fruits</i>		
Dwarf Apples on a Fence (20 slides)	4	600
Raspberry, Blueberry and Grape Culture (33 slides)	5	2,000
Strawberry Culture (24 slides)	2	3,500
Tree Fruits in the Home Garden (38 slides)	3	2,500
<i>Vegetables and Herbs</i>		
Herb Culture and Use (33 slides)	5	6,300
Vegetable Gardening for Beginners (60 slides)	15	12,400
Vegetable Gardening Planting and Culture (40 slides)	5	3,800
Vegetable Garden Soil: Chart Lecture (20 slides)	3	4,500
Vegetable Varieties for the Home Garden (40 slides)	15	11,800
Gardening in a Small Space (60 slides)	5	New
The Minimum Chemical Garden (60 slides)	5	New

**Part 4:  
Beginner's  
Guide**      A single publication was prepared for individuals needing comprehensive information on the vegetable garden. It's 32 pages, organized for quick reference to crops and gardening methods, extensively illustrated, and costs 6 cents each by printing on newsprint.

**Material Use  
and  
Evaluation**      Following the 1979 growing season, the agents were surveyed to evaluate use and value of the Home Food Production Guide and the fact sheets. Ninety-five counties, varying from

mostly rural to largely metropolitan, participated in this evaluation. The agents were asked to rate the material according to usefulness, indicate who used the guide in the office, and how the fact sheets were being used. Table 3 summarizes these data.

**Table 3. Evaluation of Virginia home food production guide and fact sheets.**

Home food production guide usefulness		Fact sheet usefulness	
Very useful	Moderately useful	Very useful	Moderately useful
68%	30%	69%	29%
People using the guide		Uses of fact sheets	
Agents	98%	Correspondence	83%
Technicians	24	Phone inquiries	87
Secretaries	41	Develop mass media presentations	57
Volunteers	8	Meetings	41
Visitors to office	34	Other	16
Others	3		

Horticultural expertise of the agents varied from no plant science training to a master's in horticulture. Their time on the job varied from several months to 30 years or more.

The survey also asked the agents to comment and react to the material. Some of the comments were:

"I have found the guide useful in doing radio programs and news articles. Also helpful in answering phone calls, especially on diseases and insects. The illustrations have been helpful."

"Outstanding work—something agents have needed a long time. Other specialists should work up similar materials. Keep up the good work."

"Some of us are not horticulturists and a guide of this nature saves valuable time by having information readily available."

"The guide was probably more useful to younger agents who were not as familiar with Extension publications as I. I tend to continue to use Extension publications rather than the guide. This in no way reduces the usefulness of the guide to others. I guess I have a habit I need to break."

Some agents used the slide sets exactly as prepared, while others incorporated slides from their area into the programs. In addition to workshops and homeowner programs, the slides were used as visuals in agents' TV programs and for clinics or displays at shopping malls and other sites.

## Follow-Up

Additional uses of the facts sheets were developed for the 1980 growing season. Four counties used them to develop Garden-By-Mail programs. The information was used by the home horticulture Extension specialist for a statewide series of weekly radio tapes and press releases during the 1980 growing season. Also, the most commonly used fact sheets were compiled into manuals that agents and technicians could carry into the field, while the larger guide remained as an office reference. The manuals were produced at a cost of \$1.50 each. A total of 480 were distributed to unit agents and technicians and an additional 85 copies were used in Master Gardener training.

Through use and increasing familiarity with the home food production materials, agents have been identifying needed additions in more advanced training aids. Two slide sets—*Gardening in a Small Space* and *The Minimum Chemical Garden*—were added to the library this year. Several crop fact sheets were added, revised, or expanded to help agents respond to clients. The ease of addition or revision of materials at low cost and effort has become one of the major program advantages.

Many efforts at comprehensive educational programming have been made in Extension to meet the needs of agents and the commercial and public clientele. The Virginia Home Food Production program has been a positive response toward meeting those needs.