

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Local knowledge helps residents grow food and plants

By expanding horticulture information through the Colorado Master Gardener education program to southwest Colorado, CSU Extension is answering the need for local solutions to the environmental challenges that have prevented residents from successfully gardening and growing food.

Issue

From Telluride to Norwood, the high mountain environment of southwest Colorado's San Miguel Basin is a tough place to garden.¹ Many longtime residents and newcomers don't bother growing plants or food due to the short growing season, pesky critters, drought, and poor soil.

CSU Extension Master Gardeners have shown people how to overcome gardening challenges like these since 1975 when the Colorado Master Gardener (CMG) program began. For 30-plus years, San Miguel and West Montrose County residents have traveled to and from Grand Junction for hours and months at a time to attend volunteer training. Unfortunately, coursework has focused on gardening in the high desert, not the mountains. From 2000 to 2005 only three San Miguel residents became Master Gardeners.

Extension's Response

To help remote and high mountain communities better serve their residents with local gardening solutions, CSU Extension developed a distance learning CMG training program in 2007. San Miguel County Extension offered its first ever CMG training in 2008. The learning format allows CMG students to attend classes locally and interact with presenters and other students in mountain communities around Colorado via online video streaming using Adobe Connect software. Online classroom learning is complemented by plant identification and soils labs, pruning and diagnostics workshops, and field trips.

San Miguel County's Horticulture Extension agent Yvette Henson adapted the CMG curriculum to reflect the region's environmentally specific, high altitude gardening needs, and to emphasize local interest in food production over plant health. San Miguel County is located more than 100 miles from major interstate highways or urban centers, and government officials and citizens alike have identified food security as one of the region's top concerns.



The Bottom Line

- CSU Extension is helping San Miguel Basin residents develop the skills and knowledge they need to improve their lives through money-saving landscape solutions, thriving gardens and homegrown food.
- Colorado Master Gardener is strengthening food security throughout this rural region by teaching people how to grow food despite environmental constraints.
- The San Miguel Basin CMG program is the preferred local source for education and training of the region's green industry professionals.

Contact Information

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Impact

As residents throughout the San Miguel Basin develop the skills and knowledge they need to improve their lives through money-saving landscape solutions, thriving gardens and homegrown food, it's clear that CSU Extension is helping people change their lives. Volunteers are teaching residents research-based gardening practices that are specific to the region, such as precipitation-only gardens on water-restricted property.

Ongoing and recent service projects led by volunteers include:

- Providing diagnostic plant disease and gardening outreach at Farmer's Markets in Telluride, Norwood and Ouray;
- Enhancing community gardens in Norwood, Ridgway and Telluride; and,
- Designing and installing the Western slope's first High and Dry Demonstration Garden in Norwood, and expanding this precipitation-only model to Telluride and Naturita.

For more information contact

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"I truly believe my garden was prettier than ever due to my Master Gardener experience with the CSU Extension. I was able to focus on the beauty of native plants, and even appreciate the grasses I once thought needed to be pulled. The knowledge I gained from the course was tremendously valuable, and it only wetted my appetite for more information."

– Master Gardener
San Miguel County

By the Numbers

2009 San Miguel Master Gardener

CMG Volunteers	29
Volunteer hours	1,078
Educational one-on-one contacts	1,401
Value of volunteer time	\$22,475*

*This figure calculates hours of service times \$20.84, hourly wage equivalent for Colorado volunteers as derived by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

