

Master Gardener Impact: Rocky Mountain Gardens



How a Demonstration Garden Strengthens Extension and Community

Community Impact Area	Examples of Outcomes
Volunteer Engagement	Master Gardeners install beds, maintain plantings, lead tours, and support education
Hands-on Learning	Plant identification, pruning demonstrations, pollinator habitat education
Community Programs	Workshops, youth camps, school visits, and public tours
Partnership Development	Collaboration with local organizations, donors, and sponsors
Environmental Education	Native plants, pollinator habitat, climate-adapted gardening
Food Systems Education	Demonstrations of vegetables, fruits, herbs, and nutrition awareness

Why Demonstration Gardens Matter

Public gardens serve as living classrooms where research-based horticulture information can be translated into real landscapes. They build volunteer leadership, expand community outreach, and strengthen the visibility and impact of Extension programs.

10 Lessons from Building a Public Garden

1. Start with a clear educational purpose.
2. Develop a strong conceptual design before construction begins.
3. Engage partners early to build community ownership.
4. Use the garden plan as a fundraising and communication tool.
5. Expect site preparation to take longer than anticipated.
6. Invest in volunteer leadership and coordination.
7. Phase development so the project grows sustainably.
8. Choose plants suited to the regional climate and site conditions.
9. Interpretation and signage increase the educational value of gardens.
10. Celebrate milestones and volunteer contributions to sustain momentum.

These lessons were drawn from the development of the Rocky Mountain Gardens in Missoula, Montana, a community demonstration garden designed to support horticultural education, Master Gardener volunteer engagement, and public outreach.