



## UI Master Gardeners put horticultural knowledge to work

At Town & Country Gardens in Idaho Falls, owner John Crook encourages his employees to enroll in the University of Idaho's Master Gardener program. "They learn a lot," he says. "They get a good grounding in plant physiology and soil chemistry and in other things they don't necessarily learn through experience." And, they stay tuned to UI recommendations on garden and landscape management.

Gary Emmett, manager of Town & Country Gardens' Pocatello store, is an Advanced Master Gardener. He had already earned an associate's degree in horticulture from Ricks College before enrolling in the volunteer program but says he benefited from the way it condensed horticultural science and focused it directly at the consumer.

Like his own boss, Emmett hires Master Gardeners when he can. "I know they have at least a basic understanding of chemicals, diseases and plant identification—and that helps spread the work around," he says.

At the UI's Bonneville County Extension office, Extension educator Wayne Jones estimates that between 10 and 15 percent of his Master Gardener trainees are either employed or self-employed in nurseries or landscape businesses. "It gives them good, solid, basic information," Jones says. "It's a practical approach to everyday gardening and landscape issues."



Photo by Susanna Smith

Boisean Dotty Hurd started her Garden Tenders business three years ago after completing Master Gardener training.

Ann Bates, executive director of the Idaho Nursery Association, earned her Master Gardener certificate shortly after launching her own nursery in the 1980s. "It's a wonderful way to start in the green industry," says Bates, now an Advanced Master Gardener. "It's a good first step."

In Boise, owner Garnette Monnie says the Master Gardeners she hires at Edwards Greenhouses have "a really, really good comfort level with their knowledge of plant materials, and they provide information very confidently. They can think on their feet and they don't make things up." In addition, Monnie says her customers respect the Master Gardener program and have confidence in what its graduates tell them.

"I wish more Master Gardeners were available out on the job market," she says. "It's a very, very excellent course."

Advanced Master Gardener Dotty Hurd began her own business, Garden Tenders, in 1999. She prunes, deadheads, plants and designs gardens for and alongside 10 Boise-area customers. The Master Gardener program "takes you from botany through xeriscaping," she says. "I don't think I would have started my business without it."

In Meridian, Matt Eells expanded his business from lawn care to irrigation systems and "tranquility gardens" after completing the

Master Gardener course. He knew how to do plumbing and how to install irrigation systems, "but irrigation does you no good if you don't understand plants and the soils that you're working in."

"We train an awful lot of people who go off and start nurseries and other businesses," says Susan Bell, UI Extension horticulture educator in Ada County. Each year, Bell also provides intensive, on-site training on timely topics to several green businesses—from pruning to plant diagnostics to weed management. "If they can recognize the most common problems in the area, they're 10 steps ahead of their competitors," she says.

