

Cooperative Extension Services Makes Our Communities Better

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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I have worked for the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service for over 31 years. I have the utmost respect for the mission of the Extension Service, which is to help people use research-based information to improve their lives. But all too often, I hear from folks that they have no idea what we do or what services we offer. I'd like to correct that!

The Cooperative Extension System is a non-formal educational program designed to "extend" the research from the university to our stakeholders, the citizens and taxpayers of each county. This service is provided by each state's land-grant university, such as Purdue University and the University of Kentucky. The Extension Service is funded by a partnership between federal, state, and county governments.

In most states the educational offerings are in the areas of agriculture and food, home and family, the environment, community economic development, and youth and 4-H. Vanderburgh County is one of the few Indiana counties that is served by a full time horticulture educator (myself).

Purdue Extension has been in business for over 100 years to make Indiana safer, stronger, smarter, successful, and sustainable:

* We make Indiana communities safer, through food safety training; increasing youth activity in nature; demonstrating heart-healthy diets; responding to local wellness issues through community health coalitions; and addressing safety in pesticide usage, grain storage, and other farming activities.

* We make Indiana communities stronger, by providing clear, useful community demographic data for future growth; helping counties assess and build upon regional economic strengths; sharing nutrition education and resources with low-income families; and offering STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) activities to underserved students.

* We help Indiana communities work smarter, by offering tools to manage farms amid changing economic conditions; determining the best varieties to plant; and increasing crop and livestock productivity. We're also giving youth the chance to apply STEM knowledge to create hydraulic robots and energy-efficient go-karts, to build sought-after skills for the job market.

* We keep Indiana communities successful, by helping families build strong foundations, and helping small communities capitalize on what makes them vibrant. We're also welcoming new people to Indiana agriculture and horticulture careers, and 4-H Youth Development opportunities.

* We encourage Indiana communities to be more sustainable, by supporting the promotion of local foods and markets; helping communities retain and expand local businesses; strengthen family systems with parenting courses; and providing programming to get youth interested in science and agriculture.

For most of my readers, the only contact they may have with Purdue Extension is my weekly gardening columns. But I assure you, our statewide team of local Extension educators, campus specialists, and researchers are all working hard to improve people's lives. To learn more about what Purdue Extension has accomplished this past year, I invite you to download a copy of our 2016 annual report: <https://extension.purdue.edu/annualreport/>. Or contact us at the Vanderburgh County office at 812-435-5287, and see how we can help make YOUR lives better.