KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“What is This Thing Called Extension?”

December 11, 2018

It’s time for the best kind of history lesson: one we can see living in the present day.

Go back with me to the time when Abraham Lincoln was President and our country was struggling through a civil war that might have ended the Great Experiment, as our democracy was first called by George Washington.

School children are told that Lincoln was a self-educated man with little formal education. But he was eager to learn and so hungry for knowledge he taught himself to be a lawyer. When he became President, he championed a congressional bill that was named for its sponsor and called the Morrill Act, or the Land-Grant College Act of 1862.

What made it remarkable, in addition to being put into place in the middle of the American Civil War, was that it provided grants of land to states so they could finance the establishment of colleges specializing in “agriculture and the mechanic arts” (known as “A&M” colleges). Each state was given 30,000 acres for each one of its congressional seats. The states were to sell the land and use the profit to establish new schools. In 1890, the Act was expanded to allot regular appropriations to support land-grant colleges, such as our own Oregon State University.

So, what, you may ask, does this have to do with the Master Gardeners? Well, it’s a winding path from 1862 to 1972.

The land-grant schools that were established across the U.S. in 1914 became the home of The Cooperative Extension Service, the largest education system of its kind in the world. Active in rural, suburban, and urban communities, it was established primarily to provide farmers with information from agricultural research and to encourage them to adopt improved farming methods. In 1902, a youth program was created in Ohio to develop a practical, “hands-on” learning to connect public school education to country life. By 1924, this program, 4-H, became a national program through the Extension Service.

Since its inception, the Extension Service’s focus has been on small farms, family health, forestry, animals and livestock, disaster preparedness, watersheds and irrigation and food safety. The list of programs is quite extensive.

By 1972, an Extension horticulture agent in Washington state was so successful, he was overwhelmed by homeowners with gardening questions. His solution was to create a team of gardeners who, after continuing education in horticulture, would be able to answer questions from the public. Today, the Extension Service Master Gardener volunteer program exists in all 50 states and two Canadian provinces. In 2009, almost 95,000 people were certified as Master Gardeners in the United States.

Training by experts from their local land grant universities gives the volunteers the latest research and technical information in everything from basic botany & pesticide safety to vegetable gardening and integrated pest management. Then, at no cost to their home gardening clients, they are able to share their knowledge, helping homeowners diagnose plant problems with scientifically-based solutions.

During the growing season, you can reach an OSU certified Master Gardener at one of the Extension Service offices in Central Oregon or by calling the Deschutes County office at 541-548-6088. If you would like to read the transcript from this episode to learn more about the Extension Service, go to our website: gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

[https://www.britannica.com/topic/Land-Grant-College-Act-of-1862](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Land-Grant-College-Act-of-1862L) - Land-Grant Colleges

## <https://www.gao.gov/products/CED-81-119> - Cooperative Extension Service's Mission and Federal Role Need Congressional Clarification

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/central/volunteer-resources> Click on “topics” for the full list of Extension Service programs

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/sites/default/files/em8749.pdf> - “An Introduction to Being a Master Gardener Volunteer”