

YARD & GARDEN FOOD PRODUCTION FOR BEGINNERS

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Need Statement

Florida's soil, climate, and pests create a challenge for growing food crops. The target audience are Marion County residents with little or no experience who want to produce food crops in their yard or garden.

Objectives

Participants will gain knowledge about how to provide for essential crop needs and about specific crops that are well-adapted for the North Central Florida region. They will adopt practices which will allow them to easily and sustainably produce their own food with fruits and vegetables.

Methods

Topics Discussed:

- Essential plant needs.
- Variables you can control.
- Site selection: right plant, right place.
- How to plant correctly.
- Vegetable options.
- Fruit options.

The program has been offered five times and consists of a two hour presentation that is followed by a tour of a demonstration garden. A step-by-step process was detailed about how to select the most productive and well-adapted crops for each participant's situation. Each fruit and vegetable crop was provided with a profile that covered the key crop production information. Locally produced fruit and vegetables were available for taste sampling. Fruit and vegetables featured in the program were available for purchase or free after the program.



Loquats are highly productive plants that require minimal inputs.



Carrots are very nutritious and come in a variety of colors and shapes



Sweet potatoes are extremely productive. A good choice for beginners.

Results

Programs are well attended (n=90). Evaluations indicated that all participants gained knowledge and 72% specifically stated at least one aspect of the program they intended to implement. After the program more than half of program participants purchased or were given at least one plant.



There are many UF-recommended blueberry varieties available.

Conclusions

This program successfully helps participants who have little or no prior knowledge to begin fruit and vegetable production that will provide a reliable source of food. By having plants available immediately after each program it eliminates the barrier of locating the UF recommended plants & varieties. Due to the high demand and enthusiastic feedback by participants, this program will help grow the local food system.