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Cornell Extension of Monroe County to offer Gardening Webinars to the Public during Pandemic and beyond.

Helping communities to plan their future harvest

'No space is too small for growing food' was the key message of the 'Small Space Gardening' workshop offered by CCE of Monroe County and hosted by the Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County, last week. Nearly a hundred people registered, 49 of which 'Zoomed' in to learn about the key aspects of gardening to maximize their space and yield such as soil composition, growing zone recognition and plant spacing.

Although planned well in advance, the workshops almost didn't materialize due to the sudden cancellation of all in-classroom activities due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite the closures, the spring season is here and the cancellation of associated gardening work is not an option.

According to the recent Agri-Pulse magazine article '*Got Vegetable Seeds? Consider Yourself Lucky as Home Gardening Soars*', the sales of seeds - mostly vegetables, herbs and flowers - in retail and online stores have skyrocketed across the country in the last four weeks. As people see shortages of food in the grocery stores and are wary of social contact, they are looking for home projects such as gardening and food growing. Gardening can be helpful for both nutritional and mental health but some who want to try are new to gardening and would like more guidance.

Determined, the coordinators of both organizations agreed to move forward and find an alternative in order to support this movement. After identifying the best delivery platform and working through operational details, the workshop went online. 'Small Space Gardening' was the second online workshop, following the 'Attracting Pollinators to Your Garden' the week prior offered through this collaboration. Both webinars yielded an unexpectedly high number of registrants, great responses and more interest.

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.

By using modern technology and timely content, CCE-Monroe gardening webinars support people's food growing efforts, strengthen their connection with nature and boost community health and resiliency. During the COVID-19 outbreak, online webinars are proving to be an invaluable teaching tool. They are extremely cost effective and present 'virtually' no geographical boundaries - people from near and far can join. Also, the content can be explained on a more personal level. It allows for a better understanding between the presenters and their audience by creating a relationship that isn't likely to be built through any other far-reaching medium.

The participants' feedback collected through the polls and Q&A's can be valuable information for future program development. In addition, hosting a webinar significantly increases an online presence of any organization, especially if repeated sessions with a cumulative value are used.

Encouraged by the first two successful sessions, CCE-Monroe will be offering more webinars and provide resources to support people's food growing and cooking activities, including Herb Gardening in May and Composting Basics in June. Stay tuned for the class details on the event page at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/> or call the CCE-Monroe office for more information at (585) 753-2550.

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