

**1. Title:**

Site Assessment for Home Gardeners

**2. Project Leader(s):**

Charles Mazza, Senior Extension Associate, Department of Horticulture (retired)

Lori Bushway, Senior Extension Associate, Department of Horticulture

**3. Cooperator(s):**

Master Gardener Volunteers in Chemung, Ontario, Orleans, Rensselaer, and Washington Counties

**4. Abstract:**

In Community Horticulture extension education, home gardeners are taught to use many IPM methods. One that is an effective preventive method is called site assessment. It helps us to know about a site's ability to support healthy plant growth. Healthy plant growth helps to reduce the plants' susceptibility to diseases "Site Assessment for Gardeners: a step-by-step workbook for better home gardens and landscapes" aims to be a valuable resource to help home gardeners. Engaging Master Gardeners in field testing, creating this new resource and educating home gardeners in the counties was a powerful method. Knowing what the opportunities and limitations of sites on properties is sound for IPM and other environmental issues, and helps in making wiser buying decisions. 80 percent of the gardening public who learned from the Master Gardener Volunteers in indicated that they would conduct a site assessment and they thought it was 1.5 times more important than having good gardening skills. Engaging professional peer reviewers provided their scientific expertise to finalize a step-by-step workbook. It was determined that this resource is valuable beyond New York State. A tri-fold promotional brochure is prepared for distribution to CCE and IPM outlets as well as realtor association as home buyer will find this workbook particular valuable as they address the needs of their new landscape.

**5. Background and justification:**

Pest problems in the home garden and landscape can often be prevented or lessened by taking into account the limitations of a particular site. Plants set into locations that have inherent stress, such as compacted soil, poorly drained soil or excessive wind, can be more prone to pest problems.

The process of site assessment, promoted for landscape professionals, is a suitable method of documenting and factoring in physical characteristics of a property prior to design and planting. By inspecting or assessing a site, it helps us to know about its ability to support healthy plant growth. Another important step in site assessment is knowing what plants are already growing on a property; by knowing, we can make informed decisions about their fate in future development.

The 7 million home gardeners in New York State can benefit from the knowledge acquired in assessing the place where they will develop a garden and establish a landscape; more will benefit in other states, as well. To date, the observations that comprise a comprehensive site assessment had been made randomly or not at all. Mistakes were made by inexperienced home owners; demands on professional contractors were unrealistic.

A new 50-page how-to workbook “Steps to Better Success in the Garden – Site Assessment for Home Gardeners,” with built in easy-to-do activities was developed to record factors on a property as a base from which to expand or improve a garden or landscape. These funds helped cover design services, printing and promotion for the workbook.

## **6. Objectives:**

To complete a workbook resource for conducting a site assessment on home properties.

To train and familiarize Master Gardener Volunteers with the process of conducting a site assessment on a home property.

To provide opportunities for trained Master Gardener Volunteers to teach other home gardeners how to conduct a site assessment.

To create a brochure to promote this resource among current CCE and IPM audiences as well as new audiences such as realtor associations.

## **7. Procedures:**

A draft of the workbook was developed in Spring, 2006. It was field tested and critiqued by 45 Master Gardener Volunteers in 5 counties in Summer, 2006. It was edited for final copy in Fall, 2006. Services of a graphic illustrator and layout artist add a professional look to the workbook.

Master Gardener Volunteers conduct workshops using various teaching techniques, including powerpoint in late Fall, 2006.

Master Gardener Volunteers in 5 counties have agreed to conduct formal and informal workshops to home gardeners in their communities in Winter/Spring 2007. Print-on-demand copies of the workbook were available at these workshops.

Working with writer and graphic artist consultants to create a promotional brochure for the workbook that can be distributed to CCE and IPM audiences as well as to realtor association.

## **8. Results and discussion:**

Workshops for the five-counties (Chemung, Ontario, Rensselaer, Washington and Orleans) participating in the residential land site assessment and modification segment of the project were completed in Fall, 2006. Each group of Master Gardeners participating was instructed by the project coordinator, Charlie Mazza, on making presentations and conducting discussion groups in their counties. This would extend the knowledge base to home gardeners (beyond Master Gardeners) in the counties.

A powerpoint and accompanying slide transparency educational module was created and provided in January 2007 for each participating county as a teaching tool. The powerpoint was designed to motivate home gardeners to conduct site assessments on their properties. Bound, pre-publication workbooks were distributed in February 2007 as teaching tools as well.

21 Master Gardeners conducted 19 workshops in late winter, spring and summer 2007 in the five counties. They reached 290 home gardeners. Feedback from an “interest gauge” completed by 284 home gardeners gave us an indication of how likely home gardeners would be motivated to carry out a site assessment on their properties.

A pre-publication version of “Site Assessment for Gardeners: a step-by-step workbook for better home gardens and landscapes” was revised, based on feedback from the field trials of 45 NYS Master Gardeners in NYS. It was printed in a limited quantity for county workshop use, created as a pdf file for the Cornell Gardening Resources website, presented for publication to Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environmental Services (NRAES), where it was peer-reviewed by 17 professional from the Northeast and revised and expanded in spring and summer, 2007. It is in line to be published in 2009.

Engaging Master Gardeners in field testing, creating a new resource and educating home gardeners in the counties was a powerful method of educating the public on site assessment.

Knowing what the opportunities and limitations of sites on properties is sound for IPM and other environmental issues, and helps in making wiser buying decisions. 80 percent of the gardening public who learned from the Master Gardeners in 2007 indicated that they would conduct a site assessment and they thought it was 1.5 times more important than having good gardening skills.

Engaging professional peer reviewers provided their scientific expertise to finalize a step-by-step workbook. It was determined that this resource is valuable beyond New York State.

There are more than 11 described steps in site assessment and interpreting how to use the information to make further decisions on landscape design and modification. They include 20 practical, basic activities and 8 optional ones of measuring, sketching, photographing, listing and researching, probing, and observing physical characteristics on a property.

A tri-fold promotional brochure is prepared for distribution to CCE and IPM outlets as well as realtor association as home buyer will find this workbook particular valuable as they address the needs of their new landscape.

#### **9. Project location(s):**

Workshops were conducted in Chemung, Ontario, Orleans, Rensselaer, and Washington Counties specifically through the workbook in draft form is available online. The promotional brochure will be use to target residents with home landscapes through out NYS.

#### **10. Samples of resources developed: (if applicable)**

Draft of the workbook is at:

[http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/landscape/site\\_assessment\\_for\\_gardeners.pdf](http://www.gardening.cornell.edu/landscape/site_assessment_for_gardeners.pdf)

The tri-fold promotional brochure is at:

[http://www.hort.cornell.edu//department/faculty/bushway/comm\\_hort\\_blog/CUHorticultureTrifoldFinalDraftSmall1.pdf](http://www.hort.cornell.edu//department/faculty/bushway/comm_hort_blog/CUHorticultureTrifoldFinalDraftSmall1.pdf)

