

Final Report

Type of Project: Education

Title: Lawn Ranger Volunteer Training

Location: Westchester and Putnam Counties

Project Leaders: Todd Schongalla, James Lee and Joe Heller, CCE of Westchester County and Marjorie Keith and Jason Dampier, CCE of Putnam County.

Collaborators: Dr. Frank Rossi and Evie Gussack, Cornell University Turfgrass Extension Team. Rod Ferrentino, Community IPM Coordinator. Gary Couch, Southeast Area IPM Educator. Dr. Tamson Yeh, CCE of Nassau. Westchester County Pest Management Committee.

Objectives:

CCE of Westchester and Putnam counties seeks to protect drinking water and human health by training homeowners in best management practices for the use of pesticides and fertilizers through the implementation of the Lawn Ranger Volunteer Training Program. With the help of Dr. Frank Rossi, Evie Gussack and Cornell Media Services, we have developed a new consumer-oriented lawn care training program that will be delivered by a corps of CCE trained volunteer educators. After receiving training, our Lawn Ranger Volunteers will provide free educational programs focusing on establishment and maintenance of healthy lawns with an emphasis on environmental stewardship. Two goals will be paramount: reducing pesticide and fertilizer use, and helping homeowners understand how their lawn care practices affect water quality.

Methods:

Since receiving an initial grant from the Westchester Community Foundation, project leaders and collaborators have spent a year and a half developing the "Home Lawn Care Almanac." This 24-page guide encapsulates the most important information for home lawn care each month. The Almanac provides much of the drawings, diagrams, and content for the slide show talk, which Dr. Rossi has completed. The almanac was conceived by CCE staff and written by Dr. Rossi and Evie Gussack. Final editing, desktop publishing, and art work for the Almanac has been completed by Cornell Media Services. The "Home Lawn Care Almanac" is now available as item number 141S2 from Cornell Media Services, and a copy has been sent to each of the extension associations in the state as an example of a recently completed publication from Cornell Media Services. The almanac has received very positive comments from the people who have so far seen it. In order to move this project to completion, CCE staff and Dr. Rossi provided more than \$10,000 of in-kind work. The Westchester Community Foundation funds originally allocated to develop this program are being used to pay for Media Services' work.

Because of production delays in completing the "Home Lawn Care Almanac" the start date of training the Lawn Ranger Volunteers has been delayed. The debut of the Lawn Ranger Volunteer Training Program has been scheduled for March 27, 2001. Dr. Frank Rossi will train the first class of Lawn Ranger Volunteers. This half day train-the-trainer program will also serve as an in-service opportunity for extension educators from other counties in the Hudson Valley. Volunteers who work with extension in other counties in the Hudson Valley will also be invited to attend this educational event. Our Lawn Ranger Volunteers will be thoroughly trained in subject matter and delivery of the 45-minute slide show presentation. They will give the program for free to any community group that requests it in Westchester or Putnam County. Each of the volunteers will agree to deliver a minimum of two Lawn Ranger Training programs for the public. Our experience with Master Gardener Training suggests that most of those we train will do more than two talks. In the beginning, CCE staff will provide talks to key audiences to create public awareness and demand for the program. The Lawn Ranger Program has already received much attention from extension associations in surrounding counties.

Recently, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection has provided a contract to help cover volunteer training and management and posting the "Home Lawn Care Almanac" on the web. We do believe though that attending a 45-minute talk will not be sufficient to change people's lawn care practices, and that the Almanac is a crucial piece of this educational program. The Almanac was created to reinforce

what homeowners learned in the talk at the appropriate time of the year. The \$1500 in funding received from NY State IPM was used to purchase a total of 214 “Home Lawn Care Almanacs” at a cost of \$6.99 each from Cornell Media Services. During the next two years, we will give these copies away to our Lawn Ranger Volunteers and homeowners who attend the initial Lawn Ranger Volunteer Training classes in Westchester and Putnam Counties. Copies will also be given to members of the Cornell University Extension Turfgrass Team, NY State IPM Program staff, and CCE staff in surrounding counties for them to use as a resource, and to publicize the Almanac and the Lawn Ranger Program.

Outcomes:

We plan to change home lawn care practices in Westchester and Putnam Counties by providing 45 minute talks and the “Home Lawn Care Almanac” to homeowners who want to learn how to grow and maintain a healthy lawn without endangering water quality and human health. Outcomes have not yet been measurable because of the delay in producing the “Home Lawn Care Almanac”, and in launching the Lawn Ranger Volunteer Training Program.