The Greatest Gift of the Garden: An Experiential Learning Curriculum for Adults

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Introduction  Hanna Rion once wrote, “The greatest gift of the garden is the restoration of the five senses.” Community gardens can serve not only experiences that restore the senses, but also as a place where people can share in those experiences. However, the community garden also provides another gift: that of education. Places such as these can be utilized by extension educators to teach about plants, the environment, and the community around them. In using community gardens, extension educators can also attract the participation of new, non-traditional clientele.

Methods  This curriculum was constructed using two frameworks for the development of the lessons. The first of these was Kolb’s model of Experiential Learning (EL). Each lesson is comprised of the four elements of the EL model. The second framework was that of the community garden. Each lesson is designed to be implemented using the community garden as the medium for education. Lessons range from composting, to planting, to harvest and use of plants.

Major Points of Information to Be Shared  The carousel will serve to explain the main characteristics of the curriculum. The experiential learning model will be explained in terms of its application to this curriculum. In addition, each lesson is designed to be mutually exclusive. All supplementary materials and information needed are included with each lesson so no additional training is needed for the extension agent. There are lessons designed to be implemented at any time of the year, as well as a separate lesson for starting a community garden. In addition, the curriculum will be discussed as a new methodology and an opportunity for collaboration across departments for extension.

Conclusions  The purpose of this carousel will be to share information and ideas pertaining to this educational concept. The carousel will be a good opportunity for discussion and feedback on the framework and the implementation of this extension education curriculum.

Educational Importance  This curriculum will serve to expose agents to more methods of experiential learning. It serves as a canned program in that there are mutually exclusive lessons that include all information and supplementary materials needed to deliver the program. This design will increase the ease and comfort level with which agents can use these lessons. In addition, this curriculum will allow for exposure to learning in different settings and for the use of new methodologies for extension education programs. Finally, this curriculum will also provide a medium and a subject area that may attract a non-traditional clientele. With these points in mind, the “Greatest Gift of the Garden” curriculum will be a positive addition to extension education.