

EMPOWERING MASTER GARDENERS TO BUILD THEIR OWN GARDENING FLOATING BEDS

Lorna Bravo¹, Jiangxiou Qiu², and German Sandoya³

¹University of Florida IFAS, Broward, FL, USA

²University of Florida REC, Broward, FL, USA

³University of Florida TREC, Palm Beach, FL, USA

Background: Broward County Urban Horticulture agent joined forces with four UF/IFAS Extension state agents and 2 UF faculty specialists to conduct the first Broward County Hydroponic Solutions for Urban Food production in July 2018. Broward County does not have an agricultural program but is collaborating with state agents and UF faculty to offer new program opportunities to Broward County Master Gardeners and residents. The first workshop had great attendance with 40 people in Broward County of which 13 were Master Gardeners (MGs). The attendees were evaluated in a pre and post survey indicating a 4.9 out of 5 levels of satisfaction. This preliminary data indicated that there is an emerging interest to implement hydroponic operations in this program.

Objective/Purpose: This multi-discipline approach brings together the expertise of each agent: Agriculture and Horticulture in an urban setting to increase the awareness on environmental benefits of urban farming and hydroponics. In doing this Broward County Extension can offer more programs, reach a different audience and provide higher quality hands-on learning experiences. This collaboration also allows for agents to share and learn about each other's programs and ultimately improve the livelihoods of urban residents, especially low-income communities through MGs.

Method: Because of the first workshop; in May 2019, Broward County Master Gardener program launched the first hydroponic workshop to 23 Master Gardeners with a focus on water use efficiency. MGs were trained in urban agriculture aspects, water use efficiency and identify suitable cultivars for hydroponics.

Conclusion: From 23 Master Gardeners, 19 were satisfied from workshop and results. Master Gardeners were evaluated in a pre and post survey indicating their hydroponic knowledge increased from 35% to 85%. Participants learned to build their own hydroponic floating bed system together to test hydroponically grown Florida lettuce as an alternative crop for local food production. Broward county extension agents and faculty will continue this program and expand the hydroponic Broward County program to other program areas in need such as 4-H.

PRESENTER BIO: Lorna is currently serving as the new UF/IFAS Extension Broward County Director / Urban Horticulture Agent. Lorna is currently pursuing her Ph.D. at the University of Florida under the department of Environmental Horticulture, where she will be researching water conservation in the built environment.