

The Garden Thyme Podcast: Educating Gardeners during COVID-19

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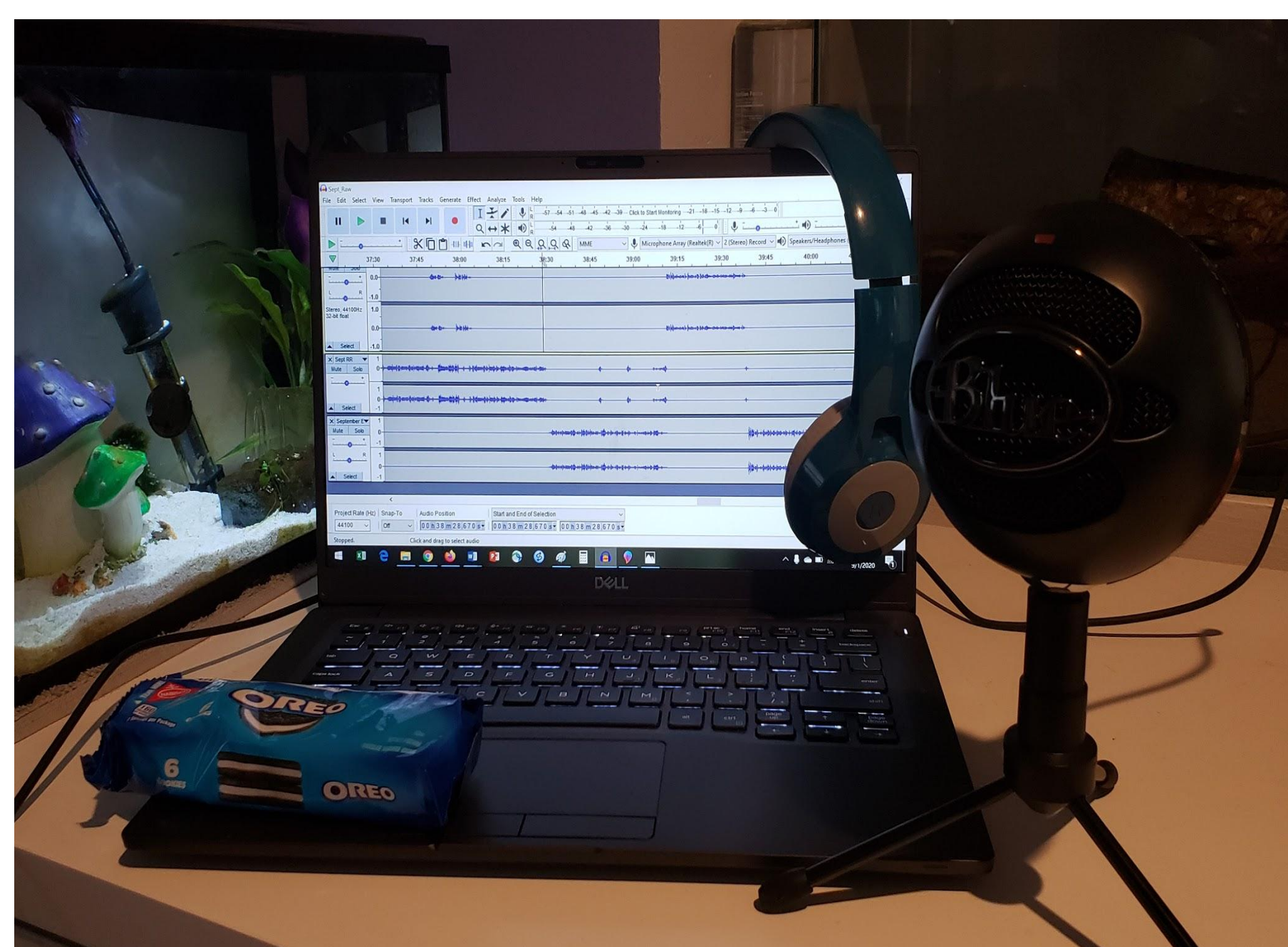
Background

In today's world, the pulsing grip of technology exists in every aspect of our daily lives from the ever-present smartphone to zoom meetings, to smart speakers, to podcasts. The way people gather and disseminate information is as easy as a click of a mouse or the swipe of a finger. For the past fifteen years, podcasts have led the way in reaching listeners who are unplugging from traditional methods of learning. As our world evolves, Extension must be able to roll with these changes to reach shifting demographics. In 2019, the Podcast Consumer Report cited that "51% of the population has listened to a podcast." With over 900,000 podcasts and 30 million episodes, the world is your oyster when finding a podcast that tickles your toes (Edison Research, 2019). The intersection of technology and extension education is vital to extending the mission of extension programs and reaching diverse audiences.

Methods

University of Maryland Extension Educators, R. Rhodes, M. Boley, and E. Zobel produce the Garden Thyme Podcast using several programs and equipment (Figure 1) Episodes are recorded and edited using Audacity (www.audacityteam.org). Episodes are housed on Buzzsprout.com and are available for downloading on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcast, Stitcher, and on the podcast Buzzsprout website (www.buzzsprout.com/687509). The podcast is advertised on the Garden Thyme facebook page (@GardenThymePodcast) and the Maryland Grows Blog (<https://marylandgrows.umd.edu/>).

Figure 1: Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, episodes have been done over Zoom, with individuals recording their own audio files using headphones and Audacity. The individual files are then combined and edited in Audacity.



Results

There have been twenty episodes published since October, 2019. As of March 1, 2021: 5,376 downloads, with an average of 269 listens per episode. 68% of listens are on mobile devices (iPhones and Androids), 32 % are on computers. 96% of listeners are from the United States with minimal international listens from Europe, Asia, and Oceania.

Topics covered included:

- Toxic plants, garden tool care, starting seeds, planting trees, gardening with children, mulching, summertime watering, preventing ticks, fall vegetable gardening, fall lawn care, winter weather plant care, pruning, backyard chickens, scary plants, and soil testing.
- Guest speakers have also appeared on the podcast to cover additional topics such as soil health, fall vegetable gardening, stormwater management, and orchid care.
- Each month's episode also includes short segments on native plants, insects, and timely garden tips.

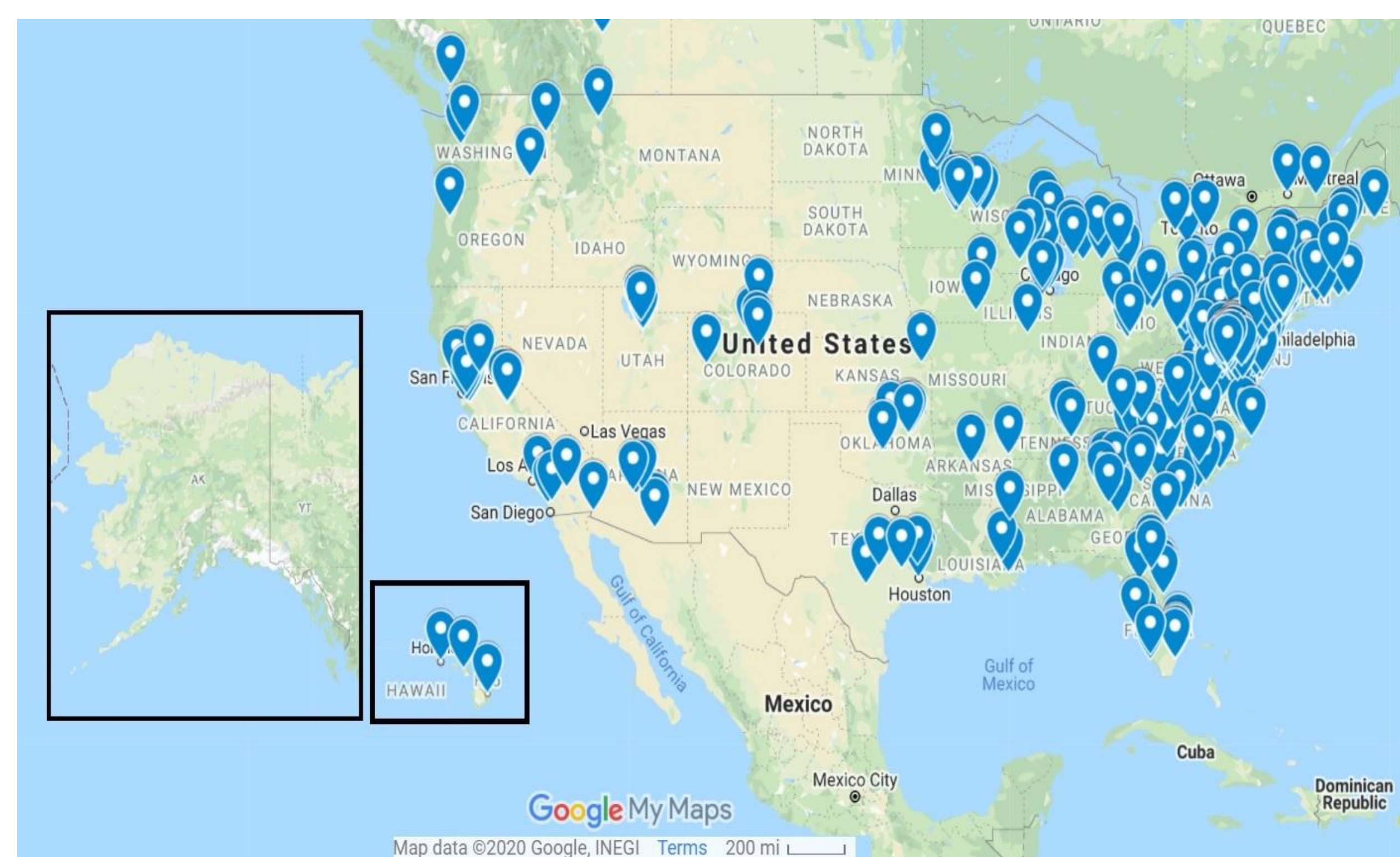


Figure 2: Map illustrating the locations of podcast episode downloads within the United States of America since October 2019

Outputs

The podcast has published 742 minutes of content. Three live question and answer sessions were held during the summer of 2020 via Zoom. The results are as follows:

- 54 questions were submitted by the public
- 221 people attended the Q&A sessions
- 42% of participants felt an improvement in diagnostic and identification skills post-webinar
- 75% of participants anticipate planting more native plant species
- 36% of participants plan to remove invasive plant species
- 28% of participants plan to use their local Extension resources in the future

The Garden Thyme Podcast also maintains an active Facebook page with 259 page followers, with a total of 8,300 people reached. It is routinely featured on the Maryland Grows Blog as part of the University of Maryland Extension Home and Garden Information Center, with a total of >1,850 people reached.

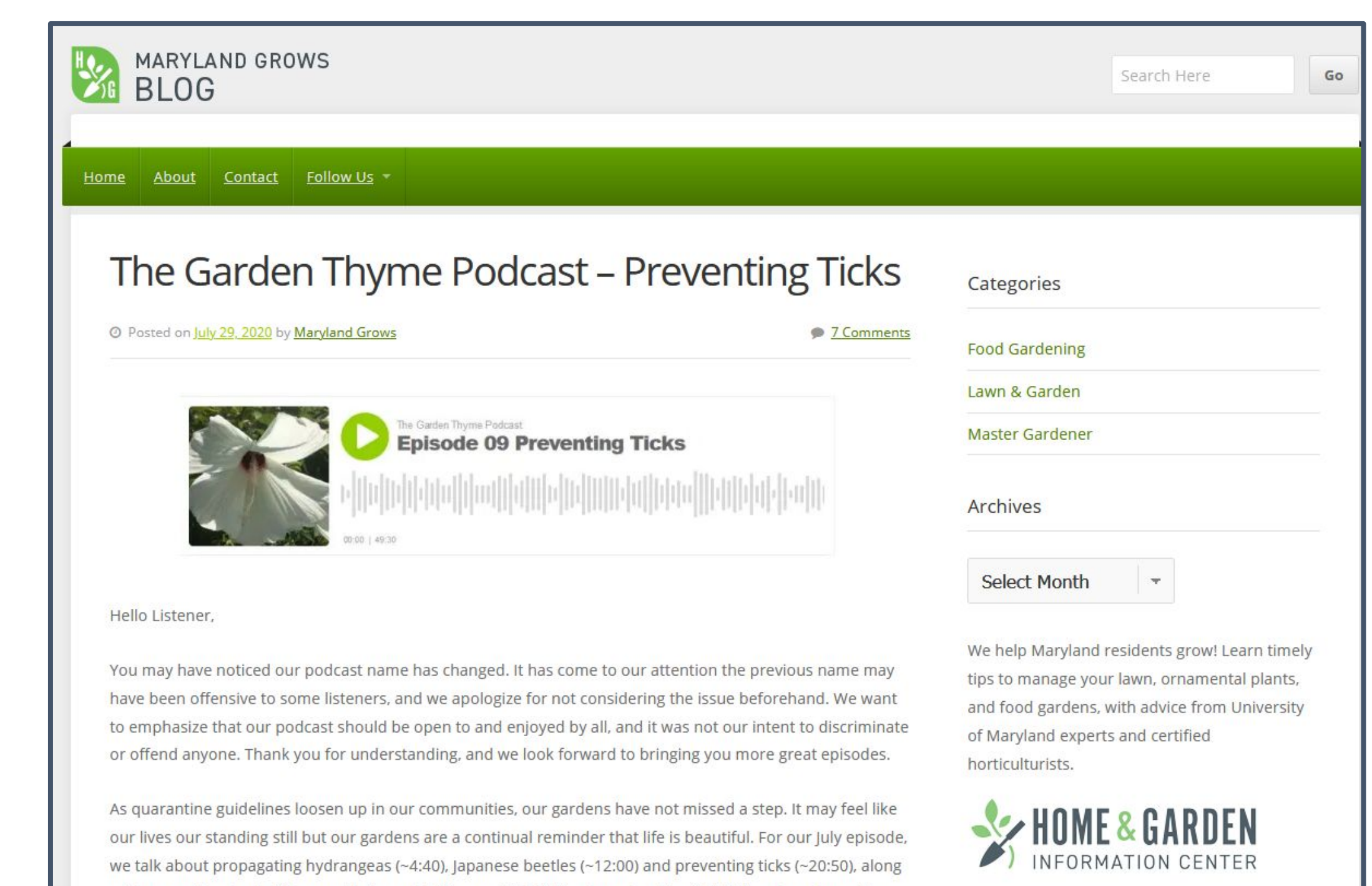
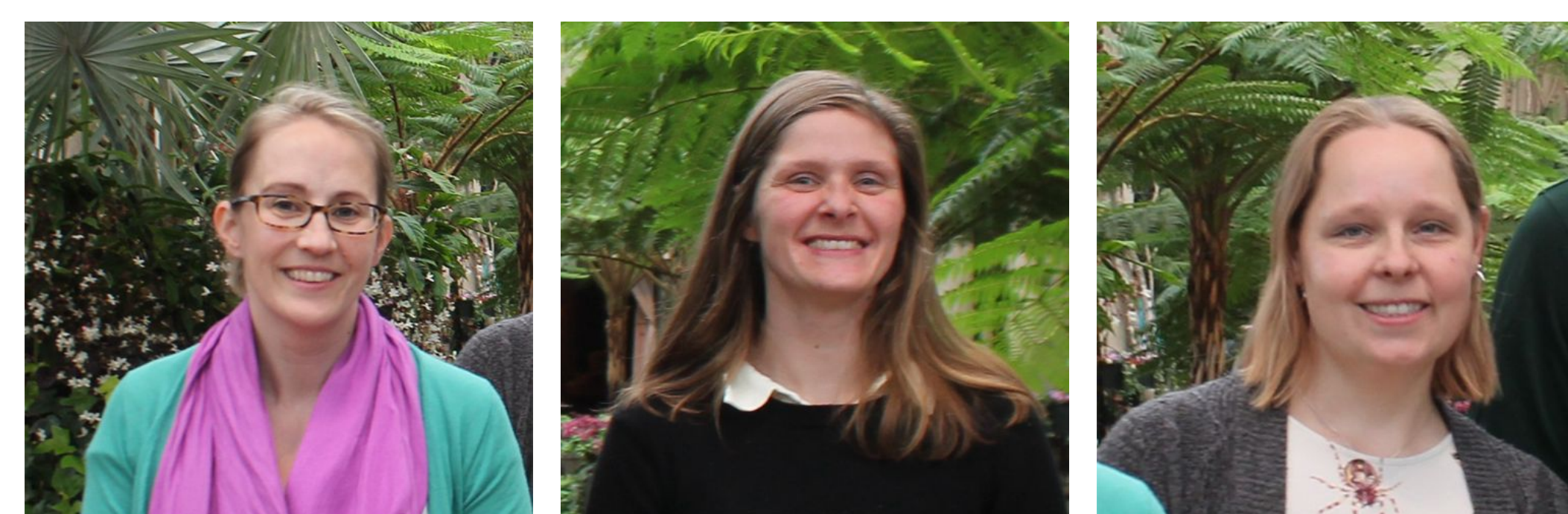


Figure 3: The Garden Thyme Podcast is routinely featured on the Maryland Grows Blog. (<https://marylandgrows.umd.edu/>)



The Garden Thyme Podcast is produced by Rachel Rhodes (left), Mikaela Boley (middle), and Emily Zobel (right).

Acknowledgements

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References

Edison Research. (2019, April 5) *The Podcast Consumer Report 2019*.
<https://www.edisonresearch.com/the-podcast-consumer-2019/>