

Partnering to Provide Activity Kits to Summit County Youth

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NEED

Extension regularly partners with library systems to provide outreach and education. The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for both Extension and libraries who were unable to provide these services in traditional ways. The Summit County (Ohio) Extension office partnered with the Akron Summit County Public Libraries to create activity kits for 3rd-5th grade youth who were not able to participate in regularly scheduled summer activities.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project were to:

- provide activities for 3rd-5th grade youth in Summit County, OH
- maintain Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) engagement during the pandemic
- engage with a trusted community partner to achieve outreach goals during a challenging time

METHODS

The Summit County Master Gardeners Volunteers suggested topics that they were interested in developing into a simple activity using easily obtained materials. Two themes emerged: nature and gardening. A two-page, branded direction sheet was developed for each activity. The direction sheets, items needed to complete the activity, and other supporting materials were placed in either an individual paper or plastic bag. For example, the Wildflower Seed Ball kit contained a package of seeds and ball of clay, along with the instruction sheet. In total, activity kits were developed on twelve different topics ranging from growing microgreens to creating a nature journal. Materials were supplied via donated materials or natural materials gathered by the (MGVs) and the Summit Akron Public Libraries provided printing services. For each topic created, sets of twenty kits were distributed to nineteen library branches for a total of 380 kits per activity. Youth were able pick up the activities to complete at home for free. A Facebook live was created for each of the kits to provide a demonstration of how to use the materials in the kit.

KIT TITLES

Garden Explorer Kits:

- Making a Gardening Journal
- Growing Microgreens
- Wildflower Seed Balls
- Growing a Fall Planted Bulbs
- Bees
- Growing a Fall Sunflower

Nature Explorer Kits:

- Creating a Nature Journal
- All About Monarchs
- All About Birds
- Pinecone Bird Feeders
- All About Trees
- Nature Scavenger Hunt

Top: Cover and back of kit directions
Bottom: Activity directions

Below: Demonstrating making wildflower seed balls



Left: FB Live video shot Right: Librarian Michele McNeal accepting 700 Nature and Gardening Explorer Journal kits

RESULTS

In total, 4,940 kits were distributed throughout Summit County. Twelve Facebook Live videos were created with a total of 594 views. Summit County Master Gardeners contributed approximately 200 volunteer hours to this project.

EVALUATION

Participating librarians were surveyed to determine the usefulness of the program.

- 80%** indicated they were able to distribute all of the kits
- 100%** indicated a similar program would be useful in the future

Comments included:

“Kits that contained everything to start the project where more popular than those which materials had to be gathered”
“Families were very happy to have these kits”

CONCLUSION

2020 created unprecedented challenges. The 2020 Nature and Gardening Explorer kits were an effective way to help meet an important community need and provided MGVs the opportunity to stay involved with youth programming in 2020.

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