

AOE: Garden Club Federation of Maine's "Show and Grow" Open Gardens

Maine's "Show and Grow" series of six (6) open gardens started as the President's Project to get back to basics and focus on gardens. The concept was simple: bring Garden Club Federation of Maine's "Show and Grow" program into every district to engage members in gardening and flower arranging. The result was so much better than anticipated! Besides educational sessions at each garden, there were opportunities for networking, inspiration, and socializing safely outside due to pandemic considerations at the time.

Gardens were member owned, and large enough to engage attendees. Members from around the state attended. The greatest attendance was 140 people. Attendees brought lawn chairs and picnics and took their own trash home which simplified the event for organizers. Anyone dropping in for a quick look was welcome as well.

The gardens were open from 10 to 3, and there was no preregistration. This simplified the need for the event to have a registrar and for members to mail checks.

A \$10 donation was requested to pay for portable toilets and honorariums for the lecturers and garden owners. The Garden Club Federation of Maine made money although that was not the intent. Local clubs and districts provided volunteers. Signage led attendees from the highway to the gardens and Volunteers were invited to attend free of charge. The project was publicized by the Garden Club Federation of Maine's website and newsletter articles, plus eblasts, and emails to club presidents and Local businesses were included.

Each garden conducted two educational sessions. Gardening lectures highlighted some aspect of each garden and provided information on plants in the garden, landscaping, and simplifying gardening as we age. Flower arranging demonstrations led by Maine's Judges' Council provided information on design concepts, conditioning flowers, and how to cut flowers out of the garden so on one would notice blooms were missing.

The goal was to make our federation relevant to members in the face of declining memberships and membership did increase during this project.