

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Putnam County: Effective Outreach During COVID-19

By leveraging resources from the Extension system and tapping local connections, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Putnam County continued to deliver vital education and accurate information during the Covid-19 crisis.

Issue

Though 2020 started out as any normal year—planning for public programs, organizing plants sales, and scheduling the Putnam County 4-H Youth Fair—COVID-19 hit, and we suddenly had to reinvent the way we served our communities. Families were thrust into at-home schooling and businesses sought extension specialists to interpret the closure rules. In unprecedented numbers people turned to vegetable gardening to grow their own food and gain a sense of security in troubled times.

Response

As New York State started its ‘On Pause’ period, CCE Putnam staff got to work from home. Within days, we were hosting professional CEU classes for Arborists, and Lawn & Landscape Contractors. Our 4-H Ag in the Classroom program recorded the farm-to-table story “Right This Very Minute” for local access TV. Instead of in-person lectures, our Horticulture & Natural Resources team with Master Gardener Volunteers launched a webinar series that focused on growing food at home, and supporting the pollinators. The 4-H Youth Development program quickly switched gears, offering the 26th Annual Putnam County Youth Forum & District 4-H Public Presentations virtually, enriching students’ at-home school experience. 4-H youth meetings continued via Zoom, and youth participated in the *NYS 4-H Mask Task*. 4-H Volunteers produced a YouTube series of STEM-at-Home videos (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math). As new resources and rules rolled out, we updated our website daily posting essential business updates for Putnam County farms and homeschooling resources for families. We filled 200 orders of vegetable & pollinator plants for Putnam County gardeners with online ordering & contactless pick-up.

“We’ve both been laid off due to the coronavirus so hoping to grow our own produce this summer as we spread small reserves. It really means a lot to have access to this instruction.” – Seed-Starting Class Participant

Impact

Using Zoom, web, social media, and team management apps, CCE Putnam and Volunteers:

- Distributed 48 gallons of ‘NYClean’ hand-sanitizers to Putnam County Ag businesses.
- Read to countless children through our 4-H Ag in the Classroom program via public access TV
- Taught 90 residents about starting plants from seeds & growing vegetables.
- Hosted 4-H District Public Presentations for 77 youth with 35 volunteers & 4-H Educators.
- Inspired 46 residents to create landscapes that support pollinators.
- Delivered continuing education to 35 arborists & landscape professionals.
- Brought together 114 H.S. Students from 6 school districts for the 2020 Virtual Youth Forum.
- Answered 91 pest management and gardening questions for Putnam residents.
- Filled 200 contactless pick-up orders of vegetable & pollinator plants for Putnam residents.
- Sewed 500+ masks for the *NYS 4-H Mask Task* initiative.
- Updated web content that received 800 social media views and 11,000 unique webpage views.