

Missoula County



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Missoula Valley farm by Patrick Mangan.

Missoula County is a dynamic landscape in western Montana which combines all the best parts of Montana into a thriving county with rivers, forests, local foods, and a large urban city center. While the city of Missoula is home to the University of Montana, serves as a regional shopping hub, and has a variety of entertainment options, Missoula County boasts miles of blue-ribbon trout rivers, forested mountain slopes, numerous outdoor recreation opportunities, pristine mountain lakes, and small communities exemplifying living in the west. Missoula County has something for everyone.

Missoula County MSU Extension has four full time Extension Agents, two Nutrition Educators, and a full time 4-H Assistant. MSU Extension partners with the Missoula County Weed District to offer support and programs to all of Missoula County.

Teaching Gardening and Horticulture

The Garden City is always a busy place for gardening, growing flowers, and learning about plants. The Missoula

County MSU Extension horticulture program offers classes to help support gardeners, backyard plant enthusiasts, and small farm owners throughout the county. In 2022, gardeners engaged in Master Gardener classes to learn about successfully growing plants through in-person offerings in Missoula, Florence, Arlee, and Condon. More than 100 new Master Gardeners completed the course and have been engaging in volunteer service throughout the Missoula area.

The Missoula County MSU Extension Horticulture program worked closely with the Tribal Health Office on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal (CSKT) Nation to develop and offer educational programming around backyard vegetables to their employees. This program is preparing Tribal Health employees to better understand vegetable gardening, grow food locally to support their neighbors and community members, and integrate fresh foods into their lives, and the lives of those they serve. The program will continue to grow in future years and engage Tribal members in growing fresh, healthy foods in their own backyards.

Additional educational opportunities throughout the year included workshops on tree pruning, weed control, forest health, rodent control, and soil fertility, creating opportunities for Missoula County residents to learn about various topics to support their horticultural pursuits.

Missoula County Plant Clinic: Diagnostics, Teaching, and Horticultural Supports

The Missoula County MSU Extension Plant Clinic provided leadership and educational opportunities to the public on the identification and integrated pest management practices (IPM) of plant diseases, pests and related plant health problems through emails, phone calls, walk-ins and site visits. Weekly scouting and trapping for insects in fruit orchards help define effective control and time management options to reduce unwarranted pesticide use.

Presentations were given throughout the season: Dormant Pest Control was presented to a group of 20 during a fruit tree pruning workshop; ‘Common pests and control measures in your yard’ was presented at a local nursery to 12 people; ‘Good gardening practices’ was presented to 8 people at a local church, 10 participants learned about edible weeds in a “Eat Your Weeds” class at the public library; a garden pests tour was held at a local community garden for 10 people; and ‘Common insect and diseases in your landscape’ was presented to 20 Master Gardeners in Helena.

Clinic staff worked with City Parks and Grow Safe Missoula to develop an Organic Lawn Care guide that was produced and distributed throughout the City of Missoula.

Family and Consumer Science Education

It is my goal as a Family and Consumer Sciences MSU Extension Agent to address the complex needs of Missoula County, provide a strategic and coordinated response, and continue to develop and strengthen community partnerships. Combining local resources and expertise helps deliver more impactful outcomes in FCS programming. As the population in Missoula County continues to grow and age, so does interest and involvement in growing food, food preparation and preservation, and caregiver education and support.

I received approximately 75 calls relating to canning, food prep, food safety, and pressure gauge testing in 2022. Many had canning pressure gauges tested for the first time, even though they had been canning for some time. Several people said they had only recently learned of the importance of annual pressure gauge checks through a friend or family member who had visited MSU Extension. A salsa-making

class in partnership with Garden City Harvest brought 25 participants together from Missoula, New York, and Texas to chop, mix, fill jars, and process locally-grown ingredients into a delicious salsa. It was a first-time canning experience for several.

Monthly cooking classes at the Missoula Public Library allowed participants to have hands-on experience with new recipes, foods, and cooking techniques such as toasting and grinding spices, creating a charcuterie board and making edible centerpieces. The Missoula Senior Center monthly cooking classes explored ways to choose more nutrient-dense foods, cooking for one or two, healthy soups, and nutritious cereals.

MSU Extension continues to help support local caregivers with the vital partnership of Missoula Aging Services. Twice yearly, Powerful Tools for Caregiver’s classes and a monthly Montana Kinship Navigator Program (MTKNP) Support Group for friends and family raising children, continue to meet on Zoom with statewide participants to provide access to caregiver and kinship resources, support, and education.

Missoula Teens take top honors at Montana 4-H Congress

With increasing enrollment and a growing 4-H Ambassador program, more Missoula teens are taking advantage of state-level 4-H leadership and competitive events. Seven Missoula teens attended Montana 4-H Congress on the MSU Bozeman campus in July. After several days of interviews and competitions, they returned with the state-winning Gavel Games team, state-winning Video contest participant, and two of the five State 4-H Ambassador offices.

Gavel Games is a parliamentary procedure competition where participants use skills in running a business meeting. Each must be prepared to fulfill the duties of the office of President, Vice President, Secretary or Treasurer, as roles are drawn from a hat before the start of the contest. With their Gavel Games win, Gus Turner, Shaun Billingsley, Ammarie Sowers and A.J. Sharkey earned the opportunity to compete at the Western National Roundup in Denver this January.

The Video contest allows participants to learn communication skills by preparing and presenting a video up to five minutes in length, as well as answering questions from judges. Autumn Schelvan won the state contest with a video about her Pack Goat 4-H project, earning her a trip to National 4-H Congress in Atlanta in November.



Top Row: (left) Participants in a forest health workshop take a core sample of a pine tree, by Patrick Mangan; **(right)** Creating a festive charcuterie board with class participants, by Kelly Moore; **Center:** Sandy Perrin teaching pest management in an orchard, by Patrick Mangan; **Bottom Row: (left)** Missoula 4-H members Gus Turner (center) and Ammarie Sowers (right) with the incoming and outgoing Montana 4-H Ambassador Officer teams, by E. Brush Photography; **(right)** Teaching improved nutrition through the use of fresh local vegetables, by Kelly Moore

Finally, two of Missoula's 4-H Ambassadors, Ammarie Sowers and Gus Turner, spent three days being interviewed by a selection committee, and both earned State 4-H Ambassador Officer positions. Ammarie is the youth representative to the Montana Extension Advisory Committee, and Gus is a youth representative on the Montana 4-H Foundation Board.

EFNEP Program

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) offers nutrition and physical education classes to community members who qualify for public assistance and children in Title One schools.

This year, Missoula County EFNEP partnered with numerous community agencies including the YWCA and Carole Graham House, where mothers of young children learned to prepare healthy food on a budget for their families. EFNEP also worked with the WIC office, Lifelong Learning Center, and Mountain Home Montana. EFNEP partnered with Double Snap Dollars and provided farmer's market coupons to class participants in 2022. EFNEP educators met class participants at the local farmer's market to redeem coupons for fresh, locally-grown produce. This was the first farmer's market experience for numerous participants. Several mothers invested in seeds to grow herbs in their homes and everyone purchased nutritious produce.

As a result of the EFNEP nutrition classes, the participants from the Lifelong Learning Center could provide more nutrient-dense dinners for their families, on a budget. Numerous participants from the YWCA became cognizant of the amount of sugar their families were consuming by learning to read nutrition facts labels for the first time. As a result, they began intentionally reducing the quantity of sugar they consumed. EFNEP taught at many Missoula

County schools, including Seeley Lake, DeSmet Elementary, Clinton Elementary, Alberton School, Franklin Elementary, Hawthorne Elementary, Lowell Elementary, Bonner Elementary, and Russell Elementary. The EFNEP educators encourage the children to be messengers and share their newfound nutrition knowledge with their families.

The Rocky Mountain Gardens and Exploration Center: A place to Grow

Missoula County Weed District and MSU Extension, Missoula Conservation District and Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium are leveraging the unique synergy of their programs by creating the premier destination for scientific and community-centered learning in the Rocky Mountain West. The new facility will be located in the heart of Missoula on the newly-revitalized Fairgrounds.

The project has received an enthusiastic welcome from the Missoula Community, and construction is well underway. Healthy Acres Healthy Communities Foundation is now focusing fundraising efforts on 2.5 acres of education gardens. An October garden event hosted 130 active corporate partners and individuals, raising more than \$100,000 for garden installation and programs.

In Spring 2022, Molly Anton, Garden Coordinator, joined the Weed District/MSU Extension team. She has expanded the garden planning committee and is creating designs along with garden sponsors/donors/staff to meet the program's needs. She is building a volunteer force and sourcing materials (plants and tools) to install the gardens beginning in the early Summer of 2023. Interpretive signage is in the plan too, and we can't wait to share this amazing place to grow.

Missoula County Staff



Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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