

MASTER GARDENERS cultivate healthy environment

Extension Master Gardeners contributed more than 111,000 volunteer hours in Minnesota communities last year, many of which were spent teaching homeowners environmentally-sound landscaping practices or how to eradicate invasive plant species.

Community-wide programs, such as a long-term partnership with the Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District, illustrate what can happen when local alliances take off.

As part of the partnership, Ramsey County Master Gardeners work to revitalize Battle Creek, which drains a large part of the east Twin Cities metro area. As water rises in the creek, it undercuts the banks and

vegetation is lost, causing further erosion and loss of animal habitats.

“Master Gardeners were instrumental in selecting long-rooted plants that would best stabilize the shoreline,” says Sage Passi, watershed education specialist.

Master Gardeners also mentor Battle Creek Middle School students, showing them how to drive plants into erosion blankets. The school’s science teachers are working with Master Gardeners to create a creek research area where students can compare different approaches to erosion control.

Protecting rivers, lakes and streams from yard-waste pollution is another priority for Ramsey County. Runoff from lawn chemicals can enter the waters through storm sewers causing fish kills, algae bloom and plant decay.

To help prevent that, Master Gardeners share tips on low-impact lawn care and composting at the county’s yard waste and compost sites. The sites draw more than 500,000 people each season. Master Gardener Kathy Smith coordinates the effort.

“It all comes back to proper management of materials and



Ramsey County Master Gardeners like Kathy Smith (left) share tips on low-impact lawn care and composting with homeowners at several yard waste sites each year.

reducing waste,” says John Springman, environmental health supervisor with the St. Paul-Ramsey County Department of Public Health. “Master Gardeners extend our capacity to hone in on our environmental goals with the public.”

For more information, visit www.mg.umn.edu or Extension’s gardening site, www.extension.umn.edu/Garden



Students from Battle Creek Middle School drive plants into erosion blankets as part of a service-learning project with Ramsey County Master Gardeners.