

## Youth Gardening Program Overview

*Anne Gachuhi, Urban Horticulture Agent, Maui County*

### Why support school gardens?

There is a growing interest in youth gardening as well as school gardening programs by many organizations, groups and individuals in Hawaii, as well as nationwide. Youth gardening enables the youth to gain better self esteem, better nutritional habits (Best Practices in classroom management, 2004), develop leadership skills, positive relationships with elders (Journal of Extension 2002), increases their awareness and appreciation for nature and the environment and enables them to gain a sense of community service. Youth gardening is also a fitness and health-enhancing activity ([www.aahperd.org](http://www.aahperd.org)). According to the National survey of children's health for Hawaii (2007), 17.3% and 11.2% of school age-children are overweight and obese respectively. Nationally, slightly more than 51% of children eat one serving of fruits a day and 29% eat less than 1 serving a day of vegetables that are not fried. Many children have limited exposure to a wide range of healthy locally available foods. Even worse, most children have no idea where food comes from or how it is prepared (Hawaii Farm to School Program Survey 2010). Youth gardening is a powerful tool for engaging the youth in healthy lifestyles. Numerous studies indicate that students that have weekly gardening activities and hands-on classroom activities have improvements on their science achievement test scores.



### Maui Youth Gardening Program

The goal of the youth gardening program is to facilitate the development of statewide youth gardening projects and to provide continuing technical and horticultural support to teachers, schools, organizations, groups and individuals through the Master Gardener volunteers. Programming efforts in youth gardening specifically centers on creating opportunities for the youth to develop gardening skills, learn about healthy foods, and gain an appreciation for nature and the environment and to participate in physical activities. The youth gardening program contributes further to achieving CTAHR's objective "to promote resilience and wellbeing in Hawaii's individuals, families and communities" by connecting the youth (keiki) and seniors (Kapuna) in intergenerational gardening projects where possible. Youth Gardening efforts in Maui County coordinated by Anne Gachuhi (Urban Horticulture Agent) have involved the following major focus areas:

- School Gardening Programs
- Annual Youth Gardening Workshops (conducted in September of each year)

- Youth Gardening Certification Training Program for Teacher (6 weeks training program)
- Youth Gardening Curricula (including the Junior Master Gardener curriculum)
- Summer Youth Gardening Programs
- Intergenerational Gardening Projects
- Agriculture In the classroom (A.I.C) program
- Agricultural & Environmental Awareness Day
- Maui Youth Gardening Alliance (new umbrella organization bringing together groups interested in youth gardening).

### Youth/School Gardening Programs in Maui County

In 2009-2010, more than 830 youth were reached with gardening information in Maui County. A total of 10 schools have initiated gardening projects with support from Maui Master Gardener volunteers. A survey of the youth gardening program in Maui County indicates, increased adoption of youth gardening projects by volunteers, schools and the community. A pre-post survey of participants attending the 2010 youth gardening workshop (September 2010) indicated that participant aspirations and attitudes were positively influenced by the youth gardening workshop and information shared. Thirty (30) of the 48 workshop participants indicated that they would be involved in a youth gardening program after the workshop.



The urban horticulture program goal is to facilitate the development of 5 youth gardening programs each year by providing financial support (where possible), technical and horticultural support through teacher training, resources to schools, organizations and individuals involved in youth gardening and connecting Master Gardeners to these schools. This effort was greatly enhanced in 2009 by a \$7,000 grant given by the Maui County Farm Bureau and the Maui office of Economic development towards support for youth gardening programs in Maui.

These funds were distributed to five Maui schools, each receiving \$1000 to support their programs. These schools were: Kula Elementary school, Maui High School, Kalama Intermediate School, Montessori School and Horizons Academy (special education). The youth involved in these gardening projects learnt how to grow and use fresh fruits and healthful vegetables in their gardens using hands-on gardening activities facilitated by the Master Gardener volunteers. At least 2 Maui Master Gardeners volunteered in each of the 5 schools that received the \$1000 grant.



In September of each year, an annual youth gardening workshop is hosted by the Maui Master Gardener program. These workshops have been attended by over 90 participants in the last 2 years (2009-2010). Workshop participants included: teachers, Master Gardeners, school principals, community youth organizations and member of the public interested in participating in youth gardening projects. The workshop covered the following areas: hands-on youth gardening activities related to the Junior Master Gardener curricula (J.M.G) and other youth gardening curriculum materials, ideas on involving children in learning about plants and the environment, starting an aquaponics project, funding, resources for youth gardening, training teachers, support or involvement and evaluation

### Youth Gardening Certification Training for Teachers

The youth gardening certification training is a six weeks training program for teachers, individuals and groups involved with youth gardening. The purpose of this training is to empower teachers and youth leaders with gardening skills and horticultural education in order to enable them to facilitate youth gardening programs in their own schools or community. The next training series will take place in Maui from May 18 – June 22, 2011.

### Maui Youth Gardening Alliance

Due to the growing popularity of youth gardening, a lot of organizations and groups have been working in this area. The Youth Gardening Alliance will be an umbrella organization, connecting the various groups and organizations involved in youth gardening. The vision is to have the Alliance become a “one-stop shop” with a website with information on education, horticulture, the environment, youth gardening curriculum, resources, research, funding, technical support and other areas related to youth gardening. The Maui Youth alliance meetings are held the first Thursday of the Month. To learn more about the youth gardening program, contact: Anne Gachuhi (Urban Horticulture Agent, Maui County at 808-244-3242 ext 232 or email: [gachuhia@ctahr.hawaii.edu](mailto:gachuhia@ctahr.hawaii.edu)).

