Hotline Training

Miami Co.
Extension Master Gardeners
January 29, 2013
Topics for today

• Hotline Purpose
• The Diagnostic Interview
• Interview practice
• Sources of information
• Addressing lingering concerns...
• Secrets to being an “Expert”
Hotline Purpose
Why do we do this??

• Stated mission of the Extension service:
  – To provide research-based information to the public.
  – “The information source you can trust”

• Marketing and Public Relations Tool
  – For Extension Service
  – For EMG program itself
How do we meet this mission?

• Remember that you are representing K-State, not popular opinion
• Be professional and personable at all times
• Continue updating your knowledge
  – Advanced training
  – Subscribe to weekly KSU Hortnews
The Diagnostic Interview
Be Approachable

- Dress for success—gardener style!
- Acknowledge caller/visitor immediately
- Use positive body language
- Use a friendly phone voice
- “Miami County Extension Master Gardener Hotline. This is Name.”
Ask for Their Question

- Adults are often reluctant to ask for help.
- The first question may not be the “real” question.
Ask Your Own Questions

• Use Helpful Questions List
• Closed-ended Questions
  – Answered by yes/no/single word or short phrase
    • Do you routinely water your lawn?
    • What type of tree is it?
Ask More Questions

• Open-ended Questions
  – Answered with complete sentences and longer explanation.
  • Tell me about your lawn watering routine.
  • Describe how the tree looks.
Be an Active Listener

- Use encouragers
  - Hmmm....
  - That’s interesting
  - Then what happened?

- Feel their pain
  - You must be frustrated! You watered your lawn correctly and it still has brown spots.
  - How sad that your beautiful tree is looking sickly!
Restate The Question

- Verify that you are listening
- Clarify what they are asking
- Restate the data you have collected
  - So you have watered your lawn 1” a week but is still looks brown so we need to figure out what else is wrong.
  - You haven’t seen any insects, but there are holes in the tree’s leaves.
Provide the Answer

• Give them the answer if you know it
• Tailor your details to the individual
• Use research-based information
• Include good garden maintenance information along with diagnosis
• Look for “teachable moments”
• Cite your source
• Offer handout if available
If You Don’t Know the Answer

• Offer to do research
  – A delayed correct answer is better than an immediate wrong answer!
• Use Hold button sparingly
• Collect their contact information—check it twice!
• Give them a time frame commitment for your follow-up
Check for Satisfaction

- Ask if the answer satisfies their need
- Ask if they have any further questions on this issue
- Ask if they have any other questions
  - This is optional depending on time constraints!
- Remind them that we are here if they need us in the future.
Time to Practice

• Find a Partner
• Questioner—Think of a garden problem you have experienced
• Answerer—Ask at least
  – 5 closed ended questions
  – 5 open ended questions
  – Hear their pain!
  – Provide possible answers
  – Check for satisfaction
• Trade roles
Hotline Resources

- K-State fact sheets and newsletter
- K-State Common Plant Problems
- Library books
- Computer research
- Other EMGs
- Extension Staff
PRUNING FRUIT TREES

BY ALAN EBB

FRUIT TREES SHOULD BE PRUNED EVERY YEAR. WHEN YOU PLANT A FRUIT TREE, YOU SHOULD BE DEDICATED TO GIVING THE TREE GOOD CARE AND PRUNING AS YOU ARE TO ENJOY QUALITY, FRUIT. IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE PRINCIPLES OF PRUNING, AND TO PRACTICE THEM. HERE ARE SOME ISOLATED PRUNING TIPS FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE:

1. **Develop Strong Trees**: This should begin when trees are planted and continued each year thereafter.
2. **Provide for Light Penetration**: Prevention of the sun is necessary for fruit trees to develop and fruit to mature properly.
3. **Control Tree Size**: Most fruit trees require pruning to control branch spread and tree height.
4. **Remove Damaged Wood**: Some wood injury will occur each year from wind damage, fruit weight, and diseases and insects.

**PRUNING TOOLS**

Pruning tools should always be sharp, where pruning or close cuts can be made. Cuts that result in bark tears, stubs, and a jagged surface are slow to heal, or they may not completely heal over.

1. **Hand Shears**: A scissors type of hand shear is used to prune small size wood up to 1/4 inch diameter.
2. **Loppers**: Long-handled loppers are used for cuts about 1/2 to 1 inch in diameter and are usually needed by the third year of tree growth.
3. **Pole Pruner and/or Pole Saw**: Long-handled equipment is used to make cuts in high areas while standing on the ground.

**WHEN TO PRUNE**

The best time to prune is during late winter or early spring just prior to the beginning of active growth. You should prune during the late dormant period because:

- Wounds heal quickly when growth begins.
- Unbreakable branches and other wood that's been pruned can be easily removed since there are no leaves on the tree.
- Winter damaged wood is easier to identify at this time.
- The bark is less likely to tear when cut are made.
- Trees pruned in early winter are not damaged by temperatures that occur after pruning.
Common Plant Problems


Problem: Aphids

Hosts: Aphids attack such a wide variety of plant material that it is not practical to list individual species.
Good old books!
To Google or Not to Google?
- Enter search terms + Extension

Preferred sites
- Other Extension agencies
- Especially in the Mid-west
- Sites ending in .edu (Universities)
- Sites ending in .gov (EPA, USDA)
- Pesticide companies product info/labels/MSDS
Computer Research

• Web sites to avoid at ALL times
  – Chat lines, gardening forums
  – Personal opinions of non-scientists
  – Any site promoting folk/home remedies

• Gray areas—cite your source
  – Nursery’s plant descriptions
  – Commercial sales sites
Challenging People

- Lonely widow(er)s
- Couples needing a mediator
- Arguers
- “But my lawn service guy told me...”
- Shooting the messenger
Working with Challenging People

- Tact & people skills
- Use Empathy--Hear their Pain!
- They don’t have to like your answer
- Delegate to a higher authority
  - “This is what K-State research has found”
  - Pass on to Extension staff
Challenging Questions

- Vague descriptions
- Insufficient information
- Un-diagnosable problems
- Strange insects or diseases
Solutions to Challenging Questions

• Ask more questions
• Get samples or photos
• Use other EMG’s
• Pass along to Extension staff
The Secrets of Being a Master Gardener “Expert”
Expert Secret #1

CLAIM YOUR AUTHORITY
Accept the role you are given.
You ARE a Master Gardener.
Expert Secret #2

PRACTICE EMPATHY
Hear their pain!
Expert Secret # 3

LISTEN
More than you talk!
This is not about you and your garden.
Expert Secret #4

BE HONEST

It’s ok to say “I don’t know” as long as you follow it up with “Let me see what I can find out!”
CITE YOUR SOURCE
Dirr’s?  KSU publication?
Personal experience?
Extension Agent?
Expert Secret #6

BE A LIFELONG LEARNER
The more you learn, the more expert you will become!
Any more questions about answering questions?