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Garden show grows interest

Summary: As a child Sue Gooch viewed gardening as a chore. Now she is so enthused by it that she writes and compiles her own scripts for "Prairie Yard and Garden," the popular show produced by Media Services at UMM and seen by thousands of TV viewers.

(February 14, 2006)-By Theresa Novak '09, Coon Rapids -- As a child Sue Gooch's enthusiasm for gardening wasn't always apparent. "I viewed gardening as a chore," she said. As she grew older, she learned to appreciate it and came to love it. Now Gooch is so enthused that she has made gardening her passion, which allows her to plan and compile her own scripts for "Prairie Yard and Garden," the popular show produced by Media Services at the University of Minnesota, Morris and seen by thousands of viewers on Pioneer Public Television.

Since 1993, Gooch, who is also a University of Minnesota Extension Service Master Gardener, has hosted Prairie Yard and Garden, a show that focuses on a variety of gardening topics and applies practical techniques and tips to help plants grow in the Upper Midwest region.

Before becoming the host, Gooch was an adviser for the show. When producer Roger Boleman needed a host he asked Gooch to take the position. "I was scared stiff," Gooch said. "It was something I had never done. I had no experience in journalism, no training in media work, nothing." Gooch took the position, uncertain of how it would go and is now in her 13th year as the host.

Gooch moved with husband Van, and his job, a UMM professor of biology, from warm California to occasionally warm Minnesota. Even though the basics of gardening are similar across the country. Gooch said there are important differences between California gardening and Minnesota gardening. "In California you can garden year 'round while in Minnesota we cram it all into three or four months. The soil is different, too. California soil is much closer to the pH level desired for gardening than Minnesota soil." One of Gooch's goals is to keep the information that is presented on the show region specific for its viewers.

Gooch believes that people like the show "because it is specific to this growing region. It's locally-produced television. A lot of viewers may not be gardeners themselves, but enjoy watching a show about gardening." She likes people to understand the "how" behind how plants grow, and believes this is an important part of structuring the program. Prairie Yard and Garden provides information that is research based, not influenced by commercial business. She knows this makes the show more realistic for this particular audience and growing area.

Behind the camera

When asked why UMM produces Prairie Yard and Garden, the show's executive producer and director of UMM's Media Services, Roger Boleman, has a ready answer: "Teaching, research, and outreach comprise the mission of the University

of Minnesota Morris. Prairie Yard and Garden is an outreach aspect that holds true to that mission. Boleman works closely with host Gooch, and Mike Cihak, production coordinator of the show. Boleman and Cihak spend many hours on this project each year, producing, editing, and airing the show.

Boleman attended Dunwoody Technological College from which he holds a degree in electronic technology and the University of Minnesota Twin Cities for his undergraduate degree in communications. He has also received his masters in liberal studies degree. Cihak holds a bachelor's degree in mass communications from Minnesota State University-Moorhead and is working on his master's degree in education with a concentration in education technology at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. He started his career with PYG as an editor. Cihak now focuses on the technical aspects and graphic design work of the show as well.

Both Boleman and Cihak agree on the show's statistics: Prairie Yard and Garden ranks in the top five of all the programs broadcast over Pioneer Public Television, and when it is broadcast nationally it airs to over 15 million households, or 50,000-100,000 people, in the Pioneer Public Television broadcasting area alone. Boleman believes it is such a popular show because, "it gives gardeners accurate information about what works in our area."

Prairie Yard and Garden has aired for 19 years and is "very popular," said Cihak. Until three years ago, Prairie Yard and Garden was filmed live from the studio. Since then, Boleman, Cihak, and host Sue Gooch take the show on the road and bring it back to the studio for editing. Three hours worth of shooting reduces to about 28 minutes of actual programming after the editing process is finished.

"Every minute edited equals about an hour of work. So we spend about 28 hours on every show we air," said Cihak. Prairie Yard and Garden originally produced 23 live programs per year today it airs for 13 weeks beginning on the first Thursday of January. It is rerun for 13 weeks in the summer, starting in the 27th week of the year.

"Prairie Yard and Garden has increased my appreciation of the variety of plants you can use in the home landscape," said Boleman. "It is science-based information about taking care of plants. Before I started this show, I was not much of a gardener. Now my wife and I are quite extensive gardeners." Cihak views it similarly: "People like gardening. Anyone can do it, young or old. It makes them feel good. They like to see color and nature, to get outside and enjoy the weather."

Prairie Yard and Garden, which airs each Thursday at 7:30 p.m. on Pioneer Public Television, Appleton, joins the other programs that have been and continue to be produced by UMM's Media Services staff. Among them are Academic Challenge and Minnesota Rivers and Fields, originally produced in 2000, and which still airs on some stations.

To read more about Prairie Yard and Garden and other programs produced by Media Services at the University of Minnesota, Morris, visit [Media Services](#).

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