



Eldergrow – A New Opportunity for Master Gardeners



Eldergrow is a new company founded by Orla Concannon that brings gardening and horticultural therapy to elders in care facilities. Master Gardeners will be able to count their volunteer time with Eldergrow as Master Gardener hours. The next Eldergrow meeting at CUH will be on August 12 from 7 to 8:30pm. Photo by Charles Ellis, courtesy Ida Culver House Ravenna.

This past spring the WSU Extension Master Gardener program partnered with Eldergrow, a new company based in Seattle and founded by Orla Concannon. Orla's passion is to bring gardening and horticultural therapy to elders living in care facilities.

The seed for Orla's inspiration was planted by her Irish grandmother, Nana. "Nana was special in many ways. One of her gifts was to grow show-stopping geraniums from leaves she 'borrowed' from places like restaurants," Concannon happily reminisced. "However, her last few years were spent in a nursing home where she was deprived of essential stimulation and she missed her garden. That was twenty years ago, and I've wanted to fix that problem ever since."

Orla recently earned her Healthcare MBA degree at Seattle University where Eldergrow became her thesis work. With some encouragement from friends, Orla entered her business concept into the university's business competition. She won the audience's heart, taking first place with their vote and second place with the judges. The positive feedback, coupled with Orla's obvious passion, has propelled Eldergrow into a fledgling business.

The Eldergrow garden kiosk offers an innovative, therapeutic connection to nature. The raised garden is portable so it can be moved around a community, and features an indoor light for year-round growth. "We bring the outdoors indoors, so that all residents can enjoy it all year long."

Research highlights the wide-ranging benefits of horticultural therapy. It has been shown to reduce the risk factors for dementia by 36%. It elevates mood, improves

sleep, reduces falls and reduces agitation. Gardening helps to keep hands nimble and strong. The United Nations made 2015 the International Year of the Soil, noting that soil microbes act as natural antidepressants.

Orla turned to the Master Gardener Program to help develop and facilitate enriching activities around the garden. Currently, a team of Master Gardener volunteers is developing a curriculum of activities to be used with the indoor garden. Volunteers are also helping with the installed pilot gardens by visiting a participating community at least once a month and helping with an activity or workshop.

The pilot gardens have received overwhelming feedback. One resident shared, “Many of our residents have been gardeners who feel sad that their gardening days are over. This brings gardening and plant beauty indoors, where they can enjoy the benefits of keeping in touch with the joys of growing things.”

Eldergrow is looking for volunteers. Interested Master Gardeners will be able to count their volunteer time as Master Gardener hours. If you would like to get involved, please contact Elaine Anderson at [206-685-5104](tel:206-685-5104) or elaine.anderson@wsu.edu. The next Eldergrow meeting at CUH will be on August 12 from 7 to 8:30pm. Watch for an end-of-summer garden party at an elder community. Check out [Eldergrow on Facebook](#) to follow their progress and receive updates.