

# Utah State University Extension

## Enhancing Horticulture Education Needs Assessments Through Annual Tracking of Public Interactions

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### Introduction

Knowing the needs of the people served by extension professionals is not only very important, but can be difficult to find as well. Needs assessments are regularly used to identify what communities or groups need and then programs, publications and classes can be focused on these findings. One of the problems faced by extension faculty is that using only the results of traditional needs assessment do not always translate to classes and programs that are well attended or successful. To dig deeper into finding the needs of Iron County Utah, a less traditional needs assessment was done, namely tracking what people from the community inquired about horticulture related needs and categorizing these questions into useful information that can be used to create more impactful programs and classes.



Image 1. In 2024 the most frequently asked questions in Iron County were about tree health. The green mountain ash pictured is suffering from an infestation of scale.

### Results

- Several hundred interactions with the public were used to gather information.
- The most important horticulture topics in order of importance were found to be:
  - Pests and Disease
  - Tree Care
  - Vegetable Production
- Subtopics in order of importance:
  - Problems
  - Informational
  - How-to

### Objectives

- 1- Better understand the overall horticulture needs of Iron County Utah.
- 2- Identify and track the most common problems that are faced locally such as plant diseases, insects, and other problems impacting production.
- 3- Use this information to create programming that will have greater impact for county residents.

### Methods

Information collection for this project was done during the entire year of 2024. The information was collected through office visits, site visits, emails, and phone calls, which happen on a daily or weekly basis during the year. Tracking and organizing this information was kept simple using the following steps:

1. The main topic of discussion was tracked for each interaction/discussion with community members who reached out to the extension office horticulture faculty.
2. With every main topic, 3 subtopics were used to track the nature of the question:
  - Informational
  - Problem
  - How-to

Topic	Informational	Problem	How-to
Trees			
Shrubs			
Weeds			
Veggies			
Weeds			

Fig. 1 An example of how information can be tracked using a simple table and tally marks.

### Impacts

- Planned workshops and classes are now being focused on these findings to better serve the people of Iron County.
- This information not only helps to make better programming for county residents but it also has given horticulture faculty an understanding that will aid in creating relevant publications and knowing what knowledge faculty members should gain to better serve the community.
- Tracking this information taps into a resource that is available to all extension professionals and can be tracked in various ways and refined over time.



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