

Dr. Lucy Bradley's Bio

“Create a year-round garden with a combination of plants that provide food, beauty, and wildlife habitat each season” advises Lucy Bradley. To achieve that, “Celebrate what you have. Focus on plants that thrive in your area, work with natural systems rather than fighting to control them, and do not strive for perfection.”

Lucy follows her own advice at home. Her front and back yards are edible landscapes featuring native varieties. Neighbors who walk past while she is gardening in her front yard often go home with fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, plants, and seeds.

A native of Florida, Lucy earned a master’s degree in organizational psychology from Purdue University and started her career working with community groups in Arizona. She became an Extension Master Gardener volunteer and when Lucy realized that gardening was the strongest force for bringing the diverse groups together, she switched her focus to horticulture. She returned to graduate school to earn a master’s degree in botany and a Ph.D. in plant biology from Arizona State University.

After 13 years as an urban and consumer horticulture Agent in Phoenix, Arizona, Lucy moved to NC to work as the Consumer and Community Horticulture Extension Specialist at North Carolina State University. She oversees programs for home gardeners and in preschool, therapeutic, and community gardens. Her work involves planning strategy and working with horticulture extension agents and Extension Master Gardener volunteers across the state to provide resources and information to help people, plants, and communities thrive through gardening.

She has orchestrated the creation and expansion of the *North Carolina Extension Gardener Handbook* <go.ncsu.edu/eg-handbook-intro>, available as a hardcover book, an

interactive online text, and free online resource and the *Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox* <plants.ces.ncsu.edu>featuring almost 5,000 plants. She was recently selected as the Outstanding Extension Educator by the American Society of Horticultural Science.

According to Lucy the most important decision a gardener makes is choosing which plants to include in their landscape. The Plant Toolbox begins by finding out what a gardener has to offer to the plants (planting zone, light, available space, etc.) This helps the gardener narrow their search to plants that will thrive in their landscape. Then, from those plants, they can select ones to serve specific functions. For example, attract songbirds, provide edible fruit, bloom in the winter, and other functions.

Lucy says the best part of her job is interacting with people who are passionate about gardening, want to learn more, and love to share their knowledge, especially North Carolina's Extension Master Gardener volunteers.

Lucy's joy in gardening is reflected in her view that "Gardens are incredibly therapeutic." She adds that even container gardens can improve people's lives.

Lucy notes that chickens add even more benefits to gardeners. She says, "Chickens lay eggs. They eat bugs and weeds. They provide fertilizer. They play a vital role in creating a vibrant cycle from plant growth, to consumption by people, to consumption of leftovers by hens, to their production of eggs and fertilizer that supports plant growth... and then the cycle repeats. This minimizes the need for inputs like pesticides and fertilizer, as well as the generation of green waste. They transform garden tasks like pulling weeds into gathering greens for the girls, and removing insect pests into collecting protein to feed the girls. "The hens also are fascinating pets and make such serene sounds—that's my Zen."