

Goodbye Flagstaff, it's time to take another Path by Hattie Braun



As fall nears, much of the gardening season comes to an end. This fall also brings an end to my career with Coconino Cooperative Extension. I retired on September 9, 2024 as Coconino Cooperative Extension's county director and from my position as the coordinator for the Coconino Master Gardener Program. This is my last column for Gardening Etcetera.

A gardening column in the Arizona Daily Sun, supported by Coconino Cooperative Extension and Coconino Master Gardeners, has run on and off since 1994. It has been an excellent way to provide information on timely topics and provide science-based information to the public.

Thankfully, Coconino Master Gardener Steven Grayson is stepping in to ensure this column appears every Thursday. Cindy Murray will continue writing her outstanding and genuine columns on gardening, native plants, birds, bees, and environmental concerns. Lisa Miller and Sarah Edmonds will assist with their excellent review skills.

Working at Arizona Cooperative Extension has been amazing and rewarding, all because of the people in our community. Not only have I overseen the Coconino Master Gardener Program for the last 21 years, I took the class from Tom DeGomez, the Agriculture Agent at the time, in 1995 shortly after moving to Flagstaff from Pennsylvania.

I moved here thinking "You can't garden in Flagstaff, it's too dry, windy, and cold. We had a garden with too little soil, too many pine trees, and late spring frosts." I was ready to leave after two years.

Taking the Master Gardener class changed everything. Not only did I meet a great group of people interested in gardening in the high country, but I also learned so much about how. (I must admit that the fruit tree class was the most depressing class ever as I learned that late

spring frosts knock out most of the blossoms making a fruit harvest unpredictable.) The best lesson I received was that we northern Arizona gardeners need to share all our knowledge with each other and our community. Gardening here is not like gardening in much of the country.

Since taking over as Coconino Master Gardener Program Coordinator in 2003, I have had the good fortune to work with many wonderful Northern Arizona gardeners on a variety of topics and projects including vegetable gardening, native plant gardens, and invasive species. I could only do all this because of an amazing group of Master Gardener volunteers, local non-profits interested in gardening and food production, neighborhood schools, and local businesses that provided their support. I also want to thank the Coconino County Board of Supervisors for providing funding and a place to hang our hats for Coconino Cooperative Extension.

If you haven't taken the Master Gardener class, it will continue. Arizona Cooperative Extension will be hiring a Master Gardener Program Coordinator soon. And for those of you who live in rural areas and small towns outside of Flagstaff, we will continue offering the online Master Gardener class.

As Coconino Cooperative Extension Director, I had the opportunity to bring new people to our office. This includes Kristi Schoppmann, program Assistant for 4-H Youth Development, who does her great work with 4-H youth and adult leaders in Page. Josh Farella came on board in 2019 and is the 4-H Agent. He designed and brought the new Beginning Blacksmithing to Coconino County and Arizona, and he expanded the Shooting Sports Program, as well as overseeing our traditional 4-H clubs. Gayle Gratop was hired as the Family Consumer and Health Science Agent in 2023. She is bringing several new programs to Coconino County including Horticultural Therapy, Farmer Mental Health, Positive Parenting, Healthy Eating, and Food Preservation. Previously, Gayle developed our online Master Gardener Program.

My husband Tom Kolb and I will be leaving Flagstaff in October to start a new chapter in our lives. We are heading to Colorado to be closer to family and water. We hope to garden more (teaching about gardening is a little different than actually gardening), hike more, birdwatch more and enjoy being in the outdoors.

I will miss Flagstaff and Coconino County and all the wonderful people that have made my job the best job ever. This is really an amazing place and will always hold a special place in my heart.

Hattie Braun is the former Coconino Cooperative Extension's county director and the best thing to happen to gardening in Coconino County since Wall O' Water season extenders.