

PINAL COUNTY QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY — MARCH 2026

Volume 13, Issue 1

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: PG.

The Gift of Reading	2
Stop Right There!	3
Beyond Ready w/4-H	4
Supporting Our Neighbors	5-6
Fall Prevention Tips	7-9
Community Gardens	10-13
Master Gardener Course	14
Connect with us	15



Cooperative Extension, the outreach arm of the University of Arizona, brings the University to the people.

The faculty and staff in the Pinal County Extension office are part of a non-formal education network bringing research-based information into communities to help people improve their lives.

Cooperative Extension is committed to delivering high-quality, relevant educational programs and information to Pinal County citizens and communities.

We are off to a great start in 2026!

What are the top three things you would like to do, change, or be this year?

Pinal County Cooperative Extension is your local partner and resource bringing research and evidence-based information to our community to help you reach your goals. Perhaps you are interested in better health or contributing to your community. Maybe you have noticed that with more birthdays come physical changes and you would like to improve your balance and fitness, or you have young children in your life and would like to help them get a healthy start. In this edition of our newsletter, you may find one or two ideas to help you as you plan out your 2026.

On the last page of this newsletter, you will find a listing of our professionals and current programs. Please reach out to us or drop by and visit about our programs or with ideas you may have about other programming you would like to see offered.

Greta Mills
Acting County Extension Director

Main Office
820 E. Cottonwood Lane, Bldg. C
Casa Grande, AZ 85122
Phone: (520) 836-5221

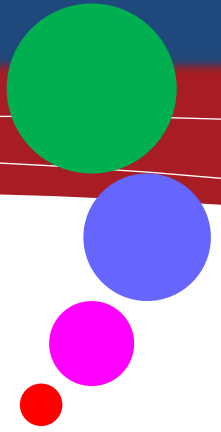
Maricopa Ag Center
37860 W. Smith-Enke Road
Maricopa, AZ 85139
Phone: (520) 374-6263

Pinal County Extension Website
<https://extension.arizona.edu/pinal>

The University of Arizona
is an equal opportunity provider.

Learn more:
extension.arizona.edu/legal-disclaimer.





THE GIFT OF READING

Submitted by Samantha Colarusso, Community Outreach Assistant II



Reading to babies and young children regularly is a gift that will enrich their lives year after year. The benefits of being read to range from academic to social, from cognitive to emotional, from immediate to long term.

Children that are read to frequently hear more words than children that are not. Being read to introduces your child to vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and ideas they wouldn't hear in everyday life. Books help children build vocabulary and learn various ways to express themselves verbally.

Sharing books with your child also provides them with opportunities to build empathy and emotional awareness. Books expose us to a wide variety of people and cultures, emotions and points of view. Reading together gives your family the chance to share thoughts, feelings and opinions. Reading aloud and talking about the narrative and pictures creates a shared experience.

We lead busy lives, and it can be hard for families to find the time to read together. Just a few minutes each day will reap benefits for a lifetime. For many parents, a bedtime story is the best time to unwind together and read a story or two. For some families that may not be practical, and they may need to be more inventive and flexible with the time set aside for reading. If you only have time to read for 5 or 10 minutes at a time, you are still gifting your child with additional language, ideas, and bonding.

The gift of reading to your child is a simple one that all parents, no matter their budgets or resources, can give. Books can be expensive and can seem unattainable for some, but they don't have to be. Libraries are a great resource for borrowing books and they often have inexpensive used books for sale. Pinal County has libraries in most towns and often have story times and events for kids that promote reading. A list of libraries and their event calendars can be found at <https://pinal.events.mylibrary.digital/>.

Our very own Developmental Sensory Program at the University of Arizona Pinal County Cooperative Extension provides families with a free book each time they complete a free developmental screening. That screening takes place as The Ages and Stages Questionnaire, is a developmental milestone screening for children between 2 months and 5 years. Screenings can be scheduled for our Casa Grande office by calling (520) 374-6221 or can be completed online at <https://asqonline.com/family/477598>.

FIRST SMILES ORAL HEALTH



STOP RIGHT THERE!

Submitted by Greeta Mills, RDH MEd, Oral Health Professional

Prevention is really the key to when it comes to children's tooth decay. Doing things like helping them brush twice a day, encouraging water to drink between meals saving things like milk and juice for mealtimes, choosing snacks that are less likely to cause cavities, and taking them to their dentist routinely are critical to establishing a healthy mouth environment.

But what happens when your child has a cavity? Because it is a bacterial infection process, it does need to be treated. One treatment option that was not available until recently is silver diamine fluoride (SDF).

The dentist may recommend silver diamine fluoride treatment to prevent the cavity from growing and spreading. It is a clear liquid that is applied to a cavity, the silver is antimicrobial and kills out the bacteria, and the fluoride helps strengthen the tooth. It has become a popular method of treating children's cavities because it does not require anesthetic and cleaning out the decay, is easy to apply, and is inexpensive. It does not repair or restore the tooth, just stops the cavity. SDF does need to be reapplied periodically to remain effective.

The process of applying SDF is simple. The tooth and area around it are dried and cotton rolls may be placed to help keep it dry. A very small brush, smaller than a nail polish brush, is used to apply the SDF to the tooth, and it is rubbed into the tooth for a minute. Then the area is dried with air, and an ultraviolet light might be used to help the SDF get deeper into the decayed tooth area.

It is 80% effective in stopping cavities and has no serious side effects other than staining the area that is treated. The treated spot will be permanently stained very dark. So, if it is in an area where the staining is going to be a concern, this might not be the best option for that tooth.



4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



BEYOND READY: PREPARING PINAL COUNTY YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE

Submitted by Esther Turner, Associate Agent, 4-H Youth Development

A national movement comes to Pinal County 4-H! The future is uncertain, but one thing is clear—our young people need to be ready for whatever comes their way. That's the driving force behind Beyond Ready, a nationwide 4-H initiative now taking root right here in Pinal County.

WHAT IS BEYOND READY?

Beyond Ready is more than just a catchphrase. It's a comprehensive framework designed to equip youth with the real-world skills, resilience, and confidence they need to thrive in an ever-changing world. The program focuses on three core areas: readiness for work, readiness for life, and readiness to navigate post-secondary opportunities.

Consider this: 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented yet. Meanwhile, 77% of employers say we should focus less on traditional school subjects and more on skills like creative thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. That's exactly what 4-H has been doing for over a century—and Beyond Ready takes it to the next level.

Beyond Ready



WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Recent national studies reveal concerning trends among today's youth. Chronic school absenteeism is at 30%, and many young people express alarming levels of negativity about themselves and their futures. But the data also shows hope: youth who participate in 4-H programs are twice as likely to aspire to leadership roles, three times more likely to engage in community service, and twice as likely to live with intentionality and purpose.

BEYOND READY IN ACTION

Here in Pinal County, 4-H members are already experiencing Beyond Ready principles through hands-on projects in areas like livestock, technology, outdoor adventures, and STEM. Whether they're caring for animals, mastering new digital skills, or developing leadership abilities, our youth are building the capabilities outlined in the 4-H Thriving Model—including responsibility, social competence, and resilience.

The program emphasizes positive youth development through four essential elements: discovering personal sparks and passions, fostering a sense of belonging, building developmental relationships with caring adults, and encouraging meaningful youth engagement in their communities.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

With a bold goal of reaching 10 million youth nationwide by 2030, Beyond Ready represents the largest coordinated effort in 4-H history.

In Pinal County, we're looking for volunteers, community partners, and supporters who want to invest in the next generation.



Join 4-H today at 4-H.org



Whether you're interested in starting a new club, supporting existing programs, or simply learning more about how 4-H is preparing youth to be Beyond Ready, contact Esther Turner, Associate Agent in 4-H Youth Development, at (520) 340-4815 or eturner@cals.arizona.edu.

Our youth are the future—and with Beyond Ready, we're making sure they're equipped not just to face that future, but to shape it.

To learn more about joining Pinal County 4-H, visit: extension.arizona.edu/programs/4-h-pinal-county.

COMING TOGETHER—SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBORS

Submitted by Muriel Gutierrez, Community Outreach Assistant III



As we move out of the holiday season and into the new year, we want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible ways our community came together this past November and December to support families facing food insecurity.

Across Arizona, food banks have experienced unusually high demands in the last year, fueled in part by the economic ripple effects of the recent federal shutdown and disruptions in food-assistance benefits. While the need has grown, the response from neighbors, volunteers, and local organizations has been truly inspiring.

In Pinal County, residents, community groups, and volunteers stepped up to ensure that no one had to face day-to-day life, or the holidays, without a meal. Local food assistance organizations, including Hope International Food Pantry, Caring Hands of Pinal County - Food Distribution Center, CAHRA, Casa Grande Alliance, and St. Vincent de Paul Food Bank, worked tirelessly to provide food and support to families across the county.

Food drives were organized throughout towns and neighborhoods, collecting non-perishable staples, pantry items, hygiene supplies, and holiday meal ingredients. Local groups such as Isa's Garden Charities, Creative Needs Center LLC, and Grande Shops, alongside banks, construction companies, and other businesses, contributed generously. Volunteers tirelessly donated their time to sort and pack donations, deliver groceries, and assist at food banks and pantries.

Churches, schools, and community organizations coordinated efforts to reach families in need. One example is A Table For All, a twice-weekly pop-up free dinner rooted in the principle: "It isn't charity, it's community." Local businesses, including Sweet Village Bakery and Churrolicious, also gave back by donating dozens of turkeys to the community.

And let's not forget the neighbors who stepped up to help one another or bought meals for those in need. Those who reached out a helping hand to many families and individuals out of love, care, and support for those in their community.

Together, these collective efforts helped provide stability and nourishment for families, seniors, and individuals who might otherwise would have struggled during the holidays.

Yet even with these efforts, many Pinal County families continue to recover from months of financial strain. Too often, households faced impossible choices: paying rent or buying groceries, covering utilities or putting food on the table. When families fall behind on essential expenses, catching up can be daunting, and food banks continue to see elevated demand for everyday necessities. Not just during the holidays.

COMMUNITY NEWS

HELPING NEIGHBORS

COMING TOGETHER—SUPPORTING OUR NEIGHBORS

Submitted by Muriel Gutierrez, Community Outreach Assistant III

While the need remains high, there are concrete ways each of us can make a difference. Here's how you can help support families in Pinal County and help fight hunger:

- Donate food or hygiene supplies to local pantries
- Volunteer to help sort, pack, or distribute meals
 - ⇒ Click her for a list of Pinal County Food Banks and Pantries and other resources
 - ⇒ Here is the link : <https://app.pinalhealthyandactive.org/dl/home>
- Give financially, allowing food banks to purchase fresh produce and other essentials
- Spread the word to neighbors, friends, schools, and local groups

Even as many families continue to face difficult choices between paying bills and putting food on the table, the response from our community has been truly inspiring. Your generosity, through donations, volunteer efforts, and goodwill, has provided thousands of meals to neighbors in need and demonstrated the resilience and compassion that define Pinal County. Because this need reaches far beyond a single moment, every donation, volunteer hour, and act of kindness becomes a powerful reminder of what we can achieve together. Nourishing our neighbors, uplifting our community, and helping our county grow and thrive with compassion at its core.

As we move through this season, we are reminded of the incredible strength of our Pinal County community and that every effort, big or small, helps lift our neighbors and bring hope to those who need it most. Together, we can ensure that our community remains a place of support, compassion, and shared strength. You can continue to make a difference by donating, volunteering, or simply spreading the word. Every action counts!

PINAL COUNTY FOOD—INSECURITY SNAPSHOT (2024–2025)

Population: 513,862 residents	Children experiencing food insecurity: 18.8%	Households w/children receiving SNAP: 18.1%	Median household income: \$77,600	Rising food costs since 2019: Eggs +163%, Chicken +37%, Bread +45%	Implication: Thousands of families struggle to put nutritious meals on the table, even as the community rallies to help.
--	--	---	---	--	--

“Even with support from local food banks, families face tough choices between paying bills or buying groceries.”

ACTIVE LIVING—FALL PREVENTION TIPS

Submitted by Maira Perez, Community Outreach Professional

As we age, our risk of falling naturally increases. This can be due to physical changes in our body, chronic medical conditions, or the medications used to treat them. In fact, falls are the leading cause of injury among older adults—1 in 4 adults over the age of 65 report a fall every year, totaling more than 14 million people. Of these falls, there are about 300,000 hip fracture-related hospitalizations every year.

While these numbers may sound concerning, they should not create fear. Understanding why falls happen—and taking proactive steps—can greatly reduce risk and help older adults stay confident and independent.

Why Falls Happen:

- Age-related changes in strength, balance, and vision
- Medical conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, or heart disease
- Side effects from medications
- Environmental hazards at home



Fall Prevention Strategies:

- Home Modifications: Remove tripping hazards, improve lighting, install grab bars and railings.
- Exercise Programs: Participate in activities that improve strength, balance, and flexibility, such as Tai Chi or strength training.
- Regular Check-Ups: Keep up with annual vision exams, medication reviews, and routine health screenings.
- Community Programs: Be on the lookout for "A Matter of Balance" classes offered in your area, which focus on reducing fear of falling and increasing activity levels.

⇒ The next class at the Coolidge Public Library will be held on January 16, 2026. Please contact Leticia Hamilton at 520-723-6034 for more information or to register.

Tips for Staying Safe:

- Wear supportive, well-fitting footwear.
- Use assistive devices, if recommended.
- Stay active to maintain muscle strength and balance.
- Keep pathways clear and well lit.

Understanding the reasons behind falls is one of the best ways to prevent them. With the right strategies, older adults can stay safe, mobile, and confident every day.

RECOMMENDED EXERCISE

Chair Rise Exercise

What it does: Strengthens the muscles in your thighs and buttocks.

Goal: To do this exercise without using your hands as you become stronger.

How to do it:

1. Sit toward the front of a sturdy chair with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart.
2. Rest your hands lightly on the seat on either side of you, keeping your back and neck straight, and chest slightly forward.
3. Breathe in slowly. Lean forward and feel your weight on the front of your feet.
4. Breathe out, and slowly stand up, using your hands as little as possible.
5. Pause for a full breath in and out.
6. Breathe in as you slowly sit down. Do not let yourself collapse back down into the chair. Rather, control your lowering as much as possible.
7. Breathe out.

Repeat 10-15 times. If this number is too hard for you when you first start practicing this exercise, begin with fewer and work up to this number.

Rest for a minute, then do a final set of 10-15.



Check Your Risk for Falling

Please circle "Yes" or "No" for each statement below.		Why it matters	
Yes (2)	No (0)	I have fallen in the past year.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
Yes (2)	No (0)	I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often feel sad or depressed.	Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
Total _____		Add up the number of points for each "yes" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Discuss this brochure with your doctor.	

Your doctor may suggest:

- Having other medical tests
- Changing your medicines
- Consulting a specialist
- Seeing a physical therapist
- Attending a fall prevention program



This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is a validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. *J Safety Res*; 2011;42(6):493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.

HORTICULTURE

PINAL COUNTY COMMUNITY GARDENS

Submitted by James Jepsen, Community Outreach Professional—Horticulture

This article focuses on three Pinal County Community Gardens, which are prospering and successful within their communities, with varying operational methods and volunteer participation. Our first one is the Florence Community Garden, located in Old Town Florence. The second one is Hope Women's Center Community Garden, located in the City of Coolidge. And the third one is the Seeds of Hope Community Garden, which is in the City of Casa Grande.



Florence Community Garden

This garden was established a few years prior to the University of Arizona and the Arizona Health Zone becoming involved. Word on the street from former gardeners; the garden was initially started by members of the Boy Scouts of America.

Located in the shadow of the old Pinal County Courthouse, the Florence Community Garden lies smack dab in the middle of Old Town Florence. Town history buffs have informed us that the rock structures located on the garden premises are water troughs used to hydrate horses because the location was supposedly an old west stagecoach stop. We don't know for sure, but the story is fun.

One of the garden's greatest cooperative strengths is that the property owner has granted full permission for the land to be used for the garden, provided it serves educational purposes. Education and demonstrations are what we have been doing, going into our eleventh year. Another positive that helps sustain the garden is the Town of Florence. Like the owner, they provide water for the garden as long as we provide educational opportunities for community members.

Instructional classes are held every Tuesday, beginning at 7:00 am. The classes feature hands-on participation and typically last two to four hours, depending on the time of year. Participation in the garden varies. There is a small core group that comes weekly, with a menagerie of others that periodically participate. The others are town workers, passersbys, snowbirds, and even the next-door neighbor. Regardless of who shows up at what time, each participant has something to add and receives something to take away. Whether it be knowledge or seasonal produce, they all benefit. We are always seeking more garden participants with open arms.



The physical garden is made up of two sections of nine in ground seed beds for a total of eighteen rows. Each row is approximately fifteen feet long and is watered by an above ground in-line plastic irrigation tube with emitters, spaced every foot with a distribution capacity of .9 gallons per hour. The emitters can be various spacings, but we have chosen the one foot spacing because it aids during planting times. As we figure out the footprint of a plant, the mature size, we can figure out where to place our seeds or transplants by using the emitter spacings. This is helpful regardless of whether we are growing crops for either cool or warm seasons.

HORTICULTURE

PINAL COUNTY COMMUNITY GARDENS

Submitted by James Jepsen, Community Outreach Professional—Horticulture



Speaking of growing seasons, we consistently grow a variety of crops in this garden. Warm season usually consists of different varieties of corn, okra, squash, melons, cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers. Cool season plantings are made up of root vegetables such as beets, carrots, radishes, and turnips. We also plant cole crops made up of broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels Sprouts, kale, collards, kohlrabi, and cabbage. Finally, leafy greens which consist of different varieties of lettuce, Swiss Chard and spinach are also included in the crop mix.

Hope Women's Community Garden:

Here, we saw the winding down of the Hope Women's Center Community Garden in its old location, where it had flourished for the past nine years. It was bittersweet calling it quits, but we had the opportunity for a whole new garden at the Center's new location - which opened across town. The new Center is an old family farmhouse which sits on a small amount of acreage and had been abandoned for a few years. During that time frame, the soil around the home became dry and parched since it had had no irrigation and very little moisture from the rain. Because there is a large amount of extra land that came along with the building, the garden program was given a substantial piece of ground in which the ladies could begin planning for their new garden. Prior to their final garden departure from the old Center, the ladies teamed up and disassembled the above ground irrigation system, including the in-ground main water lines, and timers and then moved them to the new location where the lines were reconfigured and reused were possible.



The garden class is held every Wednesday from 9am to 11am and maybe even longer, depending on the amount of work that needs to be done. Because of this two-plus hour time restraint, it was "slow and go" to put the garden infrastructure into place. Before anything was constructed, the ladies walked around their new space to brainstorm and draw in the dry dirt, not soil yet, as to how they wanted their garden to look. There is an old non-used irrigation ditch to the west of the garden plot, and along its edge in the northwest corner is where they mapped out their three-bin compost area. From there, just south, they situated the three raised bed planters, made from salvaged mobile home shower bottoms that were moved over from the previous garden and have been used primarily for garlic and herbs. South of that, they then set to work leveling more ground along the ditch where they placed their next three 4' x 8' raised bed planters that have access from all sides. There were two

raised planters donated to the Center, measuring 4' x 8' each, which were installed end to end just east of the other raised bed planters. These, along with the two additional small, raised bed planters, delineate the south boundary of the garden. Once those pieces were installed, the process of bringing a main water line to the garden was put into play. The only water source was coming from a spigot next to the house that was tapped into and then an

HORTICULTURE

PINAL COUNTY COMMUNITY GARDENS

Submitted by James Jepsen, Community Outreach Professional—Horticulture



underground pvc main line was run to the top end of the garden. Once there, the ladies helped to install four separate water taps that supply water to various parts of the garden. The first to the compost bins, the second to the raised bed planters, and the third and fourth supply water to the seven inground seed beds that at the time had still not been installed.

Everything to that point ran smoothly. Once we started working on the in-ground beds, it became very difficult to do. Unbeknownst to us, there had been a homemade concrete patio that was installed and buried under the ground over time. As we began creating the seed beds, we discovered the concrete and had to slowly break up part of the patio by hand, as it reached out far enough into the garden space that it affected four of the nine beds. After the concrete had been removed, we began to

moisten the ground with a sprinkler to loosen it with the tiller. As the ladies tilled, they discovered that extra rock and concrete had been dumped into other areas of the property, and as we found it, we had to slowly remove it from the emerging garden space. Once we got past these barriers, it was then time to designate exactly where the seed beds were to be situated, and construction began. As mentioned, the water was applied to the ground so we could loosen it up with the tiller and shovels. We dug each row down into the ground approximately one and a half feet and began adding gypsum, manure, organic matter and various types of amendments that were then worked into. As we slowly incorporated everything, the seedbeds began to take shape and resemble actual soil. That was a long hard process, but the real test was to plant our first crop.



The raised bed planters were all filled with bulk soil that we procured from a local nursery. These beds were planted with peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, and garlic. Everything but the garlic struggled to survive. It could have been the soil mixture, or perhaps it was the brutal summer heat. The garlic was small, but it did produce. As far as the in-ground seed beds are concerned, we planted all the rows in sweet corn, and it was a total bomb. I think that we didn't quite have enough amendments incorporated into our virgin soil, that it just couldn't sustain our first crop. The cool season was totally different; the second crop looks amazing. The ladies planted lettuce, cauliflower, Brussels Sprouts, both red and green cabbage, and collards. They also planted root vegetables such as radishes, carrots, and beets. We even utilized some of the carrots and cabbage and conducted a food demonstration on how to make a USDA approved creamy coleslaw that was used as a side dish for one of the lunches provided at the Center.



The garden is transitioning from the cool season to the warm season, so the ladies have once again been busy. They have planted tomatoes and squash so far, and plan to fill the garden space in the coming weeks.

HORTICULTURE

PINAL COUNT COMMUNITY GARDENS

Submitted by James Jepsen, Community Outreach Professional—Horticulture



Seeds of Hope Community Garden:

This garden, located on the grounds of the Casa Grande Presbyterian Church, has been flourishing. It is nestled on the west side of the church, next to the labyrinth and prayer garden for the pastor who passed unexpectedly last year. The space was once the children's enclosed playground, that was completely covered in Bermuda grass. Trying to eradicate the grass is an ongoing battle. Just when the gardeners think they have a jump on it, more spring up somewhere else.

As mentioned, the garden is located on church property, but is a non-denominational garden. There are a few regular townspeople and the Elders from the LDS Church, who are there on a weekly basis. Often there are four or more affiliations and volunteers there at the same time to attend class and participate in garden-work detail. We meet Thursday mornings at 8am for one hour or until the work has been completed. This garden is truly a calming and relaxing place where everyone can come and enjoy one another's company. Seeds of Hope is a local faith-based, nonprofit organization that is housed at the church and has been providing social services to members of the community since 1993. They, along with the University of Arizona and the Arizona Health Zone, work together to support the community garden.

The gardeners are engaged in transitioning the fall garden to the spring, as temperatures begin to rise. They have already planted beans and squash plants that were germinated in January by gardeners from the Florence Community Garden who wanted to share. The plants were slow to get going but are finally making a good stand with high survival numbers. By the end of the month, the 14 in-ground seedbeds and two raised bed planters will be filled. They have already transplanted tomatoes and peppers from the UA Master Gardeners that were grown at the universities experimental farm in Maricopa. Eggplants will also be transplanted, and then they will sow seeds for okra, cucumbers, squash, melons, and mammoth sunflowers. The sunflowers are used for their beauty, but their bright yellow petals are great for attracting pollinators to the garden.



The goal for this garden is first and foremost to create a sense of community and belonging. When this is achieved, the garden flourishes and produces in abundance. One of the benefits of the community garden is that everyone who participates gets to share in the bounty. As we harvest, the gardeners take the produce home and have made creative side dishes for their families and have shared their recipes and photos with the other gardeners. Oftentimes

there is excess produce, which is then placed on shelves outside the garden gate where anyone in need is welcome to partake. They also share food with the Mondo Anaya Community Center in Casa Grande which provides necessary needs like food access to many in the community, such as children in the after-school programs and senior activities. This garden is truly special. It brings together people from all walks of life and faith. It is not only a garden where people come to learn, work, and share, but it is a blissful haven where people can participate and plant Seeds of Hope!





THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

Pinal County

MASTER GARDENER ONLINE COURSE

WHO SHOULD JOIN:

Anyone with an interest in environmentally responsible landscaping and gardening in Pinal County and a desire to teach those principles/skills from research-based materials to others.

**REGISTER
NOW!**



The Master Gardener online classes are taught by University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension faculty, industry professionals, and other horticulture experts.

Participants will learn the fundamentals of selecting, installing, and maintaining healthy, sustainable landscapes and gardens suited for Pinal County's unique environment.

Through this program, The University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension trains gardening enthusiasts to become certified Master Gardener volunteers—empowering them to help their community grow better gardens and create more sustainable landscapes.

Course Start Date: January 12, 2026

Registration: Required

Course Fee: \$200

Arizona Master Gardener Manual: \$55 (separate purchase)

Contact Us:

Eva Gonzalez, Administrative Support Assistant I

The University of Arizona, Cooperative Extension, Pinal County

820 E. Cottonwood Ln., Bldg. C | Casa Grande, AZ 85122

Office: (520) 340-4193 | Email: evagonzalez@arizona.edu

SPRING COURSE

JANUARY 12, 2026

- Botany
- Soils, Fertilizers, Composting
- Entomology
- Plant Pathology
- Orientation to Master Gardeners
- Integrated Pest Management
- Plant Propagation
- Tree and Shrub Pruning
- Herbaceous Ornamentals
- Landscape Design
- Irrigation Design & Efficiency
- Citrus
- Cactus and Succulents
- Desert Plants and Xeriscape
- Vegetables and Herbs

FIND US. LIKE US. FOLLOW US.

Facebook Pages:

- [Maricopa Master Gardeners](#)
- [Pinal County 4-H](#)
- [Sensory & Developmental Screening](#)

Webpage: [CALS, Pinal County](#)



Greta Mills, Acting County Extension Director

gmills@arizona.edu

Avik Mukherjee, Assistant Agent—Agriculture

avikm@arizona.edu

Esther Turner, Associate Agent—4-H Youth Development

eturner@cals.arizona.edu

4-H provides educational opportunities for youth to become capable and contributing members of a global community. Children, ages 5-19, learn about healthy lifestyles, animals, plant sciences, and leadership.

Contact: Esther Turner at (520) 340-4815 or eturner@cals.arizona.edu

AZ Health Zone is a program designed to influence healthy eating and active living in a positive way that promotes health and reduces disease among all people living in Arizona.

Contact: Greta Mills at (520) 340-4973 or gmills@arizona.edu

Child Care Health Consultations (CCHC) develops relationships with childcare facilities to provide training to staff that will improve their knowledge and practice in the childcare setting.

Contact: Ashley Dixon at (928) 978-2911 or adixon@arizona.edu

Developmental Screening Program reaches out to families with children, ages 0-5, to screen for early developmental milestones such as gross and fine motor skills, communication, personal-social skills, and problem-solving capacities.

Contact: Jennie Treadway at (520) 340-4979 or treadway@cals.arizona.edu

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is a nutrition education class designed to assist limited resource families in eating smart and being active and in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and behavioral changes necessary to contribute to their personal development and the improvement of the total family diet, nutritional and physical well-being.

Contact: Esmeralda Castillo at (520) 788-6217 or ecastill@cals.arizona.edu

Field Crops Systems uses research and education efforts to work to improve field crop productivity and global food and fiber supply, farm economic viability, and protecting the environment.

Contact: Avik Mukherjee at (520) 340-4385 or avikm@arizona.edu

First Smiles is an oral health program that provides preventative oral health education, oral screening, referral to dentists for children birth to age five; and fluoride varnishing for children with emergent teeth up to age five.

Contact: Greta Mills at (520) 340-4973 or gmills@arizona.edu

Horticulture Program develops and delivers educational information, structured programming, and technical support to the consumer and commercial horticulture sectors, as well as urban agriculture and food systems in Pinal County.

Contact: James Jepsen at (520) 340-4489 or jjepsen@arizona.edu

MAC (Maricopa Agricultural Center) Farm Ag-Ventures educational programs include a combination of videos, educational presenters, hands-on learning experiences and tractor-trailer rides around their 2,200 acre farm for a close-up view of what makes a working farm operate.

Contact: Esther Turner at (520) 340-4815 or eturner@cals.arizona.edu

Sensory Screening Program provides free screenings of children, ages 0-5, for vision and hearing impairments that could affect developmental growth.

Contact: Jennie Treadway at (520) 340-4979 or treadway@cals.arizona.edu

