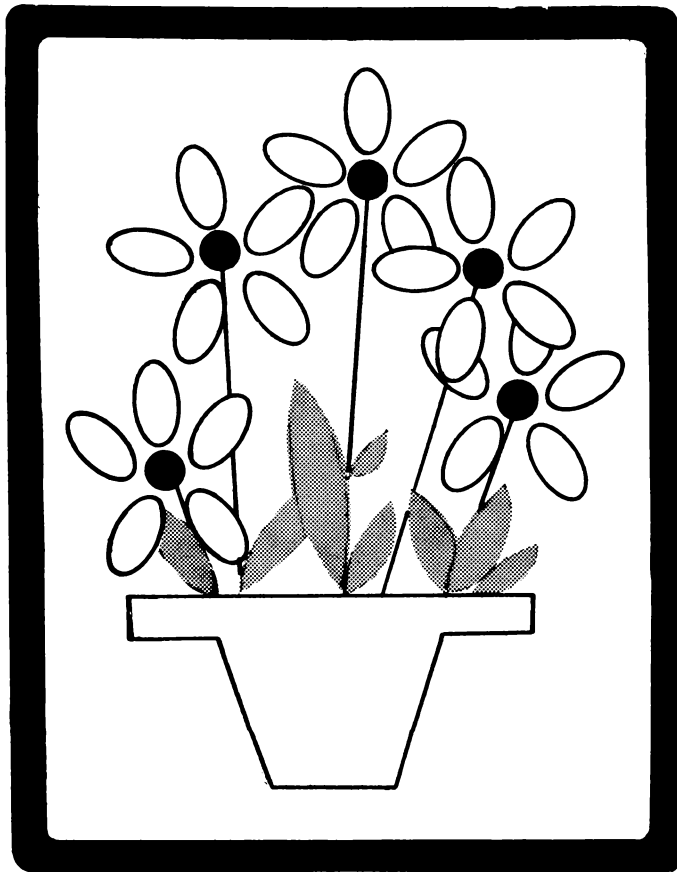


PLANNING AND
PRESENTING A
GARDEN CLUB TALK



Extension Division Virginia Polytechnic Institute
September 1968 Publication Number 7

Publication 7
Cooperative Extension Service
September 1968

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. W. E. Skelton, Dean, Extension Division, Cooperative Extension Service, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061.

Planning and Presenting a Garden Club Talk

*Prepared by
Wesley P. Judkins
Extension Specialist, Horticulture*

You are scared to death. Your stomach is tied up in knots or full of butterflies. You are nervous as a kitten. What is responsible for this unfortunate state of affairs? It is all quite simple. You have been asked to make a talk at your garden club and you are petrified. How can you possibly assemble the material and present a worthwhile program?

If it is any comfort to you, professional speakers have the same feelings. In fact, unless you are concerned about doing a good job and have developed a modest case of nerves, you will not give the assignment the effort it deserves. Public speaking is somewhat like an athletic contest, you need to be keyed up to render your best performance. This is true for professional as well as amateur speakers.

So -- what is the formula? What are the rules which will help you plan and present a good program? Briefly stated, success in public speaking is the result of self-confidence based on a thorough knowledge of a subject which has been carefully organized for logical presentation. It is just as simple as that. Good public speaking is easy if you work hard at it. The typical garden club talk may include the use of props or visual aids such as charts and pictures, or actual materials which illustrate important topics or techniques being discussed. The delivery should be made with enthusiasm and showmanship.

To summarize the situation briefly, a good program will result if you will apply the three P's of public speaking: Preparation -- Props -- and Presentation. Master these important basic principles and success will be yours.

Preparation

Of all the rules for effective public speaking, the most important is -- prepare thoroughly. Careful, complete preparation will eliminate fear and give you the confidence you need to make a good speech. Start assembling the material for your talk well in advance of the date of the meeting. A little work each day will allow you to become so familiar with the subject that you will be able to talk about it freely.

Select a topic which you know will be of interest to your audience, and determine the one central thought, or theme you wish to develop. You must pinpoint your objective if the purpose of your talk is to be accomplished. You should also decide at the beginning whether you intend to present factual information, arouse interest in a particular topic, or persuade your audience to take action on a certain proposal.

You will find helpful suggestions for program topics in V.P.I. Extension Division Publication 8, Horticulture Programs for Garden Clubs, which is available from the extension agent in your county. This publication contains lists of numerous titles, reference books, slide sets and movies, which are of interest to garden club members.

Determine the main points you intend to emphasize in your talk. Concentrate on a limited number of important ideas. As a rule, from 3 to 5 are enough for a typical 30- to 45-minute talk. List these main points in a logical order for presentation.

Assemble the details and examples which describe and illustrate the several main points

of your speech. This will constitute the main body of your talk. The information you need may be secured from personal experience, garden books, magazines, college of agriculture publications, encyclopedias, and other appropriate sources. Attempt to assemble the latest and most complete information available on the subject being discussed. Include your own personal experiences, and interesting illustrations relating to the value or use of the ideas being presented. The sources of information listed in Extension Division Publication 8, Horticulture Programs for Garden Clubs, may be of help to you.

The opening and closing statements of your talk should be planned very carefully. Your opening remarks must arouse the interest of your audience and convince them that your program is of real value. The closing should appeal for action, or be a dramatic summary statement of the main points which have been covered. Plan these opening and closing comments with extreme care. They are by far the most important parts of your speech.

Use a well organized topical outline when you make your presentation. Rehearse your speech several times vocally or silently to become thoroughly familiar with your subject. Do not read from a manuscript because such talks usually lack animation, and good speaker-audience contact. If you will prepare carefully as suggested here, you will be so full of your subject that you will be able to talk easily and effectively from notes and have no need for a completely written speech.

Props

Some topics may be presented quite effectively by the lecture method without props. However, the type of information which is typically discussed at garden club meetings will be retained more easily when visual aids are used. The preparation of such materials may take considerable time but will add real quality to your talk.

Two important rules must be observed in preparing visual aids. First, they must relate directly to your talk and make a positive contribution to the ideas or infor-

mation you are trying to convey. Second, they must be large enough so that everyone can see them and read the printing without difficulty. This includes those folks with less than perfect vision on the back row. If you cannot develop props which satisfy these two rules, use none at all. Don't spoil a good talk with poor visuals.

Some of the more common types of props include charts, sketches, pictures, slides projected on a screen, and the actual plants or materials being discussed or demonstrated. For a small group, pictures from magazines or seed catalogs may be used. These may be pasted on poster board or on a large spiral bound artists' sketch book. Plants, flowers, or items of garden equipment may be displayed effectively to a small audience but cannot be seen clearly if many people are present. One very important precaution, never pass out pictures or objects for your audience to examine. You will lose their attention and they will distract each other as they pass the articles around for inspection. If the items cannot be seen when held up for display, leave them at home.

The main points of your talk may be remembered longer if they are listed in tabular form and displayed as a chart. Use an artists' sketch book or poster board for this. If a larger chart is needed you may use pieces of white rolled table paper. Stencils or letters for making charts or posters may be secured from a local printer, or store which deals in stationery and artist supplies.

Be sure the lettering on your poster or chart is large enough for all to read. Letters should be 1/4 inch high for viewing from a distance of 8 feet, 1/2 inch if viewed from 16 feet, 1 inch if viewed from 32 feet, and 2 inches high if viewed from 64 feet. Remember, these are minimum sizes for the smallest letters. If you are using both upper and lower case letters, the suggested size refers to the lower case letters. If possible, make your letters larger than these minimum recommendations.

Charts will be easier to read if you use dark letters on a light background. In order of relative visibility from best to poorest, here are some suggested letter and background color combinations: (1) black on

yellow, (2) green on white, (3) red on white, (4) blue on white, (5) white on blue, (6) black on white, and (7) yellow on black.

Slides are possibly the most useful and versatile type of prop which can be used for a meeting. Individual objects, gardens, or scenes may be photographed, and close-up pictures allow the audience to see a magnified view of small items or individual plant parts. The size of the projected picture may be adjusted to the size of the group by using a small 4 or 5 foot portable screen in the home, or a large wall screen in a lecture hall or theater. Be sure the pictures you show are bright and sharp. Do not make your audience suffer by using slides which are fuzzy, dark, or light, because of incorrect exposure. In seating your audience in relation to a screen, have the first row of seats not closer than 2 1/2 times the width of the screen, and the last row not farther than 6 times the width of the screen.

Although you may not have a camera or projection equipment of your own, you probably have friends who would be pleased to take pictures for you, or you may arrange to borrow some from the extension division of your state agricultural college. Some commercial concerns, garden centers, or nurserymen have slides which could be used with your talk. If you borrow slides, be sure they relate to your topic and effectively illustrate the important points you plan to discuss.

Presentation

And now the big moment has arrived. You are at the meeting and ready to present your talk. After you have been introduced, walk with energy but without haste to the podium, pause briefly to get the attention of the audience, and then start. You may wish to acknowledge the introduction you have received but do not waste valuable time on irrelevant comments. Move quickly to the statement you have planned as your opening remark. Don't, under any circumstances, apologize, or offer excuses for your talk or your ability as a speaker. The planning committee obviously thought you were well qualified or they would not have asked you to present the program. If you have prepared

adequately as suggested, you will have no trouble maintaining the interest of your audience.

After you have completed your brief introductory remarks, announce the theme or objective of your talk. Explain what you hope to accomplish. It may be appropriate and helpful to indicate the number of main points you plan to cover. This will enable your audience to follow your progress with more understanding as you proceed toward your goal.

There are no special tricks in public speaking. Present your well-prepared material with sincerity and enthusiasm. Be friendly and relaxed. Speak naturally, and loud enough to be heard by the people in the back row. If you are speaking to a large group, use a microphone. To insure that you will be understood, use simple words and speak distinctly.

An effective public speaker must develop active contact with his audience. Speak directly to them as individuals and establish eye contact by shifting your gaze gradually from one part of the audience to another during your talk. Don't stand at the podium looking at the ceiling or the floor. One of the most boring college professors I ever had spent the lecture period with his attention on trees outside the window. His level of communication with the class was nearly zero. Forget yourself and concentrate on conveying to your audience the information you have assembled for their benefit. Remember, the audience is on your side. They are interested in what you have to say or they would not be there.

Your enthusiasm for your subject may be demonstrated by using appropriate gestures. These may help you relax and add emphasis to certain parts of your talk. However, avoid unnecessary arm waving and walking around on the platform. Also, eliminate annoying mannerisms such as playing with collar lapels, pulling your ear lobes, or running your fingers through your hair.

The main points of your talk may be listed on 3 x 5 cards to help you remember the important items you plan to discuss.

Do not memorize or read your speech. If you have become thoroughly familiar with your material by careful preparation you will be able to discuss it with enthusiasm from a short list of topics. You should not distribute outlines or manuscripts during your talk. It is difficult to retain the attention of your audience while they are reading printed material. An important exception to this rule is when you are conducting a workshop and wish to guide students in the interpretation of detailed information. In such cases the use of a study outline may be very helpful.

Make your presentation light by the introduction of an occasional human interest situation. A change of pace every 5 or 10 minutes with a casual comment or side-light will break the monotony of continued concentration on serious material. Return

quickly to your main subject or you may be accused of being a rambling speaker. Avoid jokes unless you know from experience that you can tell them effectively. Visual aids may be used to add variety and interest to your talk.

As stated previously, the closing of your talk should appeal for action, or be a concise summary of the main points which have been covered. This final portion of your speech should be brief and must be presented with renewed enthusiasm. Do not prolong your ending and ruin a good presentation. Remember the 3 rules for a good speech:

Stand up so people can see you.

Speak up so they can hear you.

Shut up so they will like you.