



**Satisfaction and Experiences of Callers  
University of Wisconsin Extension's Horticulture Helpline in  
Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, and Waukesha Counties**

**Final Report  
November 2005**



The University of Wisconsin Extension is interested in learning about the experiences of callers who contacted the Horticulture Helpline for advice over the past several months. To achieve this objective, the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research assisted by conducting a telephone survey between June and October 2005 with a sample of Helpline users in Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, and Waukesha counties. Survey respondents were identified through Helpline contact sheets of callers who used the service between April and September, 2005.

Eight hundred thirty-six callers were interviewed for the study and asked questions about their general Helpline use, as well as satisfaction with advisors and recommendation for addressing their horticulture problem. Of the 836 respondents 14% were in Kenosha County, 36% in Milwaukee, 19% in Racine and 32% were in Waukesha County. Respondents were classified as either “pesticide callers” or “non-pesticide callers” depending on whether they confirmed that they had discussed the use of pesticides during their last call to the Helpline. Each group was asked a set of common questions and another set of questions specifically designed for their group. Of the 836 respondents interviewed for the survey, 51 were pesticide callers and 785 were non-pesticide callers.

The following section presents the findings on characteristics of Helpline users, experiences with advisors, and satisfaction with the service. Where applicable, distinctions are made when referring to results for all respondents, or the non-pesticide and pesticide groups. There were virtually no differences between pesticide and non-pesticide respondents, so a comparative analysis is not included. And since the number of respondents who discussed pesticides was relatively small (51), and those who were advised to use pesticides even smaller (20), it was not possible to conduct an in-depth analysis for this group. However, a very brief summary of results for pesticide respondents is included at the end of the results section.

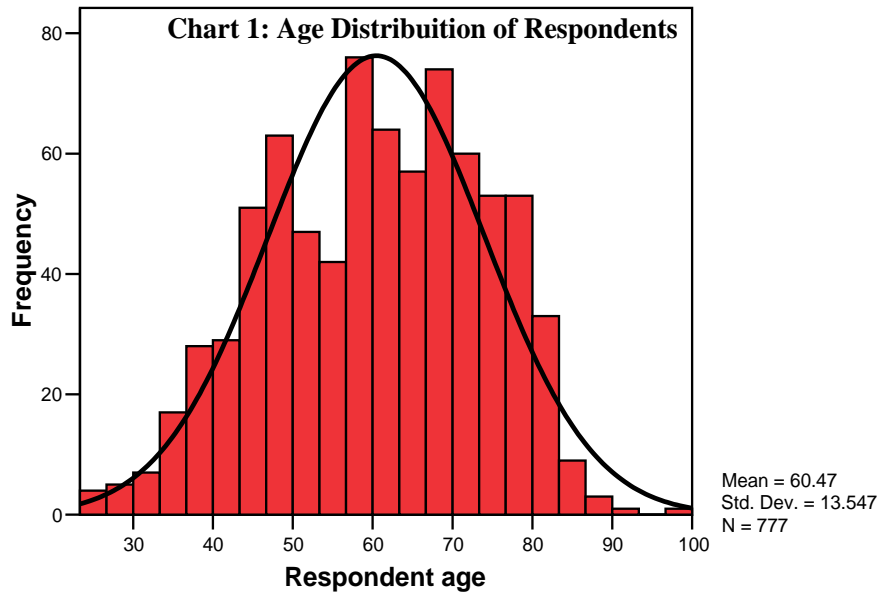
## **Results**

### ***Description of UW Extension Horticulture Helpline Users***

Respondents were similar in terms of their ethnicity, gender, home ownership status, and age, regardless of their county location. Ninety-eight percent of respondents reported their ethnicity as European American/white. Females made up 66% of persons surveyed and a full 98% of respondents were homeowners. While there was a wide age range (the youngest person



was 24 and oldest 100), the average and median age of respondents was 61, indicating users of the service tend to be older, a factor that was consistent across all counties. Below is a chart showing the distribution of the age of respondents.



Respondents indicated they had learned about the service through a variety of sources. The most frequently cited referral sources were friends or neighbors (20%), newspapers (14%) and radio or TV (8%). The following newspapers and radio stations were specifically identified by respondents:

- Newspapers: Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel (63 respondents), Kenosha News (3 respondents), Racine Journal Times (11 respondents)
- Radio: WTMJ (14 respondents), Public Radio/PBS (13 respondents)

Table 1 on the next page shows referral sources that were cited in at least 1% of survey calls.



**Table 1: How did you hear about the Horticulture Helpline?**

Referral Source	Number of Responses	Percent of All Responses
Friend or neighbor	143	20.2
Newspaper	102	14.4
Radio or TV station	58	8.2
Telephone book	54	7.4
UW Extension flyer	44	6.2
Commercial garden center	32	4.5
Garden show	31	4.4
Internet/Web site	25	3.4
UWEX Outreach	15	2.1
Governmental agency	9	1.3
Park	7	1.0

Although referral sources were largely the same for the types of respondents, they did differ somewhat by county, gender and age<sup>1</sup>. Below is a summary of the differences in referral sources by respondent characteristic.

- 21% of respondents in Racine and 18% of those in Milwaukee stated they heard about the Helpline through a newspaper compared to only 10% in Kenosha and 9% in Waukesha.
- Respondents who had called the Helpline three times or more stated they first heard about the service through a newspaper more often than respondents who had called only once (16% and 9%, respectively).
- Waukesha County respondents cited a UW Extension flyer as their referral source more often than respondents in the other three counties (10% in Waukesha compared to between 3% and 7% in the other counties).
- 13% of Milwaukee County respondents mentioned radio or television as a referral source compared to only 3% to 8% in the other counties.

<sup>1</sup> For the age comparisons, respondent ages were grouped by percentile ranges in the sample: 1%-25% of respondents were ages 24-49; 26%-50% were age 50-61; 51%-75% were age 62-71; and 76%-100% were age 72-100.



- Males heard about the Helpline from radio or television more often than females (10% compared to 5% of females).
- Respondents between the ages of 24 and 49 stated that they learned about the service from friends or neighbors more often than older respondents (26% compared to 13% to 16% of respondents age 50 and over).
- 15% of respondents over age 61 learned about the Helpline through a newspaper compared to only 7% of respondents age 49 and under.

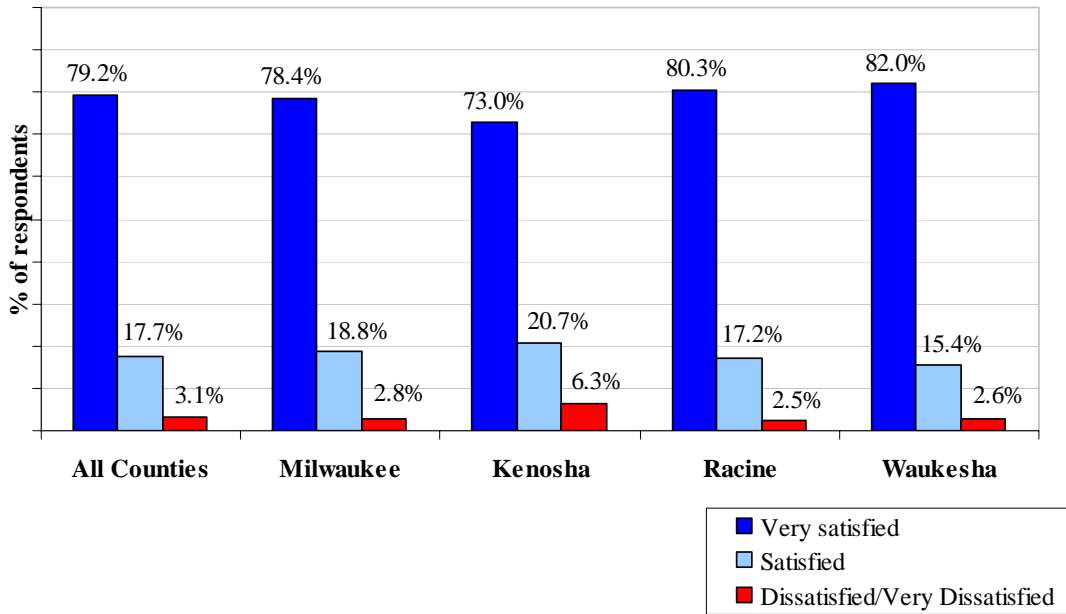
Respondents were also asked to report the number of times they had called the Helpline. Those surveyed reported that they had called anywhere from one to 100 times. The median number of times respondents called was two; 43% stated they had called only once and another 19% had called twice.

### ***Respondents' Satisfaction with the Service and Experience with Helpline Advisors***

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported high satisfaction levels with Helpline advisors in terms of their knowledge and courteous approach to them as callers. Fully 98% of respondents stated that the advisor clearly understood their question. When asked to rate the level of their advisor's knowledge, 77% stated their advisor was "very knowledgeable" and another 21% stated they were "somewhat knowledgeable". In addition, 93% of respondents indicated their advisor was "very courteous" with 83% stating they would turn to the Helpline first the next time they needed advice. Of those who would call the Helpline first the next time for advice, 71% stated it was because of the knowledge of the advisors, the most frequently cited reason. When asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the Helpline, respondents in all four counties gave high marks to the Helpline as Chart 2 on the next page shows.

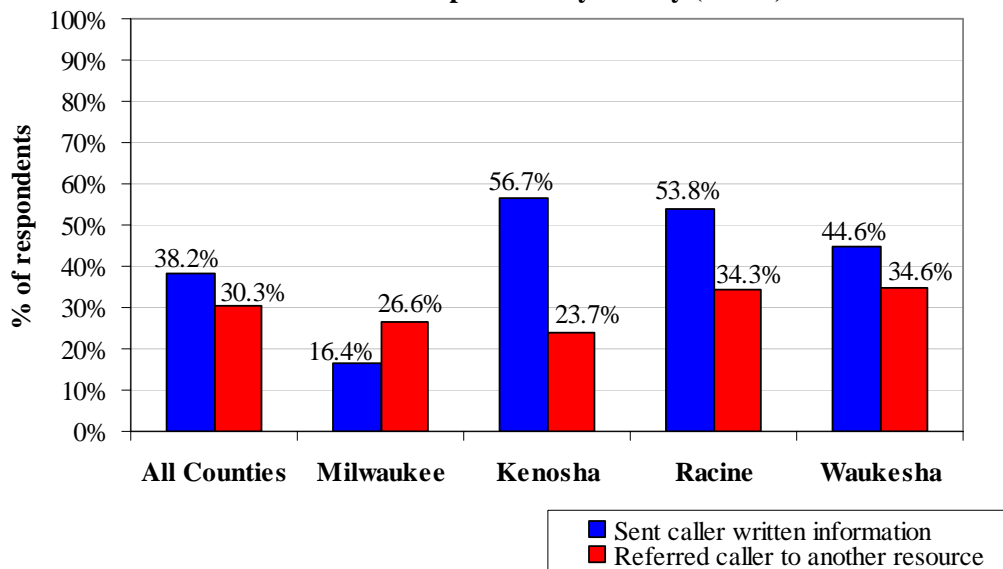


**Chart 2: Overall Satisfaction with the Horticulture Helpline (n=836)**



Respondents who did not discuss the use of pesticides in their most recent contact were asked if the advisor sent them additional printed information or referred them to any other resources. Thirty-eight percent of non-pesticide respondents indicated they were sent additional information. However, respondents in Milwaukee County were sent materials much less often than those in the other three counties as demonstrated in Chart 3.

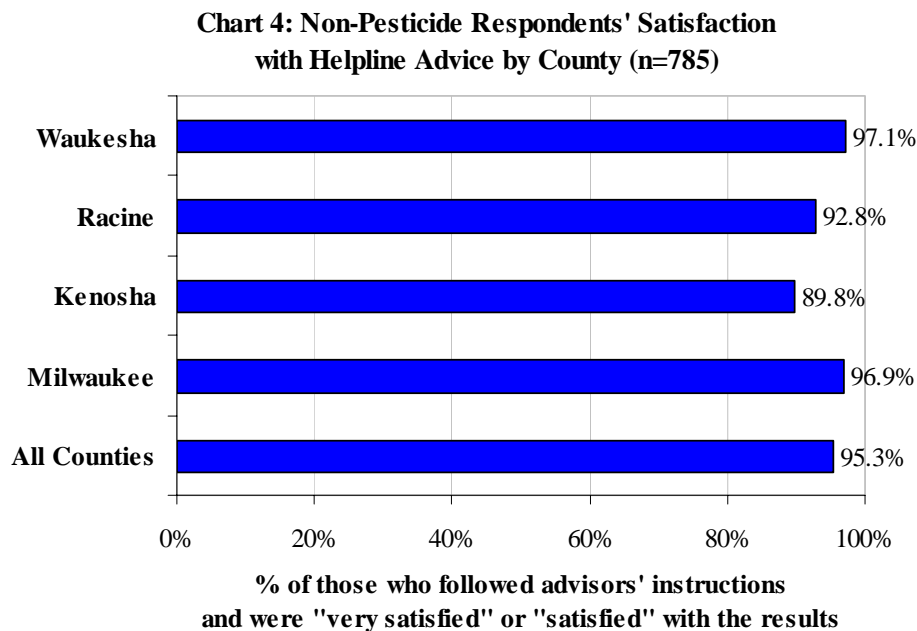
**Chart 3: Additional Resource Information Provided to Non-Pesticide Respondents by County (n=785)**





In addition, Chart 3 on the previous page shows that 30% of all non-pesticide respondents were referred to other sources of information by their Helpline advisor. Of these respondents, 44% were referred to the internet or a non-specified web site, 6% were advised to see an arborist, 6% were referred to a book, and 5% were referred to a garden center or greenhouse. Interestingly, less than half (43%) took action based on the alternate referral source compared to 61% who took action based on written materials that were sent to them. Also, respondents who were age 61 or younger were referred to other resources at nearly twice the rate of individuals who were older than 61. There was no difference in age for information mailed to callers.

Non-pesticide respondents were asked to think about their last contact with the Helpline, and indicate whether the advisor suggested an action and if they followed the instruction. Eighty-four percent of respondents reported their advisor suggested an action and, of those, 89% followed the instruction. Respondents also rated their satisfaction with the result. Chart 4 below shows that satisfaction with the Helpline advice was high among respondents, regardless of the county.



Forty percent of respondents stated they had asked others for advice before calling the Horticulture Helpline, a percentage that was similar across all counties. Of other advice sources, respondents named “family, neighbor, friend” and “garden center” most often.



Table 2 below shows the number and percent of times each advice source was mentioned by respondents.

**Table 2: Besides the Horticulture Helpline, who else did you ask for help? (n=322)**

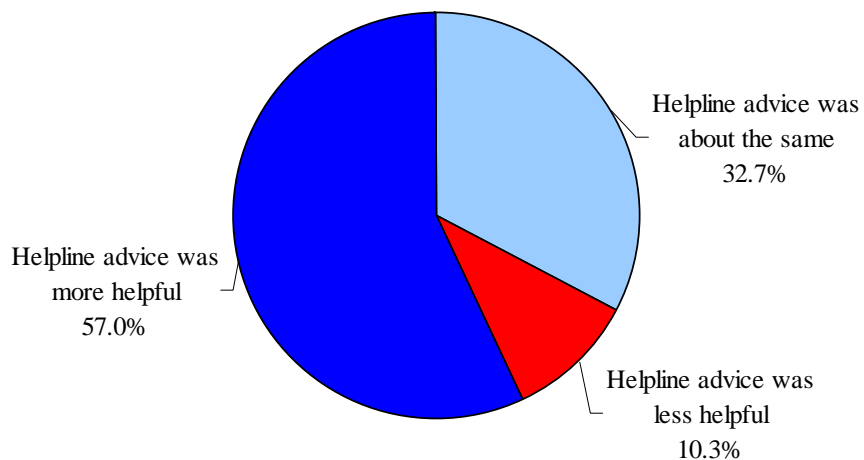
Referral Source	Number of Responses	Percent of All Responses*
Friend, neighbor, friend	91	29.0
Garden Center	89	28.3
Nursery	42	13.4
Arborist – tree service	28	8.9
Other	86	27.4

\*Total will not equal 100% as respondents could indicate multiple sources

Other advice sources mentioned by respondents in the “other” category in the table above included: other garden expert or helpline (11), Whitnall Park (7), lawn or pest service (7), internet (6), library (5), and hardware store (4).

Over one-half (57%) of respondents who had asked others for advice indicated the Helpline advice was “more helpful”, while another 33% stated it was about the same (see Chart 5 below).

**Chart 5: Respondents Who Asked Others for Advice  
Comparison of Helpline Advice to Advice from Others (n=322)**





At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were asked to express how they believed the Helpline should be funded. Nearly one-half (47%) of respondents stated the Helpline should be funded mainly through tax dollars. Another 47% indicated the funding should come from a combination of both tax dollars and fees charged to users of the service. Only 6% of respondents felt the Helpline should be funded entirely from user fees. Although respondents overwhelmingly supported the use of tax dollars for the Helpline, those who had used the service three or more times were the most supportive of this funding method. Once again, there was no significant difference in respondent opinions on funding sources between the four counties.

### ***Summary of Results for “Pesticide Callers”***

Fifty-one of the respondents in the survey confirmed that they had discussed the use of pesticides to address their problem during their Helpline contact. Of these respondents, 54% indicated the advisor had recommended the use of chemicals, while 46% had been advised to not use chemicals. Of the twenty respondents who were advised to use chemicals, twelve indicated the advisor had discussed safety precautions. Respondents who could recall the advised safety precaution mentioned the following: use the right chemical for the right problem, use protective clothing, use the appropriate equipment, use rubber gloves, use chemicals in the garage, take care around flowers, and do not inhale the dust. Ultimately, thirteen of the twenty decided to use chemicals to address their problem.

When comparing pesticide respondents to non-pesticide respondents, only one difference was found in responses. Pesticide respondents had a higher percentage of asking others for advice over non-pesticide respondents (57% and 39% respectively). But again, the sample of pesticide callers was small and a larger sample may have produced some differences.

### **Conclusion**

One of the more interesting findings from the Horticulture Helpline survey was that respondents were remarkably similar in their characteristics and answers to most questions across the four counties. The majority of respondents were female, European American/white, between the ages of 45 and 75, and homeowners. Most respondents heard about the Helpline through another person or newspaper. But most importantly, respondents reported high levels of



overall satisfaction with the service including satisfaction with the knowledge and courtesy of Helpline advisors. This should be welcome news to the Horticulture Helpline staff in these four counties.

Yet a closer look at the data revealed that respondents did differ somewhat across counties in their answers to three of the questions. Respondents in Racine and Milwaukee counties reported hearing about the Helpline through a newspaper at a much higher rate than those in the other two counties. In Milwaukee County, respondents heard about the Helpline through radio or television in greater numbers. Persons surveyed in Waukesha County were more likely to have heard about the Helpline through a UW Extension flyer than those in other counties. Finally, those surveyed in Milwaukee County received follow-up written materials considerably less often than respondents in the other three counties. These and other findings mentioned in the report regarding different types of respondents will, hopefully, assist the Horticulture Helpline in future planning.