



HISTORY OF THE MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

The rapid urban growth in many areas of the United States coupled with increased interest in the environment and home gardening have prompted ever-increasing numbers of homeowner questions to County Extension Agents. Many of these questions are seasonal in nature and are relatively easily answered, assuming that one has horticultural training.

In 1972, an innovative Extension Office Agent in the State of Washington reasoned that well-trained volunteers could respond to many of the everyday homeowner questions, freeing him and his colleagues for more technical and difficult problems. Volunteers such as Extension Homemakers and 4-H Leaders, had always been a part of the Extension Service but never in the area of homeowner horticulture. With this in mind, the Extension Agent selected, trained and certified volunteers as Master Gardeners. They soon succeeded in meeting his desired objectives -in fact they exceeded his expectations. And so it was, the Master Gardener Program began.

Since that time, the Master Gardener Program has grown and is now active in over 30 states. Florida adopted the Master Gardener concept in 1979. The program has been a tremendous success and is now active in nearly half of Florida's counties. The Master Gardener Program in Florida is sponsored by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS), of which County Extension Office is a part.

THE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

In Miami-Dade County, the Master Gardener Program began in 1979 and to date has provided annual training periods to hundreds of quality volunteers enabling them to become Certified Master Gardeners. Individuals are selected, trained, and after completing their initial 60 hours in their first year, commit themselves to giving 50 hours of volunteer service in each year they remain active in the program. Hundreds of residents have been active more than one year and some have volunteered over a thousand hours of service.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, IFAS, Florida A. & M. UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAM, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING.

The most needed area that Master Gardeners aid the Extension office is by answering homeowner horticulture phone calls at the Extension office in Homestead. Many Master Gardeners have been involved with projects off-site such as school gardens and landscapes, community gardens, the Master Gardener Nursery, as well as educational programs. Master Gardeners also assist the horticulturists with the dissemination of horticulture information to the general public as well as assisting with manning information booths at various events.

Selection to become a candidate for the Master Gardener Training Program is not predicated on prior training, education, knowledge or experience. Neither do age, race, sex or physical handicap dictate selection.

A sincere desire to help others, a desire to learn, and a personal commitment to volunteer service are the major selection criteria involved. Gardening experience and knowledge are always helpful, but they are by no means a requirement for selection for the Master Gardener Training Program.

HORTICULTURAL TRAINING

The Master Gardener Training Program is demanding and intensive. Formal classroom work constitutes more than 80% of the 11 - 12 week training period. Classes are 6-7 hours one-day per week at the Extension office in Homestead. Subjects acquaint the participants with concepts related to basic botany, soils, fertilizers, vegetables, composting, ornamentals, diseases, and related topics. Most of the classes focus on presenting information on how to garden in Florida in an environmentally friendly manner, something referred to as Environmental Landscape Management. The information presented in this program is based on the knowledge and research base of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Program. Agricultural Sciences.

As part of the training you will also become familiar with the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program (FYN). You will be expected to understand the nine principles of FYN and how they are used to create a Florida friendly landscape.

Upon completion of the 11-12 week training period, the participants are required to satisfactorily pass a comprehensive examination on the materials covered. This exam is designed help the participant understand their areas of weakness as well as help the horticulture staff be sure that they are covering the material adequately.

After completing the formal training, the participants are then required to begin their on-the-job training. Once they have completed the required 60 hours of volunteer service, the trainee will become certified and be awarded the title of Master Gardener (which needs to be renewed each year). Once certified, Master Gardeners must abide by a set of policies set out by Miami-Dade County, the Extension Office, the University of Florida IFAS, and the Federal Government.

MASTER GARDENERS ARE EDUCATORS AND ARE NOT TRAINED TO PROVIDE LABOR TO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE GARDENS OR PARKS.

The 60 volunteer hours is a minimum. Many Master Gardeners far surpass the required number of service hours with some exceeding several hundred hours in a year.

Note: Due to the high demand for this training, there is a two-year waiting list. Please contact Patty at 305-248-3311 x225 for an application.

WHAT IS COUNTY EXTENSION?

For a more complete understanding of this unique organization, we must go back to 1862, when the U. S. Congress passed the Morrill Act, which established colleges in each state to be financed through grants of land from the Federal government. They became known as "Land Grant Colleges", a name which persists today. These colleges would emphasize teaching practical subjects such as agriculture and home economics. The 1887 Hatch Act provided for experimental stations at Land Grant Colleges to conduct research for those colleges' agricultural problems.

Then in 1914, the Smith-Lever Act created the County Extension Office as a part of these colleges as a means of disseminating the practical knowledge gained through agricultural research. The University of Florida at Gainesville is Florida's Land Grant College. The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is that part of the university which has responsibility for the County Extension Office.

In Florida, three cooperating tax sources provide funds: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, State (through legislative appropriations), and counties, (through appropriations by county governments). The term "extension" defines this organization's purpose -to extend the information generated at the State and Federal level to people at the county level in the form of a "service". The County Extension Office is an informal educational organization, which provides information in three main areas: Agriculture; Family and Consumer Sciences; and 4-H and Youth. Other associated programs include Community Development, Marine Biology, and Energy .The motto and goal of the County Extension Office is "Helping People Help Themselves". Thus, you can see how well the volunteer Master Gardener concept fits into the ultimate objectives and goals of Extension.

CONTINUING HORTICULTURAL TRAINING

Training never ceases for the certified and working Master Gardener. Throughout the year, Master Gardeners meet at the Extension Office for business meetings and educational programs.

Field trips are also scheduled to botanical gardens, parks, and nurseries. Specialized knowledge is gained to better enable Master Gardeners to work effectively on their gardening project as well as give research-based advice.

Once a year, the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services (IFAS), conducts an advanced Master Gardener training course at the University of Florida. This voluntary two-day session serves to acquaint teaching landscape that surrounds our current Master Gardeners with the laboratories and diagnostic facilities which respond to requests for assistance through the extension agents. This program is presented by State Extension Specialists who strive to bring all Master Gardeners into contact with the latest horticultural developments and provide a look into the future of horticulture research. It is also a great opportunity to meet Master Gardeners from around the state of Florida and share in the joys and even the frustrations of being a Florida Master Gardener.

STATE POLICIES REGARDING FLORIDA MASTER GARDENERS

There are several policies regarding the Master Gardener program. It is important that all participants understand and adhere to them.

A Florida Master Gardener must:

- Attend the prescribed hours of instruction. Pass an examination administered by the Florida Extension
- Contribute 60 volunteer hours, before becoming a certified Master Gardener

This certification is restrictive in nature. It is valid only as follows:

- When the individual is actively participating in the program
- For one year only. If an individual ceases active participation, then the certification as Master Gardener becomes void.
- New certifications will be issued each year to those individuals who commit to give 50 hours of volunteer service annually
- Commit to attend 2 or more advanced training classes annually
- Those not continuing in the program will not be re-certified

The title "Florida Master Gardener" is to be used as follows:

- Only and exclusively in the Florida Extension Office Master Gardener program in which the trained and certified Master Gardeners answers gardening questions or works on community gardening projects
- Only when doing unpaid volunteer or educational work in this program

The Master Gardeners should never rely solely on their personal knowledge, as the Extension Office provides the following support:

- Ongoing training and in-service to keep active participants abreast of current trends, recommendations, practices, procedures and legal issues
- Master Gardeners have diagnostic support via county Extension horticulturists and state Extension Specialists.
- Master Gardeners are also provided with Extension Office publications, which discuss their plant problems. Experienced Master Gardeners are likely to receive invitations to speak before groups.

Therefore, the Master Gardener should understand the following:

- Gratuitous payments for speaking are not a concern since speaking activity is entirely separate from the question answering done at Master Gardener clinics.
- Please do not seek payment for such speaking appearances. Your work is much appreciated by the Florida Extension Service and your local area gardeners who have received or will receive your council.
- Master Gardeners are advised not to advertise their name or their place of business, nor to be listed on the advertisements of business places as Master Gardeners. This is a University of Florida/Florida Extension Office public our service program providing unbiased information.
- Appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or giving implied University/Extension endorsement of any product or place of business is improper.
- Master Gardeners deal only with homeowner-type questions. The Extension Agents themselves respond to all commercial or professional growers' problems.

In making recommendations which include the use of chemicals (e.g., insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides), Florida Master Gardeners are to:

- Follow published Extension Office recommendations
- Pass the pesticide exam
- Use of other pesticide recommendations is NOT approved (this includes homemade pesticide recipes)
- Questions concerning commercial horticultural recommendations are to be referred to the local County Extension Agent

POLICIES REGARDING MIAMI-DADE COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

Most states and many countries have Master Gardener programs. Each is different according to their needs. In Miami-Dade County, our needs lie mainly at the Miami-Dade County Extension Office in Homestead.

The Miami-Dade County Extension Office is well aware of community needs and gardening projects off-site. It would be impossible for us to supply all the help that is needed by these groups. However, if there are special project that we feel meet our

criteria for assistance, or that are directly related to the mission and goals of the Miami-Dade County Extension Office, then you may use these opportunities to fulfill the 20 off-site volunteer hours that are negotiable. All community projects must have prior approval by the Master Gardener Coordinator and Urban Horticulture Agent before you will be allowed to allocate time spent doing them to your required hours. Current community projects that qualify include Florida Yard and Neighborhood yard certifiers, Speaker's Bureau participants, and Plant Clinic participants. Once approved you can spend up to 20 hours during the first year and 30 hours each year thereafter.

Monthly Volunteer Hour Records are required to be filled out as well as documenting the race and gender of all people you contact during your volunteer efforts. New Master Gardener trainees must give 60 hours of volunteer time to the Miami-Dade County Extension Office before receiving a certificate of completion and being given the title of Master Gardener. The first 50 hours must be spent on existing approved projects before you will be allowed to start on new community based projects. All 60 of your volunteer hours must be completed within one year of completion of Master Gardener training. To continue your certification in the future as a Miami-Dade County Master Gardener you must complete 50 hour annually and attend at least 2 approved educational programs each year.