

HOW TO BECOME A GEORGIA MASTER GARDENER

by Paul J. Pugliese



The Georgia Master Gardener program is a volunteer training program which connects gardeners with their communities. Since 1979, Georgia Master Gardener volunteers have worked alongside University of Georgia Cooperative Extension agents helping them teach Georgians how to become healthier, more

productive, financially independent and environmentally responsible through their common interest in gardening.

Georgia Master Gardeners are men and women, young and old, who possess a wide array of talents, come from diverse backgrounds and represent a variety of professions. They are connected by their passion for gardening and their love for their communities.

People always ask me, "Do you have to know a lot about gardening to apply?" No! Some basic experience and knowledge is preferable, but not a prerequisite. We are looking for enthusiastic people who have an interest in gardening and who want to learn and volunteer. Being willing to learn is the main prerequisite! Master Gardeners receive more than 50 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction in horticulture and related fields. Classes are taught by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension agents and specialists, local horticulturists and veteran Master Gardeners. A minimum registration fee covers instruction, supplies and an extensive training manual.

So what's expected of Master Gardeners? After successfully completing the classroom portion, participants volunteer 50 hours of service to their community and local UGA Cooperative Extension office within the first year of their classroom training. Upon completion, they officially become Georgia Master Gardeners. To remain active, Georgia Master Gardeners must commit to volunteering a minimum of 25 hours of service each year thereafter.

What type of volunteer service is done? Georgia Master Gardeners provide practical advice and information about gardening. They are educators who love to dig in the dirt! To assist their area Cooperative Extension agent, they teach

good gardening practices through hands-on demonstrations, educational display gardens, one-on-one consultations, speaking to garden groups and neighborhood associations, writing newsletters and conducting Junior Master Gardener programs at local schools.

Many Master Gardeners work right in the Extension Office as volunteers answering gardening questions on the phone and assisting walk-in clients. Along with their gardening knowledge, they contribute valuable skills like photography, writing, editing, event planning, teaching and leadership. Though they may initially join the program to learn more about gardening, many Master Gardeners say the friendships they make and experiences they have while learning and volunteering together are the biggest rewards of the program. And of course, learning about gardening is an ongoing, lifelong process.



So, how can YOU become a Georgia Master Gardener? If you love gardening and can commit to learning and sharing knowledge and skills through volunteer service, the Georgia Master Gardener Program needs YOU! The Cherokee County Cooperative Extension office will host a local training program June 8 — July 13. This year's program will include Monday and Thursday classes from 9 a.m. — 3 p.m. during these dates. Since this year's program will be offered during summer break schedule for local schools, teachers also are encouraged to take advantage of this rare opportunity!

To apply for admission to the program, please contact our office at (770) 479-0418 or go to our Web site and download an application at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee.

The deadline for applications is April 20! If you are selected for this year's training, you will be notified by May 1. Please call our office if you have any questions about the Georgia Master Gardener program. We look forward to reviewing your applications and providing training to an enthusiastic group of new volunteers in Cherokee County! If you don't get selected this year, don't get discouraged. Our class size may be limited based on the number of applicants. You can always apply again for next year's class!

Paul Pugliese is the Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent for Cherokee County Cooperative Extension, a partnership of the University of Georgia, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Cherokee County. (770) 479-0418. For more information and free publications, visit the local Web site at www.ugaextension.com/cherokee.