

MASTER GARDENERS ACCEPTING NEW APPLICANTS

It's that time of year again, time to start thinking about dusting off the Master Gardener applications and spreading the word about the next class.

WHAT is a Master Gardener? Do I have to be a gardening expert to take the Master Gardener course? Why would I want to be a Master Gardener? What does a Master Gardener do? These and many other questions come to mind when Master Gardener training is mentioned. Let me try to clarify a few of these points.

A Master Gardener is a person who has a thirst for knowledge about home horticulture, you know, all that stuff growing around your house - the lawn, the shade trees, the shrubs, the garden, the fruit trees, and even your houseplants. It is a person who wants to know things like; which tomato does best in Kansas, what are the best shade trees to plant in a small yard, what kind of fertilizer is best for my fescue, when should I prune my lilac, and how do I get rid of moles that are tunneling throughout my yard.

And things like; how many apple trees do I need for good fruit production, how about peaches and pears, will raspberries do any good here, what can I do to improve the soil in my garden/flower beds/yard, do I need to add lime to my soil, what can I do to control ticks, fleas, and chiggers in my yard. Let's not forget about bagworms. What about herbs, and did I mention crabgrass, or dandelions. How many hours of sunshine should you have on your water garden? How much sun does your vegetable garden need?

This is just a small sample of some of the questions that commonly come up in the everyday world of home horticulture. A Master Gardener is not a person who knows all the answers to these questions, but someone who wants to know these answers and wants to learn where to go to find out the answers to other questions just like these.

WHY would anyone want to become a Master Gardener? Well, first to gain the aforementioned knowledge, and second, to share this information with friends, neighbors, and other people in the community. Past classes of Master Gardeners have participated in such projects as the landscaping and planting of the courthouse grounds, conducting a tomato taste test at the Butler County Fair, volunteering to assist at the compost site, routing traffic and taking surveys during the Household Hazardous Waste Collection day, and provided assistance during the county fair with the horticulture judging contests and judging of the horticulture exhibits, downtown planting of the planter boxes and establishment and planting of the Extension Demonstration Garden. Most recently the Butler County Master Gardeners have installed a water garden at the demonstration garden, and are currently working on the landscaping of that new feature. There's also the Numana community garden that Butler County Master Gardeners are involved with.

HOW do I become a Master Gardener? By simply filling out an application form at the Extension office (we will even mail it to you) and being available to attend twelve training sessions between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM on Thursdays from September 8th to December 8th. Thanksgiving is excluded of course, along with the week of October 27th.

IN EXCHANGE for over 40 hours of comprehensive training in home horticulture you will be asked to give back 40 hours of volunteer service to the horticulture programming efforts of the Butler County Extension office. There is a fee of \$110.00 to cover the cost of the program and educational materials, but what a small price to pay for what you receive. Sessions on landscaping, gardening, fruit and nut production, lawn care, insect and disease control, organic methods, soil management, annuals and perennials, nuisance animals, plant propagation, houseplants and more are all part of the program.

ANYONE that thinks they might be interested in taking the Master Gardener training should call 321-9660 or come down to the Extension office at the 206 N. Griffith(the fairgrounds) and pick-up an application.

Pulling Onions

Onions are ready to harvest when about half the plants have tops that have fallen over. This is a sign that the onions are mature and need to be pulled out of the ground. Bulbs may sunburn without the foliage to protect them. The secret to onions keeping well is to allow the tops to dry completely before storage. Move onions to a shaded, well-ventilated area after harvest.

After tops are completely dry, store in a cool, dry location. Large-necked onions take more time to dry than small-necked onions such as Bermuda types. Avoid storage in plastic bags because the lack of air circulation will shorten storage life. Use an open, mesh bag instead.

Vegetables Produce Flowers But No Fruit

If you have vegetables that are blooming but not setting fruit, you may have a problem with flower pollination. There are several possible reasons for this that usually vary by species. One condition that can affect several species at the same time is overfertilization. Too much nitrogen causes the plant to emphasize vegetative growth, often to the detriment of fruit production. Overfertilization can lead to a delay in flower production and a decrease in fruit set among the flowers produced. Tomatoes are very sensitive to this. If you have nice, large plants but no fruit, check your fertilization. Squash, cucumbers, watermelon, and muskmelon can have a couple of other problems. First, the early flowers on these plants are usually all male. The production of both male and female flowers becomes more balanced as time passes. You can easily tell the difference between the two because only the female flower has a tiny fruit behind the blossom. If you have both, have not overfertilized, and still have a problem, make sure you have pollinators. Look for the presence of bees visiting the plants. If you don't see any, try hand-pollinating several flowers. Use a painter's brush to transfer pollen from the anther of the male flower to the stigma of the female flower. If you get fruit on only those flowers you pollinated, you need more pollinators. Make sure you aren't killing the pollinators with overuse of insecticides. Tomatoes are wind pollinated and therefore not dependent on pollinators. But they have another possible problem, which is temperature. Tomatoes normally won't set if the night temperature is below 50 due to sparse pollen production. This, of course, is only a problem early in the season. However, they also won't set when nighttime temperatures are above 75 degrees F and daytime temperatures are above 95 degrees F with dry, hot winds.