

THE GRAPEVINE

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MASTER GARDENERS ACCEPTING NEW APPLICANTS!!!

It's that time of year again, time to dust 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. There's also the Numana community garden that Butler County Master Gardeners are involved with along with the Augusta Community Garden which both help local communities with donations to those in need.

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 12th to December 12th. Thanksgiving is excluded along with the week of October 24th.

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. And if you can't do either of those then you can access our website and print one off at: <http://www.butler.k-state.edu/horticulture/master-gardener.html>

Tomatoes Slow to Ripen?

The hot weather we have had recently not only interferes with flower pollination but also can affect how quickly fruit matures. The best temperature for tomato growth and fruit development is 85 to 90F. When temperatures exceed 100 degrees, the plant goes into survival mode and concentrates on moving water. Fruit development slows to a crawl. When temperatures moderate, even to the low to mid 90s, the fruit will ripen more quickly. Tomato color can also be affected by heat. When temperatures rise above 95 degrees F, red pigments don't form properly though the orange and yellow pigments do. This results in orange fruit. This doesn't affect the edibility of the tomato, but often gardeners want that deep red color back. So, can we do anything to help our tomatoes ripen and have good color during extreme heat? Sure, there is. We can pick tomatoes in the "breaker" stage. Breaker stage tomatoes are those that have started to turn color. At this point, the tomato has cut itself off from the vine and nothing will be gained by keeping it on the plant. If tomatoes are picked at this stage and brought into an air-conditioned house, they will ripen more quickly and develop a good, red color. A temperature of 75 to 85 degrees F will work well.

When to Pick Peaches

Peaches are best when ripened on the tree but fruit growers may wish to pick a bit early to prevent damage from birds, have a higher pectin content for jams and jellies or to have firmer fruit for canning. Peaches that are mature enough to pick are still hard. They do not give when lightly squeezed. However, these peaches will ripen off the tree and will have very good quality. They may not be quite as sweet as a tree-ripened peach but are still very good. So what do we look for to tell if a peach is mature enough to harvest? Let's look at a couple of factors.

Color: The reddish coloration is not a good indicator. Look instead for what is called the "ground color." This is the part of the peach that does not turn red; for example, around the stem. The ground color of the peach will lose its greenish tinge and turn yellow when the peach is mature enough to harvest. I use this characteristic more to determine when NOT to pick a peach. If there is any green in the ground color, it is too early. If the ground color is yellow, then I move to the next characteristic.

Ease of Removal: A mature peach will separate easily from the branch if the peach is lifted and twisted. If it doesn't, it is not mature enough to pick yet. All peaches will not be ready to pick at the same time. Pick only those that are ready and come back later for more. It often takes 3 to 5 pickings to harvest a peach tree. Peaches that are picked early but will be used for fresh eating should be allowed to ripen inside at room temperature. Once they are ripe, they can be refrigerated to preserve them for enjoyment over a longer period of time.

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