

Volunteer Time, Expertise, Become a Master Gardener

Do you like digging in the soil and growing everything from edible and pollinator gardens to native trees and plants? Do you appreciate the natural world and need to be green-smart? Do you enjoy seeing the fruits of your labor bloom each season? Then I'd say you are a garden enthusiast.

But as an enthusiast, do you wish to learn more and share your knowledge? Work with others who share your gardening passion? Well, then consider becoming a Hall County Master Gardener.

Hall County Master Gardeners help the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension staff convey research-based information about gardening, horticulture and best practices to the public. They are trained volunteers who donated more than 18,000 hours of time in 2015.

The Hall County Master Gardeners sponsor public events such as Spring and Fall Garden Expos, biennial Garden Walk and the Ask a Master Gardener booth at community events. They answer questions through the Extension Greenline, at the Cooperative Extension office and via email. The motto is "Beautification through Education."

Master Gardeners participate in teaching and helping at community gardens such as the Gardens on Green next to the Hall County Board of Education, the Northeast Georgia History Center Victory Garden, Wilshire Trails Park, Hall County Extension Office, Elachee Nature Science Center and Jubilee Community Garden. They work with the next generation of gardeners at various public, private and home schools. They educate new Habitat for Humanity homeowners about lawns and gardens. Many volunteer at Atlanta Botanical Garden, A Smithgall Woodland Legacy, in Gainesville and Linwood Nature Preserve.

They are an enthusiastic, hard-working group of volunteers who know how to have fun. If you enjoy community stewardship and have always had the desire to expand your horticultural knowledge, then I encourage you to consider becoming a Master Gardener.

To do so, call the extension office at 770-535-8293 and request an application. They will be mailed out in mid-September.

Once your application is submitted, you will be called to the county extension office for an interview. Upon acceptance, the Master Gardener volunteer intern receives more than 40 credit hours from the University of Georgia college curriculum. He or she receives instructional classes and practical hands-on training and goes on field trips taught by county agents and horticulture specialists.

Classes are 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday from early January to March. The 24 classes range in topics of basic botany and benefits of integrating native plants and pollinator gardens to pest and disease management. When classes are complete, the Master Gardener intern is required to volunteer a minimum of 50 hours the first year and 25 hours each year afterward to maintain his or her certification.

A Master Gardener is first and foremost a volunteer. Whether it is teaching children's gardening classes, the benefits of integrating native plants and use of pollinator gardens, or speaking at a symposium, the volunteer opportunities promote gardening education in the community.

For more information about the 2017 Master Gardener classes, call the Hall County Extension office at 770-535-8293 or contact Robin Friedman robinf@uga.edu.

Robin Lynn Friedman is the Master Gardener coordinator for the Hall County Extension Office. She can be reached at robinf@uga.edu or 770-535-8