

Becoming a Master Gardener

By Barbara Schuchart

UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener

When I retired four years ago, I wondered what path to take next. A short time later I saw that training classes to become a Master Gardener were being held, and I had my answer. I loved flowers, plants and growing them. Now I had a chance to learn more about them, plus help others through community volunteer service.

Ask yourself a few basic questions: Do you want to learn more about the culture and maintenance of many types of plants? Are you eager to participate in a very practical and intensive training program that will help enrich you for the rest of your life? Do you look forward to sharing your knowledge with other people? Do you have enough time to attend training and to complete the required annual volunteer service required for Master Gardeners? If you answered yes to those questions, becoming a Master Gardener could be a rewarding path for you also.

There are so many ways to participate in the program once you become a certified Master Gardener. It varies according to a community's needs and your own personal abilities and interests. Master Gardeners work in the office answering phone calls and helping members of the public who have gardening questions. Others teach or lend support at public education classes. Some work at local farmers markets, and others volunteer in school gardens and teach elementary school children at various events like Farm Days. There is much to be done at the wonderful and ever-developing Master Gardener Demonstration Garden, located behind the Folsom Lake College-El Dorado Center in Placerville. You can write gardening articles for the newspaper or local magazines. There are many outreach programs in the community such as talking to garden clubs, helping at county fairs or home and garden shows. There are plants to be grown and nurtured at home, that are later sold at the biannual Master Gardener plant sales. There are so many gratifying activities to choose from – as a new trainee you can jump in and work in any area that interests you.

The mission statement of the El Dorado County Master Gardeners is that as a volunteer arm of the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), Master Gardeners help develop and implement programs that transfer research-based home gardening knowledge and information to the public.

Training classes to become a Master Gardener are intensive and informative: this year a six-hour class typically meets once a week, for a total of 18 weeks. Trainees must complete all classes and some hands-on field work, and pass a written exam. New Master Gardeners are expected to volunteer a minimum of 50 service hours in their first year after becoming certified; after the first

year, 25 annual volunteer hours and 12 continuing education hours are required to stay active in the program.

The Master Gardener program is a life-long learning experience, offering diverse ongoing continuing education classes on current horticulture topics to its members. It always feels good to continue to learn new things both from UCCE staff experts, and fellow master gardeners. There are so many topics to choose from: home orchards, insects, plant diseases, vegetable gardening, composting, flower gardening - - the list goes on and on.

The first Master Gardener program started in Washington State in 1972. In our state of California, UCCE has trained and certified more than 15,000 Master Gardeners since 1980 when the first pilot program began in the Riverside and Sacramento areas. Today, the Master Gardener program has spread throughout the USA and Canada with more than 45,000 volunteers.

Master Gardeners are people of all ages and backgrounds who are enthusiastic, willing learners who like to help others. If you are interested in applying for the Master Gardener Training program, call our office at 530-621-5528 and sign up for one of two informative orientation meetings on November 14, from 7-8 p.m. or November 15, from 10-11 a.m. at the Bethell-Delfino Agriculture Building at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Applications are due by 5:00 pm December 2, 2013. Visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/becomeamastergardener> for more information about the training program.

Come out for this Saturday's public education class, Berries in the Foothills. Strawberries, blueberries, boysenberries and raspberries are a welcome addition to gardens, and they can be grown successfully in El Dorado County. Join Master Gardener Suzanne Wisowaty for her presentation on berry selection, planting, care and harvesting. The free, three-hour class is on November 16, 2013 in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.