

**El Dorado County Master Gardeners: At Your Service!**  
**By Charlie Basham**  
**UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County**

One of the greatest rewards of being a master gardener is helping a homeowner solve their gardening mystery. Every day our office gets phone calls, emails and visitors posing challenging questions that would stump Sherlock Holmes: “What would cause my tomato plants to mysteriously fail in just a couple of days?” “Can you identify this large, creepy bug with furry wings, red dots and horns?” “How do I compost chicken manure?”

As a master gardener our job is to solve the issues and provide practical advice and scientific-based gardening information. To do so, we have at our fingertips an impressive amount of expert reference material. There’s a library of hundreds of books. We have countless fact sheets, photos and videos. There’s access to university web sites, research papers and academic experts. Perhaps the best resource is the more than 100 El Dorado County Master Gardeners whose cumulative gardening experience exceeds hundreds of years!

All El Dorado County Master Gardeners are volunteers who have been extensively trained, tested and certified under the direction of the University of California Cooperative Extension. Plus, we get year-round training on topics such as horticulture, soils, water, entomology, plant pathology, integrated pest management, plant problem diagnosis, sustainable landscape management practices, and plant propagation.

Master Gardeners are available to answer your questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are also welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. When you’re at the office, you can browse through the free gardening informational flyers, Pest Notes, and fact sheets we provide.

If you bring a sample of something for identification, please put the plant materials in a plastic bag. As for insects, don't bring them alive! Preserve them in a container with rubbing alcohol, or by freezing in a plastic bag. Samples may also be left next door at the main county agricultural building from 1-5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday.

If you want to dig deeper into a particular gardening topic we offer free public education classes and workshops on many Saturdays throughout the year. These are typically held at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville. Classes run from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Go to the Master Gardener website at [http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/) for specific class topics and related information. No advance registration is needed. Locations are occasionally changed, so it’s wise to call the Master Gardener office or check the website for last minute changes.

When you log on to the Master Gardener website take a look at the educational resources it has to offer. You can download handouts and presentations from our recent public education classes. You can also subscribe to our monthly electronic newsletter.

Our website also provides access to the University of California's vast, web-based collection of gardening information, ranging from planting tips and sustainable vegetable gardening to insects and climate zones.

You can also pose a gardening question on our website. Keep in mind that some issues may require a conversation, so be sure to include your contact phone number. You can even add photos to illustrate your problem. (Remember that creepy bug with furry wings, red dots and horns?) If you do provide a photo it needs to be clear, focused, well lit and include some type of perspective to indicate size. Also provide as many details about the “when and where” when you describe the issue. The more information we get, the better and quicker your answer.

Several times a week throughout the summer and fall the master gardeners will have an informational booth at multiple farmers markets. If you come to the El Dorado County Fair later this year (June 12-15) stop by the master gardener booth in the Floriculture Building. We'll be giving free gardening mini-demonstrations every day of the fair. The topics and times will be posted by late May on our website as well as on the fair's online demonstration schedule.

Our Speakers Bureau will also provide presentations to community organizations. Arrangements can be made by contacting the master gardener office. We also provide one-on-one consultation.

The most spectacular educational tool we will soon offer is our two-acre Community Demonstration Garden behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. This garden will provide unique hands-on, interactive experiences on a wide variety of gardening practices specific to El Dorado County.

Join Master Gardener Walt Miller for this Saturday's public education class, Fruit Tree Pruning. The basics of how and when trees grow, how to prune to minimize injury, and when and when not to prune. The discussion will also focus on how to prune to establish a structurally sound tree that produces fruit. The free, three hour class will be held Saturday, January 25<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 a.m. in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.