

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ELKHART COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS PROGRAM

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### **WHAT IS "MASTER GARDENERS"?**

The Indiana Master Gardener is a program sponsored by Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service through the local county Extension Office.

Master Gardeners is a volunteer training program designed to meet the information needs of the local gardening community. It is much more than a gardening class. Its specific aim is to provide information and technical assistance about gardening and home horticulture through the use of qualified volunteers. Participants in the program volunteer their services in the community.

### **WHAT IS THE VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT?**

The type of volunteer work will be based on a mutual agreement with the Master Gardener and the Extension Educator in charge. Types of volunteer work might include writing articles for the newspaper, coaching individuals at community gardens, speaking to garden clubs or other groups, or preparing materials for other Master Gardeners to use. The possibilities are endless.

In previous years, Master Gardeners have set up and manned booths at various shows, worked with several local parks departments, worked with several retirement homes and neighborhood associations, held seminars for the public and coordinated a local Garden Walk. Others worked at the Extension Office, volunteering time to answer the phone during the gardening season.

### **HOW DO I BECOME A MASTER GARDENER?**

To become a Master Gardener, you must be selected from a pool of applicants, complete the training program, pass an examination administered by the local Extension Educator, and volunteer at least 45 hours of public service through the Elkhart County Extension Office.

Class size is limited to 32 people due to the overwhelming number of interested people. Priority will be given to Elkhart County residents and those who will fulfill the volunteer commitment.

### **WHAT IS THE CONNECTION WITH PURDUE UNIVERSITY?**

Each state has a university designated as its land grant college. In Indiana, that is Purdue University. As a land grant college, Purdue is charged with the responsibility to do research and teaching on agricultural and horticultural issues in Indiana. Much of the informal teaching is performed by the Purdue School of Agriculture, through the Extension Service, which has an office in each Indiana County.

Each county has a person designated as the Extension Educator - Agriculture, who works with the people in that community to answer their agriculture and horticulture questions. If there is interest, the Extension Educator can organize a Master Gardener program. Not all counties offer a Master Gardener program.

### **WHAT IS A TYPICAL CLASS LIKE?**

Most people would tell you, "Fun!" Class starts with a few announcements, followed by an hour or so of instruction. After a mid-class break, it is back to work. Many of the speakers are local experts or Purdue University Extension employees trained in specialty areas. Instructors often give a quiz at the end of the class that can be taken home and completed. Answers to the quiz are passed out the following week.

### **WHAT TYPE OF TRAINING WILL I RECEIVE?**

The training program will cover a wide variety of topics, including: Soil science, plant nutrition, plant science, insect identification and control, weed identification and control, disease identification and control, animal damage and control, pesticide safety and use, vegetable gardening, woody ornamentals, flowers, indoor gardening, lawns, tree fruit and other topics as needed.

Training will be held over a period of 5 months in a series of 18 afternoon meetings. Follow-up training and advance training can be arranged as needed. Participants are expected to attend all training sessions.

### **I SEE YOU HAVE A PESTICIDE CLASS. IS ORGANIC GARDENING COVERED IN THE CLASS?**

Organic gardening topics are interspersed throughout the course. For instance, in the plant nutrition class, we discuss both the use of manure and the use of commercial fertilizers. In the weed control class, we discuss the biological, cultural, mechanical and pesticide methods of control. In the insect class, we discuss numerous types of control: biological, cultural, mechanical, sanitation, host resistance and pesticides.

The pesticide class is designed to teach Master Gardeners about frequently asked pesticide-related questions, including safety, formulations, legal issues, and understanding pesticides labels. Whether a Master Gardener practices organic methods or not, they are expected to understand these pesticide issues.

### **WHY IS THE MASTER GARDENER CLASS OFFERED IN THE DAYTIME?**

Experience in other communities where Master Gardeners has been offered in the evening is that a high percentage of people who wish to participate in the program do not complete their volunteer hours. Many people want the knowledge, but because they work during the day, they lack the time or ability to fulfill the volunteer commitment. We hope such individuals will contact the Extension Office, and encourage the Master Gardeners to hold seminars for the public. This also gives the Master Gardeners a chance to complete their volunteer commitment.

### **WHAT IF I ONLY WANT SOME GARDENING ADVICE?**

Many people want the information about gardening, but do not wish to do the volunteer work. Rather than signing up for the Master Gardener program, these people should let the Master Gardeners know they would like classes offered on gardening topics. If this situation meets your needs, contact the Extension Office and let them know what classes you might be interested in. The Extension Office also maintains a large volume of publications on various horticultural subjects that may answer your questions.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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