

MINNESOTA MASTER GARDENERS

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What indoor/outdoor activity is enjoyed by people of all ages, all skill levels, all incomes and all climates? Gardening, of course!

Whether it's on a city lot, in a community park, on 20 acres in the country, indoors on a window sill or in a few patio containers doesn't really matter. The enjoyment of plants for their eye appeal and for useful products like fruits and vegetables is the key factor. Besides being a hobby for over 75 percent of Americans, gardening is a valuable tool in rehabilitative therapy and in community improvement. Plants can also increase property values and lower energy costs for homeowners.

Amateurs and professionals alike involved in gardening in Minnesota turn to the University of Minnesota Extension Service for much of their information. County extension agents with horticultural expertise and state extension horticulturists are committed to serving this clientele, but the demand is far greater than extension faculty can meet. On an average summer day in Hennepin County, for example, at least 60 calls on gardening come into the office. In addition, there are requests for classes, on-site clinics or visits, written material, community planning, and media releases. This heavy workload is carried only with the help of trained volunteer paraprofessionals: The Minnesota Extension Service (MES) Master Gardeners.

Who are Master Gardeners?

They are unique individuals who love gardening. They are enthusiastic, willing to learn, enjoy helping others and are able to communicate with diverse groups of people. They come from backgrounds as different as homemaker and corn breeder, accountant and teacher. Program participants range in age from 24 to 82, with a median age of 51 years. Roughly 60% are women and 40% are

men. Like all Minnesota Extension Service volunteer groups, the program stresses equal opportunity education and encourages minority participation.

What sets MES Master Gardeners apart from other "expert gardeners" is their professional training and their commitment to the local county extension office. Originating in Washington state in 1972, the Master Gardener program is now recognized nationally as an integral part of Cooperative Extension Service planning. The Master Gardener program in Minnesota began in 1977 as a metro-area pilot project, but soon spread to the entire state. Some 2,000 people have been trained, and about 700 are currently active volunteers.

Every county in Minnesota has or is benefiting from MES Master Gardener volunteer time. In 1989 in Ramsey County alone, 99 volunteers contributed 5,638 hours of staff time to address extension needs. Some individuals donate over 100 hours each year in their counties, and some have been active in the program for 10 years or more.

How does the program work?

Interested persons apply through their county office. If accepted, they are notified when training is planned for their area, and asked to pay a small registration fee. They participate in the core course - 48 hours of classroom instruction conducted by extension faculty members on a wide range of horticultural subjects. At the training, they are given a mini-library of extension publications to be used as a reference during their career as a MES Master Gardener. After completing the core course, training continues with an internship of 50 volunteer hours in the local extension office. To remain on active status and continue to receive

newsletters and updated reference materials, participate in regional and national conferences and take further educational courses, Master Gardeners donate at least 25 hours to the office yearly, thereafter.

Extension activities performed by these paraprofessionals include responding to telephone requests for non-commercial gardening information, working with community groups, holding plant clinics at garden centers and malls, giving lectures and slide presentations, setting up and staffing horticultural displays, writing for local newspapers and teaching community education courses.

What are the costs? The benefits?

Extension's Agriculture Program Area and the Department of Horticultural Science bear the major portion of program costs. The core course, the largest expense, is scheduled in one metro and three or four statewide sites each year.

Most of the resource faculty are from Horticultural Science which sponsors their travel to the training sites. The departments of Entomology, Plant Pathology, Soil Science, Landscape Architecture and Fisheries and Wildlife also participate. Agricultural Experiment Stations may serve as hosts, as may local community groups.

The registration fee helps cover the cost of publications and handouts. As MES Master Gardeners continue, they receive other materials: a name tag, newsletters, recognition items, updated references and additional training. Staff management effort also increases. Some of these needs are met by the county; others are better handled from the state office and supporting departments. In any event, few fees are charged to active Master Gardeners in recognition of their valuable contributions of time and effort. Investing in the MES Master Gardener program has gained the state an incredible number of volunteer staff hours and personal contacts. Consider the Master Gar-

dener booth at the 1990 Minnesota State Fair: over 4,000 sustained personal contacts were made and many more people stopped to listen or to pick up a yard waste management fact sheet. Eighty-eight Master Gardeners from 12 counties staffed the booth for a total of 464 hours. At \$6/hour, the 1990 rate for a temporary program assistant, Master Gardeners' contributions equaled \$2,784. A conservative yearly estimate of donated time from Master Gardeners for the entire state is 24,000 hours or \$144,000.

Where is the program headed?

In the state MES Master Gardener office, located at the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, three main goals have been identified for the future:

--improving the volunteer management skills of county staff responsible for the Master Gardener program,

--encouraging and empowering volunteers to take leadership roles in county programming and community affairs, and

--developing advanced training that will promote volunteer retention and specialization.

As budgets for University programs become tighter, the Master Gardener program takes on a new importance in helping meet community needs at the community level. Master Gardeners may even act as local experts for several counties simultaneously, bringing home from the University new expertise in special topics such as yard waste management, shade tree care, plant disease diagnosis, therapy gardening for the disabled and pesticide use by homeowners.

MES Master Gardeners also have another very important role as goodwill ambassadors, displaying the efforts of the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Extension Service to serve the people of this state. For the 70 percent of Minnesotans who live in the urban environment, horticulture may be the only form

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The overall goal of MES Master Gardeners is to assist county faculty to achieve the Minnesota Extension Service objective of "helping people to help themselves."

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References:

- 1989 Annual Report, Hennepin County.
- 1989 Annual Report, Ramsey County.
- Office of Urban Programming, MES.
- Thesis, Janis Kieft, University of Minnesota.
- National Gardening Association.



BANNED PESTICIDE CORRECTIONS

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A handout provided at the 1990 Pesticide Applicator Training session by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture listed suspended, banned or canceled chemicals. Two compounds (dicofol and daminozide) were incorrectly listed as being banned. These two chemicals should have been included in the list on the top of page 2 of the handout which names chemicals with only some formulations or uses suspended, canceled or banned.

In the case of daminozide (B-Nine), all food uses have been canceled. However, some non-food uses - including use on bedding plants - remain.

In the case of dicofol (Kelthane), technical-grade products containing greater than 0.1 percent DDT analog contaminants have been canceled. Dicofol products containing less than 0.1 percent DDT analog contaminants (products currently being sold) remain registered.

BENLATE RECALL

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