

Time to apply for master gardener program

The Okaloosa County Extension Office is taking applications for the 2008 Master Gardener Program.

The Master Garden Program in Florida is a joint endeavor of University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Extension and gardening volunteers in participating counties.

The program is specifically designed to recruit and train volunteers to help meet the demands placed on extension personnel by home gardeners.

The primary requirements for participation in the Master Gardener Program are:

1. A sincere interest in horticulture.
2. A willingness to work with and help other people.
3. Time and flexibility to complete all the requirements of the program. Those who work a regular Monday through Friday, 8-to-5 job, will not be able to complete the course requirements. The course is designed more for people who can volunteer time during the normal work week.

Master Gardener training classes will be held each Friday (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) beginning August 15 and ending November 21, 2008. Most of these classes will be held at the Okaloosa County Extension Office, 5479 Old Bethel Road in Crestview. Instruction will include classroom training conducted by county extension agents, UF/IFAS Extension specialists and local experts.

Training will include sessions on plant physiology, insects, plant diseases, care of landscape plants, vegetable gardening, fruit gardening, lawn management, landscape design and irrigation.

After successfully completing the program, participants will then be ready to begin seventy-five hours of service agreed to in return for training.

Volunteer activities allow Master Gardeners to continue to learn while assisting the public. For instance, all Master Gardeners answer phone calls in the extension office from other gardeners wanting landscape or garden information. The volunteers learn as they research the correct answers to these questions. This is a great way to sharpen garden problem-solving skills and it's a tremendous public service.

Master Gardeners help maintain a teaching landscape at the Extension office in Crestview. They help with other special projects such as speaking to groups or giving technical advice to teachers with garden projects at their schools. They also create,

install and staff educational exhibits at local events. Master gardeners may return some of their volunteer time by working in plant clinics, assisting the 4-H youth program, etc.

There is a charge of \$100 for the course. Space is limited. Only ten to twenty participants will be trained for the 2008 program.

To receive an application for the 2008 Master Gardener training, call the Okaloosa County Extension Office at 689-5850 or 729-1400, Ext. 5850, Monday through Friday, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Applications must be returned by July 18 to be considered.

Larry Williams, UF/IFAS Extension Agent, Okaloosa County, June 24, 2008