Time to apply for master gardener program

The Okaloosa County Extension Office is taking applications for the 2006 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 gardening, especially in landscape gardening.

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.

The Master Gardener training classes will be held each Thursday (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) beginning January 12 and ending April 20, 2006. Most of these classes will be held at the Okaloosa County Extension Office, Charles M. Walthall Agricultural Center, 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, irrigation and communications.

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

The volunteer activities allow the Master Gardeners to continue to learn by volunteering to help others in various ways. 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 the best way I know of sharpening garden problem-solving skills, plus it's a tremendous public service.
Master Gardeners also help maintain a teaching landscape at the Okaloosa County Extension office in Crestview. This garden includes low-maintenance plants, ornamental grasses, groundcovers, shrubs, trees and vines that are labeled with common and botanical names for Okaloosa County residents to see. It also includes a trial bed area with herbs, vegetables, butterfly garden plants, bog plants, etc. The landscape includes some fruit crops as well.

Master Gardeners help with other special projects such as speaking to groups or giving technical advice to teachers who wish to have 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.

Because the Master Gardener Program is specifically designed to recruit and train volunteers to help with the Okaloosa County UF/IFAS Extension Office horticulture program, space is limited. Only ten to twenty participants will be trained for the 2006 program.

There is a charge of $100 for the program, which covers books and other supplies.

If you would like to receive an application for the 2006 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 Nov. 25 to be considered.

Larry Williams
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