Okaloosa County Master Gardener program receives state awards

Okaloosa County Extension brought home numerous awards from the 26th Annual Florida Master Gardener Continued Training Conference held recently in Jacksonville, Florida.

I’m fortunate to have an active, talented and productive group of volunteers. Currently I manage a volunteer force of seventy-two Master Gardeners in Okaloosa County. This fall their talents and achievements were recognized.

Nineteen Okaloosa County Master Gardeners attended this year’s conference, October 23 -25. I attended, as well and participated as a host and invited speaker. The conference is designed to provide continued training for Master Gardeners as well as to share ideas on projects and to recognize successes through an annual awards program.

Okaloosa County Master Gardeners won four of the eleven awards of excellence presented by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). We received the highest number of awards as compared to any other county in the state.

Okaloosa County Master Gardeners won first place in the category of Educational Materials Development. This was primarily for PowerPoint presentations, educational brochures and a website, all developed and used by our Master Gardeners to educate county citizens. The website address is http://www.ocmga.org. They received the Extension Awareness Award for informing the public of UF/IFAS Extension through their educational efforts, including the website, a Florida Friendly Gardening brochure and library displays. The displays were used at the Crestview, Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Niceville libraries and topics included Stormscaping, Native Plants, Carnivorous Plants and Poisonous Plants. We also received the Written Mass Communications award for a monthly garden column in the Crestview News Bulletin, written by Master Gardener Shari Farrell. And the Outstanding Master Gardener award was presented to an Okaloosa County Master Gardener, Andy Donatelli.

Okaloosa County Master Gardeners took third place at the conference in a plant identification contest and Okaloosa County Master Gardener Val Boyles placed first in an invasive plants identification competition, correctly identifying 24 of 25 invasive plants.

Master Gardeners Walt Boyle, Robert Fultyn, Rick Hastings and Laurie Mackey were recognized for their ten years of service as volunteers.

I was honored to have received the Master Gardener Distinguished Extension Professional and Enhancement Award. This is a UF/IFAS faculty recognition program named in honor of Florida Master Gardeners. The program bestows an honorary title for an outstanding Extension faculty member contributing to the Master Gardener Program as selected by a committee composed of University of Florida faculty, administrators and Master Gardeners.

Okaloosa County Master Gardeners encourage and teach county residents to follow Florida friendly gardening practices based on University of Florida guidelines. Their educational efforts have been successful as recognized by UF/IFAS at this year’s conference.

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