

FLORIDA MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM: FIRST FIVE YEARS

JAMES M. STEPHENS AND KATHLEEN M. DELATE
*Vegetable Crops Department,
IFAS, University of Florida,
Gainesville, Florida 32611*

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Abstract. After 5 years the Florida Master Gardener program has expanded from the original 3 pilot counties of Brevard, Dade and Manatee to include 30 counties by July, 1984. During the first 5-yr period, 1979-1983, 26 counties trained 48 classes and 868 Master Gardeners. The total time of service contracted for each Master Gardener trained and certified was 45,350 hr. This service record does not include the large number of re-enlistees whose volunteered time has not been documented. Most counties (96%) utilized Master Gardeners in the office, answering the phone (92%), talking to walk-ins, or in clerical tasks (77%). Plant clinics were staffed by Master Gardeners in 81% of the counties. Other primary activities were helping to conduct meetings (69%), demonstrations (58%), and exhibits (50%).

Florida Master Gardeners are adult volunteers recruited and trained by County Extension Service agents to provide assistance in Extension home horticulture programs (6).

The use of trained volunteers by Florida Extension is not new, as evidenced by the large numbers of volunteer leaders working for many years in 4-H and homemaker programs. The first paid paraprofessionals were hired by Extension Home Economics in 1968 to teach special audiences. This paraprofessional concept was expanded in 1969 with the beginning of the Expanded Nutrition Program (1).

The needs and demands of Florida citizens for the educational services of Extension increased greatly in the latter part of the sixties and the first of the seventies, primarily because inflation made it necessary for everyone to cut costs on food and other expenses (3).

Though food was still a relative bargain, people did not perceive it so, and entered into gardening with vigor, enthusiasm, and much ignorance. Inflation gardeners were immediately frustrated by a simple lack of gardening skills and knowledge, and sought information and assistance from the Florida Extension Service.

Their frustration and concern carried over to the Extension Service, where there were few agents with horticultural training, and small staffs were over-run by the number of new gardeners throughout the state. Both county agents and state horticultural specialists, whose main targets were the commercial horticultural interests, began to recognize the need for services for the home gardener.

The first phase in the effort to provide these services was the launching in 1972 of the garden supply store employee training meetings, sponsored by Florida Seedsmen and Garden Supply Association (FSGSA). These were a series of statewide meetings conducted by the Extension Service at which garden supply owners and clerks were given 6 weeks of training on gardening and home horticulture. The goal was to train the people gardeners would most likely contact early in their gardening endeavor. The Extension Service covered every major population center from Miami to Pensacola from 1972 to 1978.

That program was well-received and extremely productive. However, it still did not meet the increasing demands

of gardeners. Daily calls to Extension offices escalated rather than diminished. Extension personnel began examining other means of disseminating information to mass audiences. Telelecture, in particular, was introduced during the seventies and was promoted heavily by Extension. But neither telelecture nor the accelerated hiring of county-paid urban horticulturists could stem the flood of demands on Extension for home-horticulture educational assistance.

Master Gardeners—The Beginning

Across the U.S., the same pressures were being felt. Then, in 1972, the same year the FSGSA schools began in Florida, the state of Washington started the Master Gardener program. The program was conceived by the agents of King and Pierce counties, Washington. Dr. David Gibby, King County agent in charge of suburban horticulture, refined the idea further and in the spring of 1972, Gibby and other agents opened a few pilot plant clinics and manned them with experienced gardeners who volunteered to help answer gardening questions and diagnose plant problems (4).

From the pilot clinics it was apparent that the trained volunteers could give a satisfactory answer to 75 to 90% of the questions asked, primarily because most of the questions were repetitive, reflecting the common problem of the day. Those which could not be answered by the volunteers were passed on to the Extension agents for professional response (7).

Dr. Bernard Wesenberg, WSU Extension Horticulturist, who closely observed the pilot activities, decided to formalize the project and expand it to the entire Puget Sound area. His first classes were held in February to March, 1973, and the graduates were called "Master Gardeners (MGs)." They received 55 hr of gardening instruction, twice a week, 6 hr a meeting, for 4½ weeks. At the conclusion of the training, the Master Gardeners were asked to serve, unpaid, for a day or part of a day at the local shopping center gardening information clinic (8).

During the first 5 yr, the Master Gardener program spread to 8 Washington Counties and included 400 volunteers. The program was started in Colorado, Oregon, Montana, Alaska, and New York by 1977. After a decade, the program had grown in Washington state to include 900 Master Gardeners giving 40,000 hr of volunteer time per year, and had been adopted by 33 states, including Florida. Other states who joined include: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia (R. E. Gomez, FES horticulture program leader, personal communication).

Master Gardening in Florida

By 1977 Florida Extension was convinced that training garden store employees was not the answer to the gardening information problem. Much time and expense was going into the sessions by state and county horticultural personnel, and still the citizens' questions were more than the few professional staff members could handle.

Word of the Master Gardener concept had reached Gainesville, so Extension administration dispatched a trio of Horticultural Specialists responsible for urban horti-

culture programs to the Pacific Northwest to observe the program. In July, 1977, they spent a week in Seattle, Washington and Eugene, Oregon asking questions and observing the Master Gardeners in action in those two states (7).

On their return to Florida, the committee reported to Extension administration that they liked what they had seen and recommended that Florida adopt the program.

In 1979, the program began in Florida. Susan Gray, Extension Assistant in Vegetables on the staff of the Vegetable Crops Department, assumed the role of coordinator of the initial Pilot Project. Dr. Joe Vandemark, who headed a MG program in Illinois before retiring, joined the effort as a consultant.

Three urban counties Dade (Miami), Manatee (Bradenton), and Brevard (Cocoa) were selected for the initial pilot project. Twenty to thirty MGs were recruited per county, and training began in September of 1979 (5). For the 8 weeks of training, specialists from Gainesville traveled to the counties, with some county staff members also involved in instruction. Each county program was under the direction of the county horticultural agent. A total of 58 volunteers were certified as the first Master Gardeners in Florida.

Since then, additional counties have entered the Florida program each year, while veteran counties have continued to re-enlist from earlier classes and train new recruits simultaneously (Tables 1-5).

By the end of the first 5-yr period (1983), 26 counties in Florida had trained at least one class of Master Gardeners (Table 6), with a total of 48 classes and 868 Master Gardeners graduated (Table 7). One additional county, Highlands, began training in 1983, but did not graduate the class until early 1984. Five other classes in veteran counties were begun

Table 1. Florida Master Gardener (MG) training record by counties, 1979.

County	Year	Classes	MGs	Hours promised
Brevard	1st	1	22	1,100
Dade	1st	1	15	750
Manatee	1st	1	21	2,100
Total	NA	3	58	3,950

Table 2. Florida Master Gardener (MG) training record by counties, 1980.

County	Year	Classes	MGs	Hours promised
Dade	2nd	2	60	3,000
Hillsborough	1st	1	24	1,200
Manatee	2nd	1	4	400
Polk	1st	1	10	500
Volusia	1st	1	17	850
Total	NA	6	115	5,950

Table 3. Florida Master Gardener (MG) training record by counties, 1981.

County	Year	Classes	MGs	Hours promised
Brevard	3rd	2	41	2,050
Dade	3rd	1	20	1,000
Hillsborough	2nd	1	23	1,150
Lake	1st	1	17	850
Orange	1st	1	15	750
Osceola	1st	1	19	950
Total	NA	7	135	6,750

Table 4. Florida Master Gardener (MG) training record by counties, 1982.

County	Year	Classes	MGs	Hours promised
Alachua	1st	1	18	900
Brevard	4th	1	15	750
Broward	1st	1	15	750
Hillsborough	3rd	1	25	1,250
Leon	1st	1	36	1,800
Marion	1st	1	12	600
Osceola	2nd	1	20	1,000
Palm Beach	1st	1	3	150
Pasco	1st	1	18	900
Pinellas	1st	1	16	800
Polk	3rd	1	7	350
Total	NA	11	185	9,250

Table 5. Florida Master Gardener (MG) training record by counties, 1983.

County	Year	Classes	MGs	Hours promised
Alachua	2nd	1	16	800
Baker	1st	1	3	150
Brevard	5th	1	25	1,250
Broward	2nd	1	25	1,250
Charlotte	1st	1	14	800
Clay	1st	1	12	600
Duval	1st	1	25	1,250
Indian River	1st	1	20	1,000
Lake	3rd	1	8	400
Lee	1st	1	33	1,650
Leon	2nd	1	35	1,750
Manatee	5th	1	14	1,400
Marion	2nd	1	16	800
Martin	1st	1	8	400
Palm Beach	2nd	1	11	550
Pasco	2nd	1	10	500
Putnam	1st	1	8	400
St. Johns	1st	1	18	900
St. Lucie	1st	1	21	1,050
Volusia	4th	1	53	2,650
Total	NA	21	375	19,450

Table 6. Florida Master Gardener (MG) program initiation record.

Year	New counties	MGs	Hours contracted
1979	3	58	3,950
1980	3	51	2,550
1981	3	51	2,550
1982	7	118	7,550
1983	10	162	8,100
Total	26	540	24,700

in 1983 but graduated in 1984, and are not included in this report.

In each of the first 3 yr (1979, 1980, 1981), 3 counties joined for a total of 9 in the program. Seven more entered in 1982, almost doubling the active list to 16. But the big year for growth was 1983 when 11 new counties started the program.

Counties did not always train alone. Eighteen counties chose to combine training with one or more counties at some time during the 5-yr period (Table 8). While the 26 MG counties trained a total of 48 classes during the 5-yr period, only 33 training sessions were held, 6 joint and 27 independent (Table 9).

Table 7. Five-yr training record, Florida Master Gardener (MG) program.

Year	No. counties	No. classes	MGs	Hours contracted
1979	3	3	58	3,950
1980	5	6	115	5,950
1981	6	7	135	6,750
1982	11	11	185	9,250
1983	20	21	375	19,450
Total	NA	48	868	45,350

Training Curriculum

Florida Master Gardeners were given 48 hr of horticultural training, mostly in the classroom. Subjects varied from one county session to another, but most often included the following: MG and Extension orientation, botany and plant science, soil fertility, plant pathology, insects of horticultural plants around the home, nematology, vegetable gardening, ornamentals and turf, fruit culture, and pesticide safety.

Instructors

During the first 2 yr, subjects at the MG training sessions were taught primarily by extension specialists traveling from Gainesville to the counties. However, by the third year (1981), training sessions became so numerous, so scattered across the state, and so extemporaneously planned that specialists could no longer manage the schedule to staff them all. More and more county personnel were teaching at many of the sessions.

It soon became apparent that because of the rate the program was expanding throughout Florida, the responsibility for instruction would have to shift to the county staffs. Since many agents were not sufficiently schooled in the area of horticulture, the specialists agreed to assemble well-narrated slide sets covering their respective subject areas, and make

Table 9. Master gardener training activity, first 5-yr period, 1979-1983.

Training sessions			County classes		
Total	Single	Joint	Total	Single	Joint
33	27	6	48	27	21

these available to all county instructors training Master Gardeners.

On August 26, 1982, a meeting was held at Lake Yale (Eustis) which assembled county agents planning MG programs, horticultural and related specialists, and administrators. At this conference, specialists presented their slide sets to the agents, along with other supporting materials. From that point on, instruction at subsequent training sessions was provided primarily by county extension agents combined in various instances with agents from adjoining counties, specialists, and advanced Master Gardeners.

Slide Sets

Specialists provided the IFAS Film Library with 26 individual slide sets totalling 1760 slides. Each set had either a written script or a narrated tape. By the end of 1983, 4 copies of each set were in the film library exclusively for MG training. However, with 8 to 14 concurrent sessions statewide, more copies are needed. Additionally, other subjects are required to round out the curriculum.

Additional Training

Following the basic training course, active MGs attend periodic seminars and other training events scheduled in the counties. Various tours to horticultural places of interest are offered to several county groups.

In 1982, 1983 and 1984, an advanced 2-day MG Training School was held at the University of Florida. Here, specialists gave more in-depth instruction than had been taught in the basic courses.

Table 8. Training record of counties in Florida Master Gardener (MG) program, 1979-1983.

Year begun	County	MGs	Classes	Individual classes	Joint classes	Hours contracted
1979	Brevard	103	5	5	0	5150
1979	Dade	95	4	4	0	4750
1979	Manatee	39	3	2	(1) ^z	3900
1980	Hillsborough	72	3	3	0	3600
1980	Polk	17	2	1	(1)	850
1980	Volusia	70	3	3	0	3500
1981	Lake	25	2	1	(1)	1250
1981	Orange	15	1	0	1	750
1981	Osceola	39	2	1	(1)	1950
1982	Alachua	34	2	2	0	1700
1982	Broward	40	2	0	2	2000
1982	Leon	71	2	2	0	3550
1982	Marion	28	2	2	0	1400
1982	Palm Beach	14	2	0	(2)	700
1982	Pasco	28	2	1	(1)	1400
1982	Pinellas	16	1	0	(1)	800
1983	Baker	3	1	0	(1)	150
1983	Charlotte	14	1	0	(1)	700
1983	Clay	12	1	0	(1)	600
1983	Duval	25	1	0	1	1250
1983	Indian River	20	1	0	(1)	1000
1983	Lee	33	1	0	1	1650
1983	Martin	8	1	0	(1)	400
1983	Putnam	8	1	0	(1)	400
1983	St. Johns	18	1	0	(1)	900
1983	St. Lucie	21	1	0	1	1050
Total		868	48	27	21	45,350

^zConducted in another county, ().

Recognition

Upon graduation, MGs are provided with a Certificate of Completion, a name badge, a program identity card, and in some counties, other items of recognition. Embroidered logo patches are available.

Service

In most counties, MGs contracted to give back 50 hr of service during the year. Manatee required 100 hr of service. The total hours of service for every MG trained and certified during the 5-yr period were 45,350 hr (Table 7). Florida Accountability and Evaluation Systems reports do not provide for collection of volunteer hours, so narrative reports and success stories were the key documents for recording service rendered. Unfortunately, the majority of these failed to include statistical data to support the activities of the MGs.

Table 10 depicts the various and key service activities of the MGs, expressed as number of counties reporting use of MGs in that activity. Most of the counties (96%) utilized MGs in the office, answering the phone (92%), talking to walk-ins, or doing clerical tasks (77%). Plant clinics were staffed by MGs in many counties (81%). Other high use activities were helping in or conducting meetings (69%), demonstrations (58%), and exhibits (50%). These were the primary activities in which the Master Gardeners assisted Extension Service in most counties.

Table 10. Service record of Florida Master Gardener's (MGs) as reported by counties, 1979-1983.

Activity	Counties	Percent	Activity	Counties	Percent
Office	25	96	News articles	5	19
Phone	24	92	Landscaping and maintenance	5	19
Clinics	21	81	Publications	4	15
Clerical	20	77	Soil testing	4	15
Meetings	18	69	Television	4	15
Demonstrations	15	58	Newsletters	4	15
Exhibits	13	50	Community gardens	3	12
Youth work	7	27	Surveys	3	12
Judging	6	23	Radio	1	3
Home visits	6	23	Fund raising	1	3
Specimen collection	6	23	Other	7	27

Reenlistments

After serving 1 year, many MGs reenrolled for a second or third term. These re-enlistments required no further training in most counties, although some made certain stipulations.

This report documents only those MGs originally certified and does not include the large but unreported numbers of MGs who volunteered for additional service.

Evaluations

While a few counties such as Hillsborough attempted to evaluate the work of the MGs, 2 state studies by the University of Florida are noteworthy. Carlton (2) surveyed MGs in Florida and reported their perceptions on the effectiveness of the program. Weston is studying the reliability of MGs in terms of how they answer questions from the public. These studies will provide valuable insight into the worth of the program and guidance for program direction.

Funding

The Florida Master Gardener program is a function of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service. It has no specific operating budget. It is funded similarly to other extension programs, with monies allocated primarily through the Extension Dean's office and supported by the relevant departments, particularly Vegetable Crops, which gives leadership to the program.

1984—The Sixth Year of the Program

MG growth and activity continues in 1984, the sixth year of the program. Six new counties have graduated a class or have begun training this year (Escambia, Highlands, Collier, Flagler, Citrus, and Hernando). A total of 14 training sessions were scheduled for the spring of 1984. Several other counties have expressed intent to start the program this year or next.

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