

Returns from the program became evident when the training and examination were completed and the Master Gardeners began to fulfill their service commitments. Many have far exceeded the required number of hours and want to keep working. Two volunteers in Manatee County have provided a total of 450 hours of service. They enjoy the contact with other homeowners and are constantly looking for more information to add to their training. Monthly meetings, tours and seminars have been coordinated by local Extension agents to provide current up-to-date information and additional training.

Service has been rendered in a variety of ways. Master Gardeners in Manatee County, for example, have spent at least 8 hours in the county Extension office before being assigned elsewhere. During this period they learned about the Cooperative Extension Service and what it has to offer through the local office and staff. They also learned to run pH and soluble salt soil tests. Experience at handling telephone, written and walk-in requests for horticultural information has also been obtained from time spent in the office.

Many Master Gardeners conduct plant clinics at various locations throughout each county. Locations, dates and times for clinics are advertised and homeowners are encouraged to visit the clinic nearest their homes rather than traveling to the Extension office. Dade County Master Gardeners have worked with a demonstration garden at the Homestead office and have helped organize some community gardens. Volunteers have also been asked to present programs to garden clubs or other civic groups. Some serve as leaders or resource persons for 4-H members interested in horticulture and others have participated in the training of new volunteers. These are only a few of the ways Master Gardeners can contribute to county Extension programs.

Florida's Master Gardener program is still quite young. Three additional counties, Hillsborough, Polk and Volusia, began training volunteers in September 1980 and the 3 pilot counties have expanded their programs by training new volunteers. The training schedule used for new groups is a revised version of the original schedule. An evaluation of the pilot effort helped to identify improvements which were needed and these were implemented.

Interest in the program has continued to grow in Florida and elsewhere. When the Master Gardener program began in Washington in 1972, 180 signed up for the first class. In 1978, 570 volunteers were trained and more than 130,000 citizens sought information from those Master Gardeners during that year. Volunteer time increased to 22,000 hours, more than 10 times the number of hours which could have been supplied by Extension horticulture agents. (2)

The Master Gardener program is a valuable tool of the Cooperative Extension Service for distribution of educational information and providing public service. The service supplied by these volunteers will become even more valuable as interest in food production and all areas of home horticulture continues to grow.

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Proc. Fla. State Hort. Soc. 93:104-105. 1980.

MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM IN DADE COUNTY

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During the past 25 years over 50,000 homeowners of Dade County have called the Extension office to get information that would help them to correct problems concerning ornamental plants, fruit trees, vegetable gardens and household insects.

Typical questions are:

- What are the best varieties of tomatoes to grow in this area?
- How much fertilizer should be applied to a lawn?
- How can I rid my house of drywood termites?

Over 100 such questions are answered daily. Until three years ago, one ornamental horticulture agent was attempting to satisfy this need. The Master Gardener program that was initiated in this county last year shows much promise in achieving our goal to provide this needed information.

After 48 hours of intensive training, we now have 60

certified Master Gardeners to assist the horticulture agents with our Extension educational programs.

In addition to the many telephone contacts, our Master Gardeners are active in conducting plant clinics; assisting at community and school gardens; assisting and instructing home garden courses. Some have been resource speakers for school science classes and for garden clubs. Other Master Gardeners have assisted neighbors to establish home vegetable gardens and while there, suggest treatments for other plant problems.

This training is conducted by state specialists and county Extension personnel. Basic training is in the areas of tropical fruits, ornamentals and vegetables as well as supporting disciplines such as entomology pathology and nematology.

The selected volunteers receive training one day each week. The 48 hours of instruction is accomplished over a period of 8 weeks.

When training is completed, a comprehensive written examination is given. After passing the exam each volunteer receives a graduation certificate and Master Gardener name badge which identifies him or her as a Florida Master Gardener.

In return for the 48 hours of training each volunteer

Proc. Fla. State Hort. Soc. 93: 1980.

agrees to give 50 hours service to the public as a Master Gardener.

For resource materials each Master Gardener receives a set of bulletins, fact sheets, newsletters, etc., concerning home gardening. Only 30 are enrolled in each class.

To keep up-to-date and abreast of new information, the Dade County Master Gardeners have organized a club. At each monthly meeting a program is conducted by members of the group; also, announcements of plant clinic locations and office duty assignments are made.

Because some have already fulfilled the hours committed, it is necessary to train others.

Only last week, class number three began. By the end of this year there will be 90 Master Gardeners in Dade County.

Fortunately many of our Master Gardeners have many years of gardening experience in the Miami area in addition to the recent training.

There is much enthusiasm for this program. As more experience is gained in presenting this course and we learn to make efficient use of the many volunteer hours that are available, this program can play a great role in strengthening our Extension program in Dade County.

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