Charlotte County Extension Service
2015 Master Gardener Sprouting Kit

This “Sprouting Kit” contains information that will be useful to you in understanding the Master Gardener Program as well as the role and responsibilities of a volunteer Master Gardener. It will also give you insight into the University of Florida Extension Service, how it functions and how Master Gardeners operate as part of the Extension Service.

Please read the enclosed materials carefully and complete the application included in this packet to address below:

Master Gardener Program
Charlotte County Extension Service
25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3
Port Charlotte, FL 33980
The Charlotte County Master Gardener Program

Part 1 – History

The rapid urban growth in many areas of the United States coupled with increased interest in the environment and home gardening have prompted an ever-increasing number of homeowner questions for County Extension Service agents to answer. Many of these questions are seasonal in nature and are answered relatively easily assuming that one has horticultural training.

In 1972, an innovative Extension Service Agent in the State of Washington reasoned that well-trained volunteers could respond to many of the everyday homeowner questions, thus freeing him and his colleagues for more technical and difficult problems. Volunteers, such as Extension Homemakers and 4-H Leaders, had always been a part of the Extension Service, but no volunteers had ever been used in the area of environmental horticulture. This Extension Agent selected, trained and certified volunteers as Master Gardeners. They soon succeeded in meeting his desired objectives – in fact, they exceeded his expectations. And so it was that the Master Gardener Program began.

Since that time, the Master Gardener Program has grown and is now active in over 45 states. Florida's program began in 1979. It has been a tremendous success and is active in 56 of Florida's 67 counties. The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) of which the Cooperative Extension Service is a part, sponsors the Master Gardener Program in Florida.

Just what is the Cooperative Extension Service? For a more complete understanding of this unique organization, we must go back to 1862 when the U.S. Congress passed the Morrill Act, which established colleges in each state to be financed through grants of land from the Federal Government. They became known as "land grant colleges," a name which persists today. These colleges would emphasize teaching practical subjects such as agriculture and home economics. The 1887 Hatch Act provided for experiment stations at Land Grant Colleges to conduct research aimed at solving each state's agricultural problems.

Then in 1914 the Smith-Lever Act created the Extension Service as a part of these colleges, to be a means of disseminating the practical knowledge gained through agricultural research. The University of Florida at Gainesville is Florida's Land Grant College; the Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences (IFAS) is that part of the University which has responsibility for teaching, research and extension in the agricultural and environmental sciences.

The term "cooperative" refers to the method by which extension services are funded. In Florida, three cooperating tax sources provide funds: the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the State through legislative appropriations; and the counties through appropriation by county governments. The word "cooperative" also implies a sharing of information generated through sound research programs at the federal and state levels. The term "extension" defines this organization's purpose: to extend the information generated at the state and federal levels to people at the local level in the form of a
“service.” The Cooperative Extension Service is an information education organization, which provides information in three main areas: Agriculture, Food and Consumer Science and 4-H Youth Development. Community Development, Marine Science and Energy are associated programs. The motto of the Extension Service is “Helping People Help Themselves.”

Part II – Charlotte County Master Gardener Program

In Charlotte County, the Master Gardener Program began in 1983 and to date has provided over 30 training courses to qualify candidates as Master Gardeners. Currently 100+ individuals are active in the program. They were selected and trained and have committed themselves to giving 35 hours of volunteer service each year to remain active in the program.

Selection to become a candidate for the Master Gardener Training Program is not predicated on prior training, education, knowledge or experience. Neither do age, race, sex or physical handicap dictate selection.

A sincere desire to help others, a personal commitment to volunteer service and a desire to learn are the major selection criteria involved. Gardening experience and knowledge are certainly helpful, but they are not prerequisites for enrollment in the Master Gardener Training Program.

Part III – Master Gardener Training

The Master Gardener Training Program is demanding and intensive. Classroom work constitutes more than 80% of the 50-hour training period. Subjects include basic botany, soils, fertilizers, vegetables, insects, citrus, turf grasses, ornamentals, diseases, pesticides and related topics. All information is based on research-based recommendations of the University of Florida and other authoritative sources.

There is a $150.00 materials fee for those who participate in the training. This fee includes the cost of a Master Gardener Notebook containing extensive reference materials from the University of Florida/IFAS Extension. These materials are updated frequently so that Master Gardeners always have the most current recommendations approved by the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service. On completion of the 50-hour training period, all Master Gardener trainees are required to satisfactorily pass a comprehensive examination on the materials covered. Only then can the trainees be certified and awarded the title of Master Gardener.

Once certified, Master Gardeners must abide by the policies set out by the University of Florida and IFAS. Those “Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners” are attached and should be carefully studied. As Master Gardeners assist the Extension Service Agent and staff, they are in effect “extending the Extension Service.” As such, they provide advice and recommendations that have been well documented as a result of experimentation and testing and are approved by the University of Florida. Master Gardeners deal primarily with consumer horticulture questions and various information requests. The Extension Service Agents themselves respond to all commercial/professional growers’ problems.
Part IV – Master Gardener Activities

At least initially, most Master Gardener Activities center around the Extension Service office. This is in fact a continuation of the training so that new volunteers can become familiar with the office, its personnel and resources, and so that the Extension Service faculty and staff can become familiar with their new volunteer assistants. The remaining service hours are spent in a wide variety of activities, which are related to some aspect of gardening and contribute to community education and service. Many Master Gardeners continue their close association with the office by answering telephone calls during the Plant Lifeline hours, mailing out brochures in response to request, or developing presentations for garden clubs and other civic associations. Others choose to work in demonstration gardens or with 4-H members and youth of Charlotte County. Master Gardeners also participate in the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program as Yard Advisors.

Other activities include, but are not limited to, plant clinics conducted throughout the county, manning information booths at fairs and flower shows, helping the disadvantaged and handicapped in gardening and even such tasks as preparing informational brochures. There is something for almost every skill at every level. Many Master Gardeners far surpass the mandatory 35 service hours with some volunteering several hundred hours in a year.

Training never ceases for the certified and working Master Gardener. Programming and field visits are scheduled for Master Gardeners to boost their horticultural understanding. Specialized knowledge is gained to better enable the Master Gardener to give expert advice. Outings are also used for planning and exchanging information on various projects. Many times a brown bag lunch is enjoyed amid surroundings rarely seen by the average citizens.

Once a year the University of Florida conducts “post graduate” Master Gardener training at the state Master Gardener Conference. This is a voluntary, two- three day conference that Master Gardeners attend to receive training and meet other Master Gardeners from throughout the state.

Part V – Conclusion

This “Sprouting Kit” describes the Master Gardener Program, although words cannot describe the sense of accomplishment Master Gardeners feel in helping others become better gardeners. They are the kind of people who, bonded together through a common interest in gardening, horticulture and the spirit of volunteerism, will keep America great. The Master Gardener Program is a wonderful opportunity to learn and to help. We hope that you will become a part of this “growing” experience.
Working Group Committees

This is a listing with a brief description about some of the various activities where Master Gardeners complete their volunteer time. Activity chairman as well as workers are needed.

Committee Title: Plant Lifeline

Objectives: To assist Extension office staff in answering residential horticulture questions, distributing bulletins and performing assigned tasks in support of the Master Gardener Program.

Committee Title: Plant Clinics

Objectives: To provide horticultural information to various communities on a routine basis. To maintain a list of volunteers to operate each clinic. To coordinate and man display booths and exhibits at fairs and home and garden shows.

Committee Title: Education Committee

Objectives: To provide horticulture programs to garden clubs, condominium and homeowner associations and other civic groups upon request using Powerpoint presentations, videos, slides and demonstration and discussion. To arrange programs for the general public in the form of seminars, short courses, field days and demonstrations.

Committee Title: Demonstration Gardens

Objectives: To provide advice and guidance to the public on the establishment and maintenance of various examples of dooryard-type gardens. To plan, prepare, plant, maintain and harvest plantings in a plot in the garden area or in the landscape.

Committee Title: Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program

Objectives: To advise citizens in homes on environmentally-friendly landscaping practices intended to reduce pollution to our water supply and also provide horticultural information to the general public on “environmentally-friendly” landscapes.

Committee Title: Horticulture Therapy/Working with Youth

Objectives: Utilizing plants and horticultural activities to improve the social, educational, psychological and physical adjustment of persons, thus improving their mind, body and spirit.

Committee Title: Containers in Public Places

Objective: Creating container gardens, indoors or outdoors, that draw interest in gardening and the Master Gardener Program
Charlotte County Guidelines Regarding Active/Inactive Status and Re-certification of Master Gardeners

A. Active Status

1. A Florida Master Gardener on Active Status is one who has completed all the requirements for becoming a Florida Master Gardener; and who

(a) Has committed to performing 35 hours of volunteer work within the 12 month period immediately following certification and to reporting those hours and all contacts on a monthly basis;

(b) Agrees to complete 12 hours of additional training which can include: Master Gardener in-service training, Master Gardener advanced training in Gainesville, or other training that is approved as acceptable by the county horticulture agent;

(c) Has received a certificate of completion of training; and

(d) Has been granted a certification/identification card signed and dated by the county horticulture agent.

2. The Active status is valid for one year from date of certification (or re-certification).

3. If a Master Gardener ceases active participation in the program, the certification as Master Gardener may be voided by the county horticulture agent, as stipulated in “Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners” (attached to this “Sprouting Kit”), or that person may be placed on Inactive status.

B. Inactive Status

An Inactive Master Gardener is one who has met all the requirements for Active status, but who is unable to commit to or complete the minimum 35 hours of service and who intends to re-certify for Active status in the near future. The following policies apply:

1. The county horticulture agent is responsible for determining whether or not Master Gardener may be given inactive status. To be eligible for inactive status the Master Gardener must be in good standing, having completed their original commitment of 35 hours of volunteer service. Consideration must also be given to proper reasons, intentions, degree of commitment and other circumstances.

2. Inactive Master Gardeners are ineligible to participate as or represent themselves as Active Master Gardeners.

3. Master Gardener Coordinators should maintain names and addresses of all inactive members in their files for reference.

4. Inactive Master Gardeners are ineligible for mailings or continued training in Gainesville provided to Active Master Gardeners.

C. Re-certification
Re-certification is the process by which Master Gardeners retain or obtain Active status. The following procedures apply:

1. Re-certification is for a period of one year from the date Active status is re-certified.

2. Following re-certification, Active status may be voided should the Master Gardener cease active participation in the program (see “Active Status,” part 3).

3. A Florida Master Gardener may re-certify by meeting all the requirements of Active Status (see “Active Status,” part 1) and by
   
   (a) Committing to all provisions as indicated by signature on “Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners” form (attached to this “Sprouting Kit”); and

   (b) Passing a brief test to determine adequate horticulture knowledge, if deemed necessary by the county horticulture agent.

4. County horticulture agents should provide each Master Gardener re-certified to Active status an identification card appropriately signed and dated.
Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners

The title “Florida Master Gardener” is to be used only and exclusively in the University of Florida Extension Service Master Gardener Program in which trained and certified Master Gardeners answer gardening questions. In addition to the University training, Master Gardeners have diagnostic support via county extension horticulturists and state extension specialists. Master Gardeners also are provided Extension Service publications. Master Gardeners are expected to use the title only when doing unpaid volunteer educational work in the Extension Horticulture program.

Florida Master Gardeners are advised not to advertise their names or their place of business, nor to be listed on the advertisements of business places as Master Gardeners. This is a University of Florida Extension Service public service program. Appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or giving implied University or Extension Service endorsements of any product or place of business is improper.

In making recommendations which include the use of chemicals (e.g., insecticides, herbicides and fungicides), Florida Master Gardeners must follow published University of Florida Extension Service recommendations. Use of other pesticides recommendations is not approved. Cultural problems, which are not specifically covered by University of Florida Extension Service recommendations, may be handled by suggesting treatments, which an experienced Master Gardener considers appropriate. Questions concerning commercial production of crops and pest control on such crops are to be referred to the local County Extension Agent.

A Florida Master Gardener must attend the prescribed hours of instruction and pass an examination administered by the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service before becoming a certified Master Gardener. This certification is restrictive in nature in that it is valid only when the individual is participating in the Florida Master Gardener Program and for one year only. If an individual ceases active participation, then the certification as a Master Gardener becomes void. New certifications will be issued each year only to those individuals who make a commitment for participation in the program for the coming year. Those not continuing in the program will not be re-certified and should be aware that if they represent themselves as Master Gardeners, they are violating their original commitment to the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service.

All Master Gardener volunteers must recognize the necessity for representing the County Extension Service in a manner consistent with exemplary citizenship and leadership. Standards for Master Gardeners have been established to create a safe and pleasant learning environment for the Master Gardener Program. In addition, procedures for due process are available from the Extension Agent for a Master Gardener to follow if he or she is charged with violating a standard and feels the charge is unfounded.
Master Gardeners are expected to participate in all components of the planned program, be responsive to the reasonable requests of the county agent in charge, and be respectful of the need for personal safety and the safety of others. Along with active participation, Master Gardeners are expected to uphold certain standards of behavior including, but not limited to the following: no possession or use of alcohol or drugs in the workplace or on job assignments outside Extension Office; no abuse or theft of public or personal property; no sexual harassment or misconduct; no verbal abuse and/or failure to cooperate with others, including staff members and/or the public; no possession of weapons or fireworks in the workplace; no defamation of the organization; no creating an implied or outright University or Extension Service endorsement of any product or place of business; no misrepresentation of sources of information; not consistently giving out incorrect information; no use of state and/or county vehicles without authorization; no failure to report any and all injuries to the County Extension Agent as soon as possible; and no physical assault. Any violations will result in dismissal pending due process. Illegal activities will be referred to law enforcement.

The training and experience gained by participation in the Florida Master Gardener Program are valuable and may rightfully be listed and featured as qualifications when seeking employment. Once employed – and while serving as a paid employee, or if self-employed, Master Gardeners should not display credentials or give the appearance of being Master Gardeners on duty at places of business. Places of business specifically designated as Master Gardener Plant Clinic locations by the County Extension Agent are exceptions to this “separation” rule, but still do not put active or former Master Gardeners in the position of selling horticultural merchandise.

Experienced Master Gardeners are likely to receive invitation to speak before groups. Gratuitous payments for speaking are not a concern since such speaking activity is entirely separate from the question answering done at Master Gardener Clinics. However, please do not seek payment for such speaking appearances. Donation can be accepted towards our non profit foundation, Friends for Extension Foundation, Inc.

Your work is much appreciated by the University of Florida Extension Service and your local area gardeners who have received or will receive your counsel.

Special Note of Caution:

Individuals who are not acting on behalf of the University of Florida Extension Service are strongly urged to make every effort to minimize the appearance of being on duty before making any recommendations in the area of horticulture. Speaking “off the record” is your right; however, make sure everyone knows you are speaking for yourself and not the Extension Service.

http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/
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<td>&amp; Tom Becker</td>
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Charlotte County
Florida Volunteer Master Gardener Application

Name: ________________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________
City: _______________ State: _____ Zip: ____________
Home Phone: ____________ Work Phone: _____________
E-mail Address: ________________________

How did you learn about the Master Gardener Program?
________________________________________________________________________

Please list any specialized gardening interest or hobbies you have such as vegetables, houseplants, ornamentals, turf grasses, landscaping, etc.:
________________________________________________________________________

What gardening affiliations do you have; e.g., garden clubs, horticultural societies, etc.?
________________________________________________________________________

Are you currently in other organizations (Kiwanis Club, PTA, etc.)? Yes _____ No _____

Why do you wish to become a Master Gardener? _______________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What do you expect to gain from this program? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How would you rate your “people skills?”
☐ Excellent
☐ Good
☐ Fair

*Please fill out reverse side of form.
How would you rate your gardening skills?
- Expert
- Intermediate
- Beginner

List degrees or certifications you have earned in the past:

List major occupations you have held:

What ideas do you have of the type of volunteer work you can do in completion of your commitment? (Answering information requests, maintenance of vegetables or fruit gardens, horticultural presentations, etc.)

Where do you obtain most of your gardening information? Please check all that apply.
- Extension fact sheets
- Gardening magazines
- Gardening books
- Nursery/garden centers
- Family, friends and neighbors
- Master Gardener volunteers
- Garden clubs
- Other

List all periods during the next year that you know you will not be available for volunteer service due to vacation, job, etc.: __________________________

What are the best days for you to do volunteer work? __________________________

I wish to become a Master Gardener and would like to be accepted into the program. I understand that if accepted and I successfully complete the course of instruction, I agree to donate at least 35 hours of public service for each 12-month period I remain active in the Master Gardener Program. I have also read, understand, and agree to abide by the “Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners”.

Signature __________________________ Date __________________________