

SO, YOU WANT TO BE A CHARLOTTE COUNTY EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER!

Do you enjoy meeting and talking with people? Do you like searching for answers to gardening questions that you or others have? If so, you may be a candidate for the Master Gardener Program. Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who provide the public with gardening programs and activities that draw on the horticultural research and experience of the University of Florida Extension Service. Each Master Gardener receives research-based instruction in all areas of home horticulture and is kept up-to-date with the latest developments in home horticulture from the Charlotte County Extension Service. In return, Master Gardeners volunteer an equivalent number of hours sharing their knowledge and experience with interested gardeners in the community.

Charlotte County's Master Gardener Program, along with similar programs in other counties in Florida, is directly linked to the University of Florida as part of its national Land Grant College charter. It is this tie to the University that provides Master Gardener's state-of-the-art gardening knowledge. The Master Gardener Program is a world class national program of trained volunteers who work in partnership with their County Extension office to extend horticultural information throughout the community. The first Master Gardener program was started in Washington State in the early 70's. Since then, literally tens of thousands of people have participated and developed strong networks across the country.

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Our own Master Gardeners work on a variety of programs and activities. Master Gardeners who work the Plant Lifeline, open Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays from 1:00pm until 4:00pm answer questions and diagnose plant insect and disease problems. Others man booths at shows and fairs talking with people about gardening. Some do talks; others even host gardening radio call-in programs! Educational demonstration gardens are also maintained as well as weekly plant clinics open across the county. What else - the sky is the limit!

Who can be a Master Gardener? Literally anyone who enjoys gardening and has a desire to share their knowledge and skills in their community.

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

*contact a
MASTER GARDENER
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 764.4340 or by email Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.*

*You can also visit them at one of our many **Plant Clinics** around the county:
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>*

Candidates apply and are interviewed prior to attending an intensive, yet enjoyable training course on all aspects of home horticulture or gardening. Volunteers then volunteer the required amount of time (50 hours per year) while bringing our educational message to the community. Volunteers are kept up to date with regular in-service training. Trips, tours and other special activities round out the experience, which is as social as it is educational.

A new training program is in the works and should tentatively begin in early March 2009! I would recommend that you visit our website and especially the section on the Master Gardener Program at <http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/horticulture/hort-05-MGprogram.htm>. Within this website you will also find what we call the "Sprouting Kit" which includes an application that you can print out, fill in and send to our office. Or give our office a call at 764-4340 for more information. Talk with one of our Charlotte County Master Gardener Volunteers. They will tell you why gardening is America's number one hobby! Continue this tradition and consider becoming a Master Gardener volunteer! To talk to a Master Gardener volunteer on the Plant Lifeline, call on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 1:00pm until 4:00pm at 764-4340 for gardening help and insight into their role as an Extension volunteer.

*Ralph Mitchell is the Extension Director/ Horticulture Agent for Charlotte County UF/IFAS Extension Service. Ralph can be reached at 764-4344 or by email:
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