


# Master Gardeners:
# The Few, the Trusted, the Informed

A **Master Gardener Program** is designed to train a volunteer educator who partners with a university-Cooperative Extension to share research-based horticultural information with the public.

These nationwide programs began in Washington State in 1972-1973, when Extension agents, overwhelmed by home gardening questions, trained community volunteers to help. The model spread widely and now operates in nearly all U.S. states (often called Extension Master Gardener programs), the District of Columbia and even some Canadian provinces.

Participants complete an intensive course, typically 40-80 hours of classroom work taught by university specialists, researchers, and horticulturists. Topics cover soil health, plant pathology, vegetables, fruits, integrated pest management, composting, water conservation, entomology, taxonomy, pruning, and sustainable landscaping. This earns participants their Master Gardener certification.

Master Gardeners commit to a set number of hours in the first year with annual requirements such as teaching educational courses, answering gardening helplines, offering workshops and talks, staffing plant clinics and/ or maintaining school programs or assisting with your programs.

Programs are typically administered through state land-grant universities and their local Cooperative Extension offices (such as the University of Florida IFAS Extension

In Florida, the University of Florida, (IFAS) was the original land grant school. Master Gardeners act as representatives of their Extension Service and provide unbiased, science-based recommendations rather than personal opinions. The title “Master Gardener” is generally used only when performing approved Extension sponsored activities. Those who are selected to be Master Gardeners are typically community members who enjoy plants and people and want to deepen their knowledge and are willing to volunteer.

The programs emphasize environmentally responsible practices that support healthy gardens, landscapes and communities. In order to maintain certification volunteers must keep the title active, volunteers must complete an annual quota of volunteer service and continuing education hours.

We are fortunate to have two offices in Okaloosa County. They are the Gerald R. Edmondson Extension Building in the north end at 3098 Airport Road, Crestview, and the Sheila Dunning Extension Building at 1954 Lewis Turner Boulevard, by the fairgrounds, in the south end.

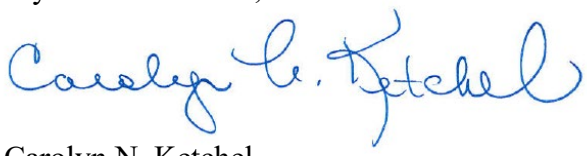
As a homeowner you may find you have questions about your lawn, whether it is regarding watering, fertilizer application or an insect infestation. A Master Gardener can help you find the answers. Perhaps you are frustrated with trying to grow vegetables or what citrus trees would grow in NW Florida. Perhaps you have a landscaping question about which flowers would bloom in season in Florida. Our region of Florida is very different from south Florida. It is important to know what will grow when in our area.

Lastly if you have a green thumb or concern for our environment, you may be interested in becoming a Master Gardener. This coursework is intensive but rewarding. Individuals in the Master Gardener program provide research-based education and are a trusted resource for horticultural education in Florida. I am grateful for the volunteers who are a great source of information to take care of the resources entrusted to our care.

Whether you want to find local classes or contact a volunteer help desk call at 850-689-5850.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



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