

What are Nebraska Extension Master Gardeners?

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator

(Part 1 of 3)

Nebraska Extension Master Gardeners are Extension-educated volunteers who make a difference in their communities, reaching people from all backgrounds and ethnicities about research-based gardening information. While beautification of outdoor spaces is one of the happy consequences of their volunteer efforts, Master Gardeners do so much more:

- They work with child care centers and school programs to start youth on a journey of lifelong gardening and ensure the skills necessary to have access to fresh food.
- They serve as consultants to community and food pantry gardens.
- Master Gardener volunteers work with garden clubs and school groups to foster, plant, and maintain habitats for pollinators.
- They answer questions from the public about gardening-related topics through local Extension offices via the horticulture helpline and “Ask the Master Gardener” tables.
- Master Gardeners provide gardening programs and demonstrations to clubs, senior citizen centers, neighborhood associations, farmers markets, and youth groups.

Besides a love of gardening, Nebraska Extension Master Gardeners have good people skills and a strong appreciation for the research that goes into making everyone better gardeners, reducing waste that goes into landfills and using Integrated Pest Management as a means of solving pest problems, regardless if the pest is a plant disease, insect or weed.

Nebraska Extension Master Gardener volunteers have a long history of supporting the land grant mission to improve people’s lives by providing research-based education. The Extension Master Gardener program began in King County, Washington, in 1971 as an outreach to plug the gap between the demand for horticulture information and the shortfall of Extension staff to answer those questions. Hippies and “getting back to Mother Earth” were two cultural dynamics leading to the increased demand. Since that time, the Extension Master Gardener program has expanded across the United States, is in four Canadian provinces, and now South Korea, joining in 2011.

Next: Part 2 of 3, What do the instructional classes cover for Nebraska Extension Master Gardener volunteers?