

Master Gardeners – Supporting Tennessee’s Volunteer Spirit (published 12-14-2024)
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The servant heart, that what the Master Gardeners (MG) have. Willing and able to help!
The skills and what the new MGs get out of the MG program are vital to helping our neighbors.

From Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association: The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.” The programs are coordinated and cohesive throughout the state. Classes are provided at local Extension offices with additional workshops and field trips to enhance the training experience.

As Master Gardeners we recognize our mission is to educate the public about horticulture and assist them in their gardening endeavors. We are an arm of the University of Tennessee Horticultural Program and the County Extension Program. We serve the community by sharing garden experiences in our many garden projects. As volunteers, we have a desire to continue learning about gardening and share that learning through our educational programs. One of our most important ways of doing this is through our Master Gardener classes in which we train and educate new volunteers, who will in turn join our team and serve our community in our gardening aspirations. The training program includes a core curriculum of basic horticultural information appropriate to gardening in Tennessee. These classes are usually topics you need to know as you respond to questions in your community. Courses are taught by University of Tennessee Extension experts and local professionals.

Spring classes begin January 28, 2025, and go through April 22, 2025. Classes will be held on Tuesdays from 10:00 am - 12:00 pm. For Sullivan County, classes are held at the Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center located at 140 Spurgeon Lane, Blountville, TN. Applications are available online at UT website: <https://utia.tennessee.edu/hardeman/wp-content/uploads/sites/110/2020/05/TN-Master-Gardener-Application.pdf> or at your local county Agricultural Center. To find out which counties offer MG classes, go to: <https://mastergardener.tennessee.edu/how-do-i-become-a-master-gardener/>

You can improve the lives of Tennesseans through horticulture education delivered by a dedicated and skilled volunteer network. You will gain in-depth knowledge about gardening, people and the community around you through the program. Here are just some of the activities of a MG:

- Develop educational programs and activities related to gardening and nature
- Prepare and/or Present Educational Seminars
- Hold Plant Clinics
- Write News Articles
- Volunteer in Community Garden Programs
- Answer Questions One-on-One
- Create Demonstration Gardens

“Master Gardeners are a nationwide group. It makes you feel like you are a part of something bigger than yourself. You never have to feel out of place, no matter what city you visit or move to.”

2021 Extension Master Gardener Intern

Here are some specific examples of what we do. We master gardeners help at historic sites including Old Deery Inn, Exchange Place Living History Farm, Rocky Mount Living History Museum, and Tipton-Haynes Historic Site. In addition to historic sites, we volunteer at Carver Peace Gardens, Discovery Garden the Hands-on Discovery Center, Johnson City Hospital Gardens, and more! We enjoy helping at all the official projects where we volunteer. For a full list of official projects, go to <https://www.netmga.net/> and check out the “Projects and Photo Gallery” page.

Our efforts at historic sites include a lot of other things besides the necessary weed removal. Exchange Place Living History Farm benefits from our help with a demonstration vegetable garden containing heirloom and hybrid varieties grown in raised beds. We built the raised bed gardens and trellises for vines. We also maintain a pollinator garden and we have a small garden area that focuses on native plants.

At Rocky Mount we planned and installed specialty gardens, historically representative of the date the buildings were constructed. We also created two native plant gardens at the large stone sign seen from the road and at the gated entrance. When we work at Rocky Mount when it is open for tours, we dress in costume representative of the time. We help in putting on festivals there as well.

One program we are very proud of and part of the mission of Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association (NETMGA) is providing education to the children (Jr. Gees) who attend the after school and summer camp program at Carver Peace Gardens. The program for children was developed by Master Gardeners to teach basic gardening skills to urban students. MGs have worked with over 150 children ranging from five to twelve years of age through their after-school programs in the spring and fall and the summer programs. With coaching from MGs, the students learned how to plant, maintain, and harvest raised bed vegetable gardens. A new pollinator garden was created to develop the students’ understanding of the importance of flowers and pollinators to our ecosystem. There have also been lessons on container gardening, building bird houses, composting, and recycling.

The bonuses of becoming a MG are making new friends and the comradery of working on a team. When we step back from the day’s efforts at one of our projects, we feel enormous satisfaction about the transformation we were a part of and the information we shared to help our neighbors improve their gardens.

For additional information:

UT Master Gardener Program information: <https://mastergardener.tennessee.edu/>

Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association: <https://www.netmga.net/>

What is the Tennessee Master Gardener Program?: <https://mastergardener.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/227/2021/03/MainPage-SP-635.pdf>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.