April 21, 2010

Dear Prospective Master Gardener:

Thank you for your interest in serving as a Master Gardener Volunteer. A new Master Gardener training class is scheduled to begin on June 2, 2010. This year we will be selecting 15 Master Gardener trainees to participate in the training program. The classes will be held at the Sumter County Extension Office. Training dates are every Wednesday from 06/02/10 through 08/25/10. Training classes will run from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

In the following pages, you can read about the history of the Master Gardener program and the state policies regarding Florida Master Gardeners. Hopefully, this information will help you decide whether you want to join the Sumter County Master Gardener Program.

In order to be considered for the program you must do several things:

1. Complete enclosed application form.
2. Select your choice of interview times.
3. Return all items mentioned above to:

   Sumter County Extension
   Master Gardener Program
   7620 SR 471 Ste 2
   Bushnell, FL 33513-8734

Interviews will be conducted on select dates in May of 2010. You will be called to confirm the time that you have selected in the attached forms. I look forward to receiving your application. If you are selected to become a Master Gardener, there is a $120.00 fee. This fee covers the cost of training materials and refreshments. Please call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Brooke Burn
Urban Horticulture Agent
(352) 793-2728
burnb48@ufl.edu

The Foundation for The Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution
History of the Master Gardener Program

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

In 1972, an innovative County Extension Agent in the State of Washington reasoned that well-trained volunteers could respond to many of the everyday homeowner questions, 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 never in the area of homeowner horticulture. The 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 the Master Gardener Program began.

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

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 emphasize teaching practical subjects such as agriculture and home economics. The 1887 Hatch Act provided for experimental stations at Land Grant Colleges to conduct research on agricultural problems.

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

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 appropriations 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 level to people at the county level in the form of a "service." The Cooperative Extension Service provides information in three main areas: Agriculture, Home Economics and 4-H Youth. Community Development, Marine Biology, and Energy are associated programs.

The Foundation for The Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution
The motto and goal of the Cooperative Extension Service is "Helping People Help Themselves." Thus, you can see how well the volunteer Master Gardener concept fits into the ultimate objectives and goals of the Extension Service.

In Sumter County, the Master Gardener Program began in October of 1995 and to date has provided several training classes to qualify trainees as Master Gardeners. They were selected and trained and have committed themselves to contributing 35 hours of volunteer service each year to remain active in the program.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, disability or national origin, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Board of County Commissioners Cooperating.

A SINCERE DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS, A DESIRE TO LEARN, AND A PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO VOLUNTEER SERVICE ARE THE MAJOR SELECTION CRITERIA INVOLVED.

Gardening experience and knowledge are always helpful but they are by no means a requirement for selection for the Master Gardener Training Program.

**Master Gardener Training**

The Master Gardener Training Program is demanding and intensive. Formal classroom work constitutes more than 50% of the training period. Subjects include basic botany, soils, fertilizers, vegetables, entomology, citrus, turf grass, use of (and alternatives to) chemicals, ornamentals, diseases and related topics. All information is based on the knowledge and research of the University of Florida.

Each weekly session is about six hours and a portion of each class includes a practical, hands-on activity related to the theory just presented. Many sessions conclude with the "most asked questions" relating to the subject matter. These are the questions most commonly asked by homeowners and serve to prepare the Master Gardener for the day when that first homeowner question must be correctly answered.

Each trainee is also provided, at a minimal charge, a collection of UF/IFAS books. This collection contains extensive reference materials from the University of Florida. These materials are used so that Master Gardeners always provide recommendations approved by the University of Florida at Gainesville.

Master Gardeners deal only with homeowner's questions. The Extension Service Agents themselves respond to all commercial/professional growers concerns. On completion of the training period, all Master Gardener trainees are required to pass a comprehensive
examination on the materials covered. The trainees will then need to give 75 hours of volunteer time to the Sumter County Master Gardeners. This volunteer time must be completed within one year of the comprehensive examination. Only then can the trainees be certified and be awarded the title of Master Gardener. Once certified, Master Gardeners must abide by a set of policies set out by the University of Florida and IFAS. Those "Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners" are attached and should be carefully studied.

**Master Gardener Activities**

Most Master Gardener activities center around the Extension Service offices, at least initially. The first twenty volunteer service hours of each new Master Gardener are spent there. This is in fact a continuation of the training as the new members become familiar with the center, its personnel and facilities, and the Extension agents become familiar with their new helpers. The remaining required service hours may be spent in a variety of activities related to some aspect of gardening and contribute to community education and service through Sumter County Extension.

Many Master Gardeners continue their close association with the office by answering telephone calls in plant clinics, mailing out brochures in response to requests, or by developing presentations for garden clubs and other civic associations. Others choose to work in the demonstration garden around the Extension Service Building. They may also choose to garden with children at the Sumter County Youth Center.

Master Gardeners may choose to present classes to the public in these gardens, helping the typical new-to-Florida homeowner adapt his gardening techniques to the peculiarities of Florida and Sumter County in particular.

As the Master Gardeners assist the Extension Service Agent and staff, they are in effect "extending the Extension Service." As such, they provide advice and recommendations which have been well documented as a result of experimentation and testing and are approved by the University of Florida.

Other activities include plant clinics conducted throughout the county, manning information booths at fairs and flower shows, giving presentations at garden clubs, working with youth groups (4-H, Sumter County Youth Center, etc.), developing community gardens, helping the disadvantaged and handicapped in gardening, and even such tasks as preparing this information brochure. There is something for almost every skill at every level. Many Master Gardeners far surpass the mandatory service hours, with some exceeding several hundred hours in a year.

Training never ceases for the certified and working Master Gardener. Throughout the year, Master Gardeners visit local gardens, nurseries, parks and similar facilities. Specialized knowledge is gained to better enable the Master Gardener to give expert advice. Many times a brown bag lunch is enjoyed amid flora and fauna in surroundings rarely seen by the average citizen.

*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*
*An Equal Opportunity Institution*
IFAS conducts "post-graduate" Master Gardener training by the University of Florida throughout the state. These voluntary training sessions offer Master Gardeners continuing Education, as well as, offer time for Master Gardeners from throughout the state to share information and to receive recognition for the jobs they perform. Many training sessions are presented by State Extension Specialists and Extension Agents who strive to bring all Master Gardeners into "sync" with the latest horticultural developments and provide a look into the future of horticultural research.

The Master Gardener Program is an opportunity to learn and to help others. We hope that you will become a part of this "growing" experience.

State Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners

Within the State of Florida, 48 counties currently maintain active Master Gardener programs. This being the case, a need exists for the establishment of standards for all Florida Master Gardeners to represent their county in a manner consistent with exemplary citizenship and leadership.

To become a Florida Master Gardener, one is required to attend the prescribed hours of instruction and pass an examination administered by the Florida Cooperative Extension Service before becoming a certified Florida Master Gardener. This certification is restrictive in nature. Certification is valid only for one year and while an individual is participating in the Florida Master Gardener Program. Certifications will be reissued each year by the Extension Agent only to those individuals who make a commitment to participate in pre-approved work and are certified as active in their county of residence. Only certified Florida Master Gardeners are eligible to attend additional educational programs such as the Florida Master Gardener Continued Training offered by the University of Florida.

Master Gardeners are expected to participate in all components of the planned program (including record keeping). Volunteers are expected to be responsive to reasonable requests of the coordinating Extension Agent and be mindful of the need for personal safety and the safety of others. It is the responsibility of the Master Gardener to immediately contact the coordinating Extension Agent or other authorized county employees in the case of injuries which occur while performing the duties of a Master Gardener Volunteer.

The title "Florida Master Gardener" is to be used only and exclusively in the context of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener Program. Master Gardeners are expected to use the title only when doing pre-approved volunteer educational work in the Extension Horticulture program. The training and experience gained by participation in the Florida Master Gardener program are valuable and may rightfully be listed and featured as qualification when seeking employment. Once employed, and while serving as a paid employee, (if self-employed), Master Gardeners should not display credentials or give the appearance of being a Florida Master Gardener at the place of business. The Master Gardener title may only be

*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*
An Equal Opportunity Institution
used at a place of business which is specifically designated as a Florida Master Gardener Clinic established by the coordinating Extension Agent.

Experienced Florida Master Gardeners may be invited to speak before various community groups. Gratuitous personal payment (i.e., in the form of cash) for any such presentation is not appropriate.

The Master Gardener Program represents a University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service educational program. When making horticultural recommendations that include the use of chemicals (e.g., insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides), Florida Master Gardeners MUST FOLLOW approved Florida Cooperative Extension Service recommendations. One should avoid having association with commercial products, or giving implied University of Florida endorsements of any products or places of business to the exclusion of similar products or businesses not mentioned. Questions concerning any commercial horticulture enterprise (i.e., vegetable production, fruit crop production, landscape management, maintenance of golf/recreational/park or school grounds, condominiums, nursery operations, etc.) are to be referred to the local coordinating Extension Agent.

As a volunteer with the University of Florida and Extension Service, it is important to know that this organization functions without regard to race, sex, age, disability or national origin and does not tolerate:

Possession of alcohol or drugs in the workplace;

Abuse or theft of public or personal property;

Sexual harassment or misconduct;

Verbal abuse or failure to cooperate with other Master Gardeners, staff members and/or the public;

Possession or use of weapons or fireworks in the workplace;

Defamation of the organization or its members;

Making statements to news media, Government officials, or claiming in public meetings to represent the views of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service of the County Master Gardener Program without prior discussion with Extension Agent coordinating the Master Gardener Program;

Use of state and/or county equipment or vehicles without authorization.

Master Gardener Certification may become void when an individual ceases active participation in the program or in the case of dismissal resulting from violations described above. Illegal activities will be referred to law enforcement. Those individuals not continuing in the

*The Foundation for The Gator Nation*

*An Equal Opportunity Institution*
program should be aware that if they represent themselves as Florida Master Gardeners, they are violating their original commitment to the Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

I have read the above policies regarding the Florida Master Gardener Program and do here by agree to contribute 75 hours of service to the Master Gardener Program in return for the training provided by the Florida Cooperative Extension Service.

Signature of Applicant       Date

County Extension Agent       Date
Florida Master Gardener Application

Please type or print legibly.

Section I.

Name: Mr./Mrs./Ms. ____________________________________________

Nickname, if any: ____________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________________

Home Phone E-Mail Address FAX

Section II:

Have you applied for Master Gardener training before? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, when? _______________________________________________

where? _____________________________________________________

Please list any training and/or practical experience you have had in gardening, horticulture, farming, or related fields:

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

What types of volunteer work have you done in the past or are currently doing?

The Foundation for The Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution
How did you learn of the Florida Master Gardener Program?

Why do you want to become a Florida Master Gardener?

I wish to become a Florida Master Gardener and would like to be accepted into the training program beginning June 2, 2010. I understand that if accepted and I successfully complete the course of instruction, I agree to donate at least 75-hours of public service in the next 12 months through the Florida Master Gardener Program. I have also read, understood, and agreed to abide by the Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardeners.

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Interview Request Form

Prior to final selection for training, all Master Gardener candidates meet with a certified Master Gardener and/or the County Master Gardener Coordinator. This meeting gives you the opportunity to visit the Cooperative Extension Service Office (if you've not yet done so), and to meet and talk to a current Master Gardener and/or the County Master Gardener Coordinator.

These interviews take about 45 minutes and are scheduled for May 7, 10, 11, and 17. Interviews will be conducted from 9:00 a.m. until noon and 1:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. each day. Please indicate below the date and time of your choice. Every effort will be made to meet your request. Your interview date/time will be confirmed by telephone.

On arrival, please check in with the receptionist at the Extension Office.

The Foundation for The Gator Nation
An Equal Opportunity Institution
Master Gardener Interview Request

Name: ____________________________________________

Phone Number: ____________________ Preferred Date: _______________

Preferred Time: ________________________________

Please return this sheet with your application.

Sumter County Extension
Master Gardener Program
7620 SR 471 Ste 2
Bushnell, FL 33513-8734