

Surry Gardener

September 25, 2014

Joanna Radford, Horticulture Agent, NC Cooperative Extension—Surry Center

Extension Master Gardeners Make Our Region a Greener Place

Throughout the year, Extension Master Gardeners help to make our region a greener place to live by sharing research based horticultural knowledge with gardeners of all ages and ability levels. The Surry County Extension Master Gardener program is currently accepting applications for individuals to become volunteer, with training classes beginning after the first of the year.

Who Are Extension Master Gardeners?

Master Gardeners are members of the local community who enjoy learning, gardening and volunteering. Persons who become Master Gardeners receive intensive training from their local Cooperative Extension office. In return, they volunteer to help the organization meet a tremendous demand for sustainable gardening information and advice.

In the Piedmont region alone, over 400 Master Gardeners volunteer with the Cooperative Extension offices in Surry, Yadkin, Forsyth, Stokes and Wilkes counties to answer lawn and garden questions, teach gardening skills, and maintain gardens that demonstrate good plants for our region.

Helping Gardeners Grow Greener

By offering practical advice and research based information, Extension Master Gardeners help both novice and experienced gardeners enhance their landscapes and grow their own fruits and vegetables using methods that conserve water and require fewer chemicals. During 2014, the 15 volunteers who are part of Surry County Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener program shared sustainable gardening advice with over 500 volunteer hours through their educational classes and demonstrations. Extension Master Gardeners work with Extension agents to teach these classes to both young and old. Surry Master Gardeners are currently working with elementary schools where they give instruction on school gardens. They teach these eager future gardeners lessons about plants, bugs, and soil. They are also working with high school seniors on senior projects that focus on creating raised vegetable beds to help provide food to needy families in their communities.

Surry County Master Gardener Volunteers also practice what they preach, which is evident in the four demonstration gardens they maintain at the Mount Airy Fire Department as a part of the Firehouse Community Garden. At the site, Master Gardeners use raised beds to demonstrate various trellising used in gardening, utilize raised beds for maximum vegetable production, and to exhibit garden cover crops for the area.

Should You Become an Extension Master Gardener?

Anyone with an interest in both gardening and volunteer services can apply to become an Extension Master Gardener volunteer. Applicants should be comfortable working with a diverse range of people and willing to share their knowledge of both new and experience gardeners.

In addition, applicants should have the time and desire to be part of an intensive, science based training program and be able and willing to volunteer with Extension's outreach programs. Because Cooperative Extension's greatest demand for volunteers is during office hours (Monday—Friday, 8am-5pm), applicants should be available to volunteer and attend training during these times.

How You Can Become an Extension Master Gardener

The first step in becoming an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer is to complete the Master Gardener training course. Providing at least 40 hours of instruction, the course will prepare you to answer gardening questions and diagnose common problems related to cultivating lawns, fruits and vegetables, and landscape plants.

Most county Cooperative Extension Centers offer Master Gardener training once a year during the winter. The Surry County Extension Center is now accepting applicants to their Extension Master Gardener program. Training will begin in February, with classes meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00pm-4:30pm through March 12, 2015. Full details are posted online at <http://surry.ces.ncsu.edu>.

Learn More!

Visit www.ncstategardening.org to find out more about the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program in North Carolina. Contact your local Extension office to find out when application are being accepted or to get answers to your gardening questions. If you live in Surry County, call 401.8025. Application are found at <http://surry.ces.ncsu.edu>. If you live in another county you can visit <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/> to find your local office.



Picture Caption:

Extension Master Gardeners, Hugh Wilkins and Joy Barlow demonstrate straw bale and adaptive gardening at a local agriculture awareness event that hosted over 3000 participants.