

Who is a Master Gardener?
By
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(Updated by Rebecca Miller-Cripps)

If you've been reading the Saturday Union Democrat, you probably have read the articles about plants and insects and gardens and green thumbs. You've been shown how to use water effectively; you've been told why certain plants should or should not be cultivated in our area; and you may have even read about interesting bugs and fungi and why your tomatoes have blossom end rot.

But just who are the people telling you all this interesting stuff? Master Gardeners, that's who. And who are these master gardeners? Well, they may be your neighbor or a friend or someone you talked to last week at the local nursery. In fact, they most likely are very much like you.

Rather than "experts," they are simply people who like to see things grow well and who choose to apply sound, scientific research-based principles to their gardening. Master Gardeners are University of California-trained and certified volunteer educators, and the approximately 100 master gardeners in Tuolumne County and the 60 in Calaveras County are often contractors, teachers, homemakers, students, or people who retired from professions like those—again, chances are they are just like you.

The Master Gardener Program is administered locally, in each county in California, by the county office of UCCE (University of California Cooperative Extension) and is part of the public education arm of the University's Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The UC County Director or a UC Advisor administers the program.

Master Gardeners donate a minimum of 25 hours per year (50 the first year) manning demonstration gardens, working on the Annual Spring Garden Tour, helping with school gardens, and responding to inquiries.

Perhaps the greatest thing about becoming a Master Gardener is the wealth of research-based information the gardeners learn and apply to their own gardens.

So just how does someone become a master gardener? Alternating between Tuolumne and Calaveras counties, a UC training program is offered each year to interested individuals.

An Orientation has been scheduled for Thursday, October 19, time to be announced, at the Tuolumne County Senior Center located on Greenley Road in Sonora, CA. Anyone interested in becoming a Master Gardener should attend the Orientation to learn about the Master Gardener Program and the volunteer requirements. For more information and to register for the orientation, go to: http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardeners/ and click on "Becoming a Master Gardener." Or call the UCCE Tuolumne County office at 209-533-5695.

The actual training classes for new volunteer candidates begin Thursday, January 18, 2018, and continue weekly through April, 2018. Usual class time is from 3:00 pm to 7:30 pm each

Thursday. Classes will be held in Tuolumne County at the same location as the orientation. These classes will include over 50 hours of intensive training by University of California personnel and horticulture specialists in various fields. Topics include water management, soils, composting, native plants, fruit production, plant diseases, entomology, integrated pest management, understanding pesticides, and more.

A fee will be charged to cover the cost of all class materials, which includes several reference texts; more information will be available during the orientation. After successfully completing the training program, certified Master Gardener volunteers agree to fulfill annual volunteer service and continuing education requirements. If there is room in the class, professionals will be accepted, meaning no volunteer time is required. The professional rate is \$350.

For more information, contact Debbie Powell, the UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Coordinator for Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties by phone or email. Phone number is (209) 754-6473 and the email address is dlpowell@ucanr.edu.

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