

Master Gardener Program Newsletter

First attempt at better communication

I've been challenged to write something on an ongoing, regular basis to keep people in the loop and excited about upcoming events in the Master Gardener Program. I'm thinking if I get this out quarterly or at least twice a year, then I'm doing good. That's regular, right? I also challenge you to make every effort to make yourself aware of what's going on in the Texas Master Gardener Program. We have a wonderful State Association newsletter (sign up on our website to receive it via email), [website](#), [Facebook](#) page, directors from State Association meetings who return to their associations and share what's happening and I send out emails to you. Hopefully those emails are passed along to the volunteers. However, even with these tools, I often hear that people, agents and volunteers alike, don't know about events or opportunities. Please take a few minutes to utilize these tools and help make sure all in your program know what's going on too.

Online Master Gardener Training: We have developed online Master Gardener training modules that are being piloted this year. We've asked our pilot counties to explore using the modules in three different ways: The first use is in addition to your current, traditional training; the second use is as a supplement when a speaker is not available and the third use is for a flipped course, where the students will review the module then come to class prepared to learn more in depth information already familiar with the terminology and ready to implement practices. We plan to wrap up the pilot in the spring of 2017, then make updates and edits to the modules and be ready to implement beginning in 2018. The modules are not designed to be complete stand-alone training as a large portion of the training will still need to be face-to-face. Pricing for the modules has not yet been determined.

Online Reporting System: The Volunteer Management System (VMS) is available to all MG Programs. Currently there are 49 MG Programs using the system and there are over 5,000 users in the system. By the way, we have over 7,000 Master Gardener volunteers in Texas! Y'all are awesome!

Conferences: The Southern Region Master Gardener Conference is coming up next week, November 1-4 and TODAY is the last day to register. This is going to be such a neat conference! It will be intimate in that we will meet other Southerners from across the lower United States and will not be as massive as the International Master Gardener Conference. The benefit when you visit with other attendees, you will know that they are dealing with similar growing zones, major climatic issues, and enthusiasm for gardening as you, yet it will be wonderful to get different perspectives from beyond our borders. Tarrant County Master Gardener Association is our host and they have done an excellent job bringing together really fantastic speakers and

setting a fun schedule. Please join us in welcoming Master Gardeners from other states and if we show off a little bit of how awesome Texas is..., well then, so be it (wink)!

Registration for the 2017 Texas Master Gardener Conference Cruise is closed. Sorry to break it to you like that, but if you really want to get on the ship, we may still be able to help you! Check out the website at texasmgconference.com. If we can't get you on board, you will not miss out on everything! The Galveston County Master Gardener Association will host our annual banquet at the return of the cruise. Galveston County is putting together tours, vendors, and a wonderful luncheon where we will recognize our deserving award winners, specialists, and milestone volunteers. Watch for the registration information for that portion of the conference coming soon.

The 2018 Texas Master Gardener Conference will be in conjunction with our 40th Anniversary and the opening of The Gardens at Texas A&M University. This will be HUGE! I can't spill too much now because we have some surprises for you. Speaking of The Gardens, the wonderful county associations across Texas have surpassed our goal of \$100,000 for naming rights of the Earth-Kind™ Teaching Garden, to the tune of \$136,372. All I can say is WOW and a huge thank you!

Have I overwhelmed you enough? Well, I have one more point and then I'll be done. The last is the Annual Report. At the National MG Coordinator's Conference in September we discussed having a unified MG report that address the NIFA (National Institute of Food and Agriculture- a part of USDA) Strategic Goals. Well, there are several so we picked food security. I agreed to help the committee come up with questions that could be asked across the nation that would aid in collecting and providing information that met this goal. The purpose is to become more visible to NIFA/USDA and ultimately to have new funding opportunities from this source. For 2016 numbers in Texas, I will ask for the same information as always, however, I hope to have some information to you before January about what I will ask for in 2017. I expect one question will be if your MGs donate produce to a food bank or similar; and if so, how many pounds of produce does your program donate? I know there will be other questions and the example may be modified but that is the general direction we are going in at this very early point.

Well, that's all for now. Thanks so much for all you do and please let me know how I can help you!

Jayla