



Smith County Office 1517 W. Front St., Ste. #116 / Tyler, TX / 75702
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March 2, 2021

Dear Master Gardener Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in the Smith County Master Gardener program. *Please read this letter carefully, complete and sign both the enclosed Application and the Background Screening Consent Form and return to the above address by April 14, 2021.* We will review the applications and notify you regarding your status in the program no later than May 5, 2021. Please see the final paragraph of this letter for details.

The following information will help you better understand the functions and requirements of the Texas Master Gardener program. *The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to extend the ability of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service to provide educational programs to the public in the areas of horticulture and gardening through use of trained and certified volunteers.*

A Master Gardener is required to participate in a 12-week training period covering gardening and plant/horticultural science. You are expected to attend all sessions. Cost of the training is \$200.00 (cash or check only). Lectures will begin Thursday, June 3, 2021 and continue every Thursday through Thursday, August 5. At the end of the training, a take-home, open-book exam will be given.

Following the training and completed exam, interns must provide a minimum of seventy-two (72) specific hours of Master Gardener volunteer services in Smith County during the following 12 months. All interns are required: to give 2 hours (over a one-year period) helping the Smith County Extension office assisting phone, email, and walk-in gardening inquiries. Other required activities include 12 workdays in our demonstration gardens located in the Tyler Rose Garden, and participation on assigned project committees such as the Garden Tour, Bulb Sale, and Discovery Texas.

After training and initial intern volunteer service have been completed, participants become Certified Texas Master Gardeners for 1 year only, after which time Master Gardener certification is maintained through annual volunteer service (24 hours minimum) and continuing education (9 hours).

We are seeking persons who have experience, skills, or knowledge in home gardening, ornamental horticulture, vegetable gardening, etc., and will volunteer to provide educational information to the public by telephone, helpdesk, public speaking, personal contact, and group seminars or through writing articles, etc. Master Gardeners are supervised by the Extension Horticulturist who provides support to the volunteer Master Gardener program and assigns, reviews and assists the Master Gardener work.



Space in the 2021 class is limited. *Preference is given to residents of Smith County with horticultural knowledge, the will to educate, and time to volunteer.* The \$200.00 fee (due first day of class) covers the newly updated Master Gardener Handbook, admission to various training opportunities, reference materials, and other miscellaneous costs.

In its 27th consecutive year in Smith County, Master Gardeners are involved in many projects, including the following examples:

- Publication of the annual *East Texas Gardening Guide and Calendar*
- Jr. Master Gardener program
- Assisting horticultural research at Texas A&M - Overton
- Writing gardening tips for Tyler Morning Telegraph and the internet
- Bulbs to Blooms Fall Garden Conference & Bulb Sale
- Spring Home Garden Tour
- Creating and maintaining demonstration gardens (IDEA Garden, Heritage Rose Garden, Shade Garden, and Sunshine Garden)
- Creating and staffing exhibits at the East Texas State Fair and other community events
- Speaker's Bureau; First Tuesday in the Garden workshops
- Master Gardener Help desk at the A&M AgriLife Extension office, answering homeowner gardening questions
- Helping in the administration of the Master Gardener Association and its programs
- Testing of plants, new materials, techniques, etc.
- Maintaining the Smith County Master Gardener Facebook page

The Smith County Master Gardener Association meets monthly for educational programs, informal exchange of information and plants, program and project planning, and fellowship. And, Master Gardeners from across the State meet annually for more of the same. There are currently 153 certified and 534 trained Master Gardeners active in Smith County.

Along with the enclosed application, you must complete and return the mandatory Volunteer Background Check Consent Form. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Youth Protection Standards (YPS) - Qualifications of Volunteers program was implemented to provide a safe and positive environment for youth and adult volunteers. The YPS program involves national criminal background checks of all adult volunteers 18 years of age or older who are involved in teaching roles, which includes Master Gardeners. Volunteers who have been screened by another entity, such as their employer, school district or other youth organization, may indicate this on their enrollment form. Prior screenings with similar criteria to YPS are accepted by AgriLife Extension.



Thank you for your interest in this exciting volunteer program. If you have further questions regarding this program, please give me a call (903-590-2980).

Due to limited space, not all applicants will be accepted. Priority will be given to those from Smith County and those with gardening experience, a willingness to educate, and time to volunteer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "D. Greg Grant". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Greg Grant
County Extension Agent – Horticulture
Enclosures