

# Consider Joining the Master Gardener Program

by Claudia Steen

The gardening articles you enjoy each week are written by community volunteers who are certified as Master Gardeners by Washington State University. There are currently 30 Master Gardener Programs within the 39 Washington State Counties. In Yakima County we celebrated our **40<sup>th</sup> year of service** in 2020. In 1980, Dr. Roy Van Denburgh, WSU Extension emeritus, began training a few individuals in horticultural practices. Today under WSU Extension, we have grown to over 100 active volunteers. The purpose of the WSU Master Gardener Program is for WSU Extension Agents to educate volunteers so that they can provide and share science-based horticulture, gardening, and pest management information within their community.



From January to April, these dedicated individuals begin their course work meeting every Wednesday afternoon at the Red Barn at the Ahtanum Youth Park. A few classes are taught by WSU faculty and local individuals who are experts in their field. For Trainees these classes are supplemented by a WSU Canvas online course. Subject areas include botany, plant identification, soils, composting, insect identification, plant diseases, integrated pest management, lawns, vegetable gardening, sustainable gardening, plant propagation and much more. Yes, it sounds technical, but the purpose of the coursework is not to “know” all there is about gardening, but to be able to use resources to find information when needed. The primary goal of the Master Gardener Program is public gardening education. Many of our members are retired teachers who continue to get satisfaction from sharing their knowledge.

Another goal is community service, where we volunteer in Teams and Interns volunteer a minimum of 40 hours by spending time in a variety of the teams. These include: the diagnostic plant clinic at the WSU Extension, the Yakima Farmer’s Market, or the State Fair. Master Gardeners research and answer questions posed by the public when they either call, email or present in person.

Other volunteer teams include:

- working in our 3 gardens (the beautiful Demonstration Garden located at the Ahtanum Youth Park, the Heirloom Garden - strictly vegetables and seed saving and the West Valley Food Garden that donates produce to a local food bank);

- doing plant propagation and seedling nurturing over the winter months in our Greenhouse; helping at our annual plant sale the first week-end of May (which provides the necessary funding to support our program);
- hosting the Spring Symposium where each of the four Wednesday evenings in March a guest lecturer gives a 2-hour gardening presentation to the public;
- holding classes for the public on most Saturday mornings at both the Demonstration Garden and the Heirloom Garden given by Master Gardener in their area of expertise.
- upon request our Speaker's Bureau will talk on gardening topics to local groups;
- writing gardening articles for the Yakima Herald and Yakima Magazine;
- teaching gardening practices to our Youth in certain schools, outreach programs and at many local events; and helping to create community gardens when asked. We all work hard, but most of all we find the Master Gardener program fun and extremely rewarding as we make friends with fellow gardeners.

After completing these educational and service requirements, our new Interns are awarded their Master Gardener Certificate of Completion. Many of our Master Gardeners say, "it is the friendships you make along the way that are as important as completing the Program". The 'veteran' Master Gardeners return each year for 10 hours of continuing education and to contribute a minimum of 25 hours of community service in the team(s) of their choice.

If you feel you would like to join our "family of gardeners", we encourage you to apply to the WSU Master Gardener Program before the November 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. Contact the WSU Yakima County Extension at 2403 S. 18th St., Suite 100, Union Gap, WA 98903. Call 509-574-1604 or email [www.gardener@co.yakima.wa.us](mailto:www.gardener@co.yakima.wa.us) and ask for the application and information sheet. For more information visit our webpage: <http://tinyurl.com/yakimagarden>, where an application and information sheet are both available. It is always important to "Follow your Passion" and we are here to help you.