Want to be a Master Gardener?

Ohio State University Extension has a long tradition of providing education information and programs to farmers, but many individuals may not realize that the university also provides consumer horticultural information and programs to the homeowner.

The Master Gardener Volunteers is an example of one of these programs.

The Master Gardener program was created for individuals who want to learn more about yards and gardens and who are willing to share that knowledge with others.

The program provides intensive training in horticulture to interested individuals, who then volunteer their time to assist with educational programs and activities for Ohio residents through their county Ohio State University Extension office.

The Master Gardener program originated in Seattle, Washington in 1972. The Agriculture Extension agent for Washington State University in King County began to train and utilize the expertise of volunteers in order to more effectively reach the gardening public with research-based educational information.

The program became the Master Gardener Volunteers and was adopted by the other land grant universities across the country. The program began in Ohio’s urban counties during the late 1970s, but now exists in both rural and urban areas and can be found in 62 of Ohio’s 88 counties.

The program started in Hancock County in 1992. It has continued to grow and the local program currently has 50 members.

You may have seen the Hancock County Master Gardener Volunteers teaching classes at the library; answering questions at garden centers, home shows, and the county fair; participating in the Danger Zone programs during the Fourth of July celebration at the fairgrounds; and providing guidance and training at the community gardens.

You may have read their gardening articles in the Saturday editions of The Courier. They have responded to over 500 community horticultural questions during the past year.

Besides providing service to the community, the volunteers continue their learning experience by attending regular monthly meetings, participating in field trips, and interacting with other individuals who have a passion for gardening.

An individual who wants to become a Master Gardener Volunteer does not need to have a strong educational background in horticulture or years of experience — just a desire to learn.

You may want to consider becoming a Master Gardener if you have the following characteristics:

- Want to learn more about plants and gardening.
- Willing to participate in a practical and intensive horticulture training program.
- Enjoy sharing knowledge with others.
- Willing to serve your community as a volunteer educator.

A new Master Gardener class will be offered this winter in Findlay. Classes will meet at the Hancock County Agricultural Service Center every Wednesday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., from Feb. 6 to March 27.

After completing the training sessions, each participant will have received 50 hours of education on topics such as soils, fertilizers, botany, entomology, plant pathology, vegetable gardening, fruit production, annuals and perennials for the landscape, herbs, and other horticultural subjects.

The knowledge obtained from this advanced training will be used to complete the last step of becoming a Certified Master Gardener Volunteer — 50 hours of community service.

A $150 fee will be charged to cover the cost of instruction, Master Gardener manual, and handouts. Sessions will be taught by horticultural experts from Ohio State University Extension.

Because of the hands-on nature of many of the sessions, class size will be limited. Registrants will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Anyone who would like to become a part of this exciting program needs to obtain a registration packet by contacting the Ohio State University Hancock County Extension office at 419-422-3851 (lentz.38@osu.edu).

An enrollment meeting for the new Master Gardener class will be held at the Hancock County Extension Office at 4 p.m. Jan. 16.

The registration packet may be turned in at this meeting. For those who cannot attend the meeting, the packet needs to be delivered to the Hancock County Extension Office before Jan. 18.

Becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer is a great way to beat the wintertime blues.

It will be several years before the class is offered again in Findlay.

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Lentz can be heard with Van Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXO-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.