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## Becoming a Master Gardener

by Harriett Burt, Contra Costa Master Gardener Association President

### Loving to Garden and Serving the Community: a Perfect Match

#### SUMMARY

The Master Gardener program offers comprehensive training in the best home gardening practices, combined with an opportunity to do what you love in service to the community. Visit <http://ccmg.ucdavis.edu> to find out more.

**Q: I have talked with Master Gardeners at the Walnut Creek Farmer's Market and they helped me with some plant problems I was having. I am interested in becoming a Master Gardener. Can you tell me more about what they do and how to join?**

**A:** If you are a dedicated gardener – boy oh boy, are we looking for you! Have you reached a point in your life where you have more time to garden but find you have no space left in your yard? Do you believe in the benefits of community service but haven't found quite the right situation? The UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program could be just right for you!

The Master Gardener program offers comprehensive training in the best home gardening practices combined with an opportunity to do what you love in service to the community. In this time of growing interest in sustainable landscape practices including water conservation, integrated pest man-

agement and eating healthy, locally grown food, the Contra Costa Master Gardeners are helping home gardeners, school gardeners, and community gardeners get the most benefit and enjoyment from gardening.

#### **Training Program:**

Acceptance to the program includes enrollment in a four-month training program featuring weekly class sessions taught by outstanding instructors, mainly from UC Davis, who are expert in their fields. Newly-certified Master Gardeners emerge with increased knowledge and, most importantly, an understanding of how and where to find research-based information to share with the public. An unexpected and quite welcome benefit for each new Master Gardener is a group of new friends who share their interest, their enthusiasm and their dedication to the public good.

#### **Volunteer Service:**

Acceptance to the program also in-





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cludes a commitment to a minimum of 75 hours volunteering on local Master Gardener public education projects including a Help Desk which answers hundreds of questions from county gardeners each year. The questions cover a wide range of topics including identification of a pest or disease, advice on the best ground covers for a steep hillside, the best variety of tomatoes to grow in a particular part of the County, and the most drought-tolerant plants for the landscape.

Other volunteer opportunities include working with the ever-increasing number of schools which integrate science, environmental studies, and nutrition into the curriculum using a school garden. Or perhaps you want to help with a community garden, or answer ques-

tions and distribute information at a Farmer’s Market or at the John Muir House on Earth Day, or give a talk on pruning, water conservation or any number of other topics at a library.

**For More Information:**

To learn more about the program and how to become a Master Gardener, go to the Contra Costa Master Gardeners’ website <http://ccmg.ucdavis.edu> and visit the About Us and Join Us pages listed in the top navigation.

Also, check us out on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/CoCoMasterGardeners>,

and Shutterfly:

<http://www.shutterfly.com/pro/CCMG/Nature>.



**CONTRA COSTA MASTER GARDENERS**

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