

The Transplanted Gardener - Next episode - The Master Gardener

Zann Wilson, Pinal County Master Gardener

What exactly IS a Master Gardener?

Many think that being a masterful, experienced gardener equates to carrying the moniker of “Master Gardener.” Not so. Certification as a trained Master Gardener is a process taking a semester of horticultural training and a commitment to volunteering a required number of hours annually, plus gaining continuing education in one’s county. Here’s how it works in Pinal County, Arizona.

One must apply to enter the training program with the local Master Gardener organization within the county of your residence. Applicants here in SB and SBR must contact the Saddlebrooke Master Gardeners at sbmastergardeners.wordpress.com. Applicants may be interviewed to assure their future commitment to volunteering time back to the county program once trained. When the next scheduled Landscape and Garden Short Course is offered, applicants are expected to attend 12 three hour training sessions covering plant science, arboriculture, entomology, landscape design, soils study, fruit and vegetable production, propagation and plant disease/pest diagnosis. Though this sounds very scientific and challenging, most experienced and interested gardeners will absorb this information readily.

Master Gardening has its roots in the nationally recognized Cooperative Extension Service (CES). After Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Morrill Act of 1862 authorizing funding for land-grant colleges and universities in every state of the (then) union, Cooperative Extensions became county level arms between the university’s agricultural research and direct contact with farmers. Today, as historically, each county’s Agriculture and Natural Resources agent serves the educational needs of local farmers. That includes home horticulturists like you and me. (Think of yourself as a producer and grower.)

Interesting tidbit: Because nineteenth century conservative farmers resisted this new fangled approach to getting fresh ideas, eventually the 4-H youth program (Heart, Hands, Head and Health) was developed to bring new information into the family farm through the backdoor of the younger generation.

The Cooperative Extension Service has adapted to modern times in serving the community in other areas such as Home Economics, Nutrition Education, Children and Family Services, Water and Food Safety and 4-H Youth Development. You can learn more about these services at extension.arizona.edu/pinal.

Master Gardening came about in 1972 when CES Agent David Gibby, serving a highly populated area near Seattle, organized and trained some of his most accomplished gardeners to assist him in supplying information to the growing population of home horticulturists (gardeners). And the idea of training volunteers to answer questions and

provide education to gardeners throughout each county around the nation spread. Today every county in every state has a branch of Master Gardeners ready to advise home gardeners.

Should you want help with your garden problems here in SB and SBR, contact our hotline: fflanagan1@wbhsi.net or call 520-407-6459. A Saddlebrooke or Saddlebrooke Ranch Master Gardener will answer your questions or request a home visit to see plant issues directly. All Master Gardeners are teachers and advisors. Our goal is to help you GROW WELL.