

We Are Taking Applications for the 2023 Master Gardener Program!

By: Jackie Sledge

President of the Big Country Master Gardeners

Do you like plants?

Do you like to work on gardening projects?

Do you enjoy learning about plants and gardening?

Would you like to meet and work with other gardeners?

Would you like to learn more about gardening in the Big Country?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you should check out the Master Gardener Intern Training Program.

- What is a Master Gardener? The Texas Master Gardener Program is a volunteer program conducted by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service of the Texas A&M University System. Master Gardeners are members of the community who take an active interest in areas of gardening such as lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers, and vegetables. After completing horticulture-related training, they contribute time by working volunteer hours on projects and programs approved by the AgriLife Extension Service Office. Master Gardeners are enthusiastic, willing to learn, and want to help others.
- What kind of training is involved? If you are accepted into the Master Gardener Program, you are required to complete a 50-hour training course. These classes are taught by Texas A&M instructors, Extension Service specialists, agents, local experts, and certified Master Gardeners. The Intern Training covers topics such as plant growth and development, soil and soil fertility, vegetable and herb gardening, fruit and nut production, irrigation, EarthKind, turfgrass management, propagation, rainwater harvesting, plant pest problems, and landscape principles.
- Is there a volunteer commitment? Participants in the Master Gardener Intern Training Program volunteer at least 50 hours of service in projects approved by the Taylor County AgriLife Extension Office within one year following their training. The types of volunteer service include working in demonstration gardens, assisting with presentations to groups, helping with educational workshops, and working on plant sales. Master Gardeners are representatives of Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas A&M University System. Master Gardeners must follow the research-based recommendations of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and the title "Texas Master Gardener" can be used by volunteers only when participating in Extension-sponsored activities.
- How does an intern become certified? Participants become certified Master Gardeners after they have completed the training course and fulfilled their volunteer commitment.
- Who are the local Master Gardeners? The Taylor County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service sponsors the Big Country Master Gardener Association (BCMGA), and we have members from Taylor, Jones, Callahan, Nolan, Eastland, Runnels, Fisher, and Stephens counties. We are involved in the community by working on projects such as the demonstration gardens at the Extension Office and Modern Living Mall, pollinator beds at the Hope Garden at the First

Central Presbyterian Church, demonstration and pollinator beds at the historic Swenson House, pollinator gardens at the Abilene Zoo, and demonstration projects on Maple Street property. We present programs to groups and organizations in the Big Country and to Abilene and area students. We provide specialized training sessions for the community and educate the public about growing plants in the Big Country during these presentations as well as at the Master Gardener Spring and Fall Plant Sales. The Big Country Master Gardener Association provides an average of 7,000 to 8,000 hours of volunteer service in our community every year.

We need you. We are pleased to announce that registration is now open for the next Master Gardener Intern Training Program, and applications must be received in the Extension Office by February 1, 2023. Training classes will start on February 9, 2023 and will end on April 25, 2023. Information about the training and the application form are available on the Big Country Master Gardener Association Facebook page and on our website at www.bcmgtx.org. You can also contact the Taylor County Extension Office at 325-672-6048 for the application or to get additional information about Master Gardeners and the Intern Training Program.

Remember that BCMGA is always available to help with your gardening questions. Call our hotline at 325-672-6048 or email us at mgardeners@yahoo.com. We are always available to help.