

Become a Master Gardener!

Gaye Mara, Fairfax County Master Gardener

If you like gardening and want to get better at it, consider joining the Fairfax County Master Gardeners Association. Here's why:

1. You will learn a lot.

Whether you are an expert or a novice, with the thousands of species of plants that grow in our region, and the thousands of critters that associate with those plants in myriad ways, there is always more to know. Through its training and extensive resources, FCMGA puts at your fingertips the most current knowledge and methods, based on ongoing research at Virginia Tech.

2. You will meet and work with interesting, positive people.

The 200+ FCMGA members come from all walks of life. We range in age from under 40 to over 80. What we share is a love of gardening, and a desire to communicate what we know to others. In FCMGA I have met nursery owners and international agriculture experts. I have also met retirees, new mothers, school teachers and principals, computer engineers, lawyers, and consultants.

3. You will learn to promote the health of the environment and teach others to do the same.

The program teaches environmentally healthy practices for managing the land and what grows on it, while minimizing chemical use and energy and resource consumption. Our volunteer teaching, writing, and trouble-shooting activities convey that knowledge to the public.

4. You will use your skills and develop new ones.

Through FCMGA, Master Gardeners have opportunities for public speaking (Speakers Bureau); writing (in print and on the web site); one-to-one problem-solving (plant clinics and horticulture help line); laboratory work (diagnostic lab); teaching (the Ready-Set-Grow program in elementary schools and a new series of classes at Senior Centers); and leadership, planning, administration, and computer support for the Board and Committees.

The requirements are few:

- You must be a Fairfax County resident.
- Master Gardener certification requires 30 hours of training (3 hours each Wednesday from mid-January through March) and 24 hours of volunteer service annually for three years.
- Continuing certification requires 8 education hours and 24 volunteer hours annually.

To apply to the program, contact the Enrollment Coordinator:

- by phone at Merrifield Garden Center, (703) 968-3018 x 3500, or
- by e-mail to enrollment@fairfaxmastergardeners.com.

See you in class!

Photo: FCMGA volunteers answer gardeners' questions at the weekly plant clinic at the Kingstowne Farmers' Market, one of 16 clinics across the County in May through September.

