

Now is the time to become a Master Gardener

Do you value education and like to volunteer? Would you rather be outside in your garden than anywhere else? The University of Illinois Extension Office will offer the following Master Gardener Training Classes in 2021. Starting February 16, a hybrid program that will accommodate COVID policies will be offered. This program is limited to a small number of students and will include hands-on activities once a week. The hybrid training will also include self-study at home and in-person class options at the U of I Extension office in Mattoon following CDC guidelines and social distancing. An online option where students take all classes remotely in a self-paced format will be offered starting June 14. A significant internet connection that can support live video is highly recommended for either option. We are developing options for those with internet and technology limitations.

Master Gardeners are volunteers who have a love of gardening and a passion to share it with others, but despite the title, don't claim to know everything about gardening. The program focuses on learning for the love of learning. This stress-free approach, opportunity to meet fellow gardeners and share knowledge with the community is exactly what makes the Master Gardener program so popular.

During Master Gardener training, attendees learn about gardening from University of Illinois educators and other Horticulture specialists in a way that is both interesting and practical to the home gardener. The classes are geared for all levels- from beginners to more experienced gardeners. Each session covers a different garden related topic such as Small and Large Fruits, Plant Diseases, Insects, Annual and Perennials, Vegetables, Trees, Shrubs etc. The class price is based on class choice and a commitment to volunteer 60 hours within 2 years. Partial financial assistance is available for need-based applicants. An extensive manual developed by University of Illinois educators for gardeners in Illinois is included in the class price.

One of the most rewarding parts about being a Master Gardeners comes from the friendships made with fellow gardeners and making a difference in your community. Master Gardeners volunteer at a variety of different community garden projects. They grow vegetables for the local food pantry, work with children and adults. They plant and care for the Idea Garden at Sarah Bush Lincoln Hospital, hold a Spring into Gardening Conference each March, offer educational garden themed workshops, speaker's bureau, annual plant sale in May and Garden Walks. They also research and answer questions from the public through the Extension office Horticulture Hotline. Clearly no matter where your talents lie there is something for everyone!

For more information please contact Jenny Lee in the Coles County Extension Office at 217-345-7034 or visit our website at <https://extension.illinois.edu/ccdms/horticulture>.