

Master Gardener Classes Begin in September

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN
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From time to time, I write about the activities of the Southwest Indiana Master Gardener Association (also known as SWIMGA), who are without a doubt some of the most interesting, dynamic, and fun people I know. The Master Gardeners do a tremendous amount of horticultural education around the tri-state, reaching people of all ages.

Master Gardeners can be found in numerous area schools, teaching students about how plants grow, the importance of trees, and how to attract and protect butterflies and honeybees. They teach and demonstrate good gardening practices for adults at garden clubs and civic groups. Master Gardeners serve as horticultural docents at Mesker Park Zoo's Amazonia exhibit, and have helped several community gardens get started.

The Master Gardeners are responsible for over 20 demonstration display gardens in the four counties that make up our part of southwestern Indiana. You may have visited some of them over the years: the gardens at Newburgh pool and Newburgh dam; the historic garden at Reitz Home; and the Mt. Vernon rain garden. We maintain gardens at Mesker Zoo, Wesselman Woods, and The Hartman Arboretum. Our brightest gem is our own Master Gardener Display Garden, located on the north side of the old Evansville State Hospital grounds next to the Eykamp Boy Scout Center. This garden covers nearly two acres and contains over a dozen smaller themed gardens, including a vegetable garden that generates over ten thousand pounds of vegetables for the Tri State Food Bank each year.

SWIMGA also hosts a garden walk and a garden conference in alternating years. This year, on October 15, we will be hosting the Ohio Valley Garden Conference, which is open to everyone. It will be held at the Tropicana Convention Center in Evansville, and features Peter Hatch, author and retired director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants in Monticello, as keynote speaker. I'll be providing information in the next couple of weeks about how to order tickets.

If this sounds like a group that you'd want to be part of, you're in luck! I will be teaching two Master Gardener volunteer training classes this fall, starting September 1st and 2nd. Classes will be held Thursday evenings and Friday mornings at Ivy Tech Community College, on Evansville's First Avenue.

Over the fifteen weeks that the class will run, you will learn about basic plant and soil science, pest diagnosis and control, and plant nutrition. We will also cover how to grow and maintain vegetable and flower gardens, fruit plantings, lawns, and woody plants.

Once you have completed the semester and passed the final exam, you will be invited to join SWIMGA and partake of our continuing education, as well as sharing your knowledge with others in our community.

Cost of the Master Gardener volunteer class is \$125 per person. A limited number of scholarships are available for people who live or work with low-income neighborhoods.

For more information on the Master Gardener classes, or to get a registration packet, please contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 867-4935.