

## Master Gardener Classes Start Soon

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

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The fall Master Gardener volunteer training classes are filling up, but we still have room! I thought I'd take a moment to describe some of what you will learn if you sign up.

My philosophy on the training is to have you understand how things work in the garden, and why we recommend what we do. So, we start off with basic plant science: parts of the plant, how they work, and how the environment affects plants. We then move on to soil science, so that members fully comprehend why we add organic matter to soil, and why proper irrigation techniques are so important. We also include an examination of plant nutrition and fertilization, as well as how to deal with yard waste and create compost.

The next set of classes will teach students how to identify plant pests, including insects, weeds, and diseases. Once we know what pests are, we then cover the broad categories that make up pest control, concentrating mostly on non-chemical methods.

At this point, we move into the "meat" of the course, and learn about specific gardening categories. We start with home fruit production, and cover tree fruit and berry crops. Next is vegetable gardening; and regardless of how many years you've been growing tomatoes, you are going to learn something new in this class! Both classes will cover how to select what to grow; how to plant and care for the crop; and some of the major pests of that crop.

Next, we move into the landscape. We start off with woody ornamentals (trees and shrubs). I will illustrate the proper way to plant, prune, and maintain woody landscape plants. We will then cover the major problems we see in trees and shrubs; trust me, you will be amazed at what the number one killer of trees is!

We will then cover lawn care. While some gardeners dislike acres of sterile green grass, lawns do play an important function in the American landscape. Further, you will learn how a well-maintained lawn can actually reduce your reliance on weed killers and other pesticides.

Finally, we will study how to landscape with flowering plants. Planting, propagating, and caring for annuals and perennials is only part of this class. You will also learn how to

design an attractive and functional flower garden, and how to attract pollinators, including bees and butterflies.

You may be wondering how you can possibly remember all of this knowledge. Fear not! Because everyone who signs up will receive a 600-page manual, full of colorful illustrations, in depth explanations of the topics, and sample questions you may be asked by other gardeners (or see on the final exam).

If you would like to be part of one of the greatest gardening organizations in America...if you would like to be able to share your gardening knowledge with others in our community...then the Master Gardener volunteer training class is for you! You can obtain a registration packet from my website: <http://tinyurl.com/2017MGclass>; or you can contact my office at (812) 435-5287 for a hard copy.