

**Master Gardeners Stay Busy All Year Long**  
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Sometimes when I am out and about I am often asked, “What is a master gardener?” To which I tell a little about how the program requires over 60 hours of classroom instruction in horticultural science and techniques. After which 50 hours of volunteering over the next two years is required to complete the internship program. There are also continuing education requirements and additional volunteer hours required during the following years.

Other questions asked of me about the program included, “What can I do to volunteer?” The master gardeners have been busy this summer getting organized, maintaining perennial beds at The Journey Museum, teaching horticulture classes, and answering questions in the extension office. They have been a great help enabling me to work on other projects and still having the horticulture calls taken care of. Other areas master gardeners can work in include getting involved with a school gardening project, a community landscaping project, answering horticultural questions, assisting an elderly person plant his/her flowerbeds, writing articles for local newspapers, and holding plant clinics, only to name a few of the possibilities. All of these activities can be very rewarding and appreciated by someone or by an organization.

“What advantages does this program offer?” People that volunteer in their community find a great deal of community spirit and pride. Watching flowers grow at a local elementary school can be very rewarding if you had an instrumental part in the design and implementation of the bed. In addition to the pride and spirit that is generated, there are several award programs available for smaller communities to be involved in. Wouldn't it be neat to be a part of a community project that has won an award?

Master gardeners are educated in many topics including; botany, plant pathology, entomology, soil science, plant nutrition, fruits, vegetables, indoor plants, perennials, bulbs, and pesticide safety, just to name a few. Basically, master gardeners become experts in the field of horticulture. This enables them to assist in many areas and help out at many events. Reference materials are provided so that new master gardeners are prepared for any horticultural situation.

The program costs \$160 for an individual and \$250 for two individuals sharing a manual. Participants who complete the training are asked to contribute 50 hours of volunteer service over the two years following their completion. Only those participants who complete the course and the volunteer obligation are considered official Master Gardeners. Individuals may pay \$500 and complete the course. In doing so, they are not required to complete the volunteer obligation, but they do not receive the title.

Do you have a desire to volunteer and a willingness to learn horticulture? If so, the master gardener program may be what you have been looking for. But, where do you go from here?

South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service offers Master Gardener training at several locations each year. In 2011 it will be held in Spearfish, Pierre, Mitchell, Watertown, and Yankton. The dates range from March 29 – May 24 in Spearfish to June 1 – July 27 in Pierre. Other sites have different dates.

If interested you can call your local Extension office or call me at the Pennington Extension Office at 605-394-2188 or email me at [ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu). Additional information is posted on the Pennington County Extension website at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html>.