

RELEVANCE

With a continuously growing U.S. population and more urban development, many people have an increasing interest in horticulture and gardening to connect with nature. There is also a high demand for information that is accurate and readily available to the general public. Many homeowners come to the Titus County Extension Office seeking advice and information on topics such as insect and weed identification and control, fertilization and herbicide selections, and other basic lawn management topics.

RESPONSE

The Texas Master Gardener Program is a volunteer development program offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and is designed to increase the availability of horticultural information and improve the quality of life through horticultural projects. The Cypress Basin Master Gardener Committee meets monthly to organize and host educational programs that benefit the community, Titus County and surrounding areas. Cypress Basin Master Gardeners reach a vast audience, provide tremendous outreach and are very visible within the community. The group currently has 67 active members who make a positive impact on our community.

- **Master Gardener Training Class-(5 participants, January-April)**
 Training classes consist of 50 hours of classroom instruction to equip motivated individuals on horticulture and gardening topics and information so they may serve as highly trained and professional volunteers who can assist with education and outreach efforts. These trainees are then required to volunteer 50 hours of service to become a certified Master Gardener.
- **Monthly Master Gardener Meetings-** These monthly meetings are open to the public and contain an educational program covering various horticultural topics.
- **Master Gardener "Workdays"-** Cypress Basin Master Gardeners host "workdays" each Wednesday and/or Saturday of the week for members, interns and guests to receive experiential learning opportunities. The Cypress Basin Master Gardeners believe in learning by doing and exemplify this throughout the year with many hands-on experiences such as plant propagation, green house management, etc. available to a wide variety of people.
- **One-on-one consultations-** Cypress Basin Master Gardeners assist the public by answering general horticulture and gardening questions, often during weekly workdays where Master Gardeners are found at the Titus County Extension Office. County Extension Agent also makes home visits and assists homeowners with questions such as turfgrass management, weed and insect identification, fertilizer and herbicide recommendations.
- **Tree Seeding Giveaway-(1,000+ seedlings given away, February)**
 Collaboration between Titus County Extension Office, Cypress Basin Master Gardeners and the Texas A&M Forest Service to give away tree seedlings to the public free of charge.

Horticulture

The Cypress Basin Master Gardeners and the Titus County Horticulture Committee strive to bring quality outreach and educational programs to the community that cover a vast array of horticulture within Titus County.

5,670
 volunteer
 hours



67
 Master Gardeners
 Volunteers



RESPONSE

- **Spring Plant Sale and Garden Show-** This is a widely known event throughout the community and surrounding areas. The Plant Sale is held at the Titus County Extension Office in the Greenhouse.
- **Demonstration Gardens-** Master Gardeners maintain numerous demonstration and teaching gardens including Earth-Kind Landscaping, a pollinator and butterfly garden, Texas Superstar beds, Texas Native Plants, vegetables, fruits and herbs. The demonstration gardens are listed as an attraction for garden and nature enthusiast with the Mount Pleasant Chamber of Commerce. The Extension Office enjoys the many tourists and visitors and utilizes the gardens for hands-on learning opportunities.
- **Summer Horticulture Series-(66 Participants, May-August)** A monthly series of Horticulture related educational programming.
- **Feral Hog Control for Homeowners-(28 Participants, November)** A Feral Hog Control Program that was geared toward homeowners both urban and rural in Titus County.
- **Arkansas Master Gardener Tour-(45 Participants, October)** Master Gardeners from Arkansas toured the Titus County Extension Office. There were 12 group rotations that provided the tour group information on each demonstration garden at the Extension Office.

Evaluation Strategy

Retrospective post evaluations were utilized to measure knowledge gained and adoptions of best practices.

RESULTS

Viticulture-- 10 Participants, 10 Evals. (100% response rate)

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
Pests of Grapes	.87	2.6	67%
Grape Varieties Suitable for NETX	.93	2.5	55%
Risks of growing Grapes	1.2	2.5	36%
Integrated Pest Management	1.1	2.3	35%

Earth Kind Landscaping-- 18 Participants, 15 Evals. (83% response rate)

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
Earth-Kind Soil Management	2.3	3.7	19%
Role of Mulches in Soil Tilth	2.4	3.7	18%
General Soil	2.3	3.4	17%
Role of Mulch on Soil fertility	2.7	3.7	13%

Rainwater Harvesting-- 12 Participants, 12 Evals. (100% response rate)

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
Methods of building a rainwater harvesting system	1.6	3.2	33%
History of collecting rainwater	1.4	2.7	27%
Benefits and Uses of collecting rainwater	2.25	3	11%

Fall Gardening-- 26 Participants, 24 Evals. (92% response rate)

	<i>Percent Change</i>	<i>Likert Score</i>	<i>Total Economic Impact</i>
Importance of Record Keeping	43%	100%	\$11,225
Weed Control	29%		
Planting and Site Selection	25%		

Feral Hog Control for Homeowners-- 28 Participants, 16 Evals. (57% response rate)

	<i>Percent Change</i>	<i>Likert Score</i>	<i>Total Economic losses due to wild pigs</i>
Knowledge of trap/bait techniques	64.3%	100%	\$1,450
Knowledge of legal control options	60.5%		
Knowledge of wild pig biology	60.5%		

Summary & Future Programming

The Cypress Basin Master Gardeners and the Titus County Horticulture Committee look forward to growing the Master Gardener Training Class and providing more educational opportunities for individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and resources that are available to them. We also look forward to participating in variety trials for the demonstration gardens located at the Titus County Extension Office.

For More Information:

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Cypress Basin Master Gardener Association

The first thing I want to do, on behalf of our group, is to thank you for your support. Few master gardener groups have the facilities you provide for our meetings and certainly not the area we have for our gardens and other projects. We are aware of the value of what you provide us and we thank you.

The local master gardener group started in approximately 1998. Our goal is to educate and serve the community. Our members include people from Franklin, Camp, Morris, and Titus counties.

Classes are offered beginning in January and include 50 hours of education and 50 hours of approved volunteer work to certify as a Master Gardener. Each year thereafter, a member must volunteer 25 hours and earn 6 CEU's to remain a member in good standing.

Currently, we have 51 members and 18 interns working toward certification.

Last year our local Master Gardener group contributed **5904 volunteer hours** to the extension office beds and other projects.

These are the named areas that we maintain at the extension office:

1. Nature trail with picnic area
2. Azalea Trail
3. Beds include each of the following:
 - a. Drift roses
 - b. Perennials
 - c. Super Stars
 - d. Grapes

- e. Blackberry
- f. Blueberry
- g. Vegetables
- h. Butterfly (a Monarch Way Station)
- i. Native plants
- j. Bulbs
- k. Herbs
- l. Front of building

We have an annual sale which provides funds for all of the above as well as a scholarship for NTCC students who major in an agricultural field. Proceeds from the sale a few years ago allowed us to transform the hoop house, which was donated to us by the city of Mt. Pleasant, into a functioning greenhouse. We also built two more storage areas and a covered area behind ^{the extension} ~~this~~ building that has multiple uses. This spring, a smaller hoop house was built behind the greenhouse for plants that don't require the warmth of the greenhouse. Proceeds from this year's sale will cover all the projects mentioned today as well as to up-date and standardize the water supply to the various beds.

We contribute to the work-study program at NTCC and donate to the "store" NTCC has for the students who need something for lunch and a place to eat it, as well as providing personal items when needed. Most of the students at NTCC work, many of them full time, in order to go to school and it is an honor for us to contribute to their success.

At Christmas we donate sleep items for women and underwear and socks for children to the Safe-T shelter, blankets and soft toys to first responders in Franklin, Camp, and Titus Counties to give to those they interact with who are in crisis. We also contribute to Toys for Tots.

2. Last fall we hosted a master gardener group from Arkansas who was passing through Mt. Pleasant on their way to Dallas/Fort Worth. They toured our gardens, we provided lunch for them, and put them back on the bus with a goodie-bag of handmade items including soap, hand moisturizer, and lip balm.

1. *a few years ago we participated in the making and installation of the agri-life sign in front of the building*
We also hosted a group of local Cub Scouts who toured the gardens,

3. and they particularly liked the nature trail.

We host a tree give-away every February in conjunction with the Forestry Service. This year we were out of 1500 trees in one hour.

We coordinate with our agents to help with various programs/events which includes a "summer learning series" ~~to~~ ^{for} the public. We help with 4-H contests and other projects when the agents feel they could benefit from our participation.

For the 3 years Pre-Covid, we hosted area 4th graders for a day of science activities that met some of the curriculum requirements given by Texas Education Association. We called it "Hallo-Green." Harts Bluff, Chapel Hill, and Mt. Pleasant 4th graders were included in the events. Pittsburg and Mt. Vernon were invited but did not choose to participate. Feed-back from the participating schools was all positive. The 300 kids each day loved it and so did we. Hopefully, we will be able to resume this event in the fall.

As stated at the beginning, our primary purpose is to educate and serve. However, we are also friends who enjoy working together. Again, thank you for your support that enables us to do what we do.