

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

In 1972, the Extension Farm Advisor in Snohomish County, Washington, could no longer handle the calls from the growing number of “urban” farmers in his area. A core group of interested gardeners were trained by the local land grant university cooperative extension office to meet the need. This was the beginning of the Master Gardener Program. Arkansas adopted the program in 1988 with four counties participating. Over half of the 75 counties in Arkansas now have Master Gardener programs. Today Master Gardeners exist in every state in the US and six Canadian provinces.

In April 1991, thirteen (13) people completed the first Master Gardener Training Course offered by the Washington County Extension Service under the direction of Extension Agent, Merle Gross. The first Master Gardener graduates included: Audry Baltrush, Jack Firmin, Richard Haqll, Harold Johnson, Pauline Keegan, Sue Madison, Gregory McDowell, Jim Miller, Jr., Sherry Morrison, David Richardson, Nancy Seiff, Mary Thomas, and Richard Walters. Their first volunteer projects included: planting ornamentals around the Old Courthouse in Fayetteville, landscaping the Richardson Center’s homes in Springdale, production of several videotapes on gardening, and presenting a mini-course for the public. The following year (1992) the Master Gardener program added twenty-seven (27) new graduates.....and the rest is history.

IMPORTANT EVENTS:

1991

- The Washington County Master Gardener program was established and the *Ask A Master* telephone line was open for business.

1992

- A weekly newspaper column called *Ask A Master* was started in Washington County by Pauline Keegan.
- A “Plant the Future” grant was received from the Arkansas Reforestation Program to enable Master Gardeners to plant a tree at every Washington County public school, produce a video of the project, and an educational pamphlet, “Planting Trees in Northwest Arkansas.”

1995

- Washington County “Tree Care and Awareness Project” received the Outstanding Master Gardener Project award at the first annual Statewide Master Gardener Conference held in Eureka Springs.

1996

- A new Extension Service building was dedicated. The first Extension Office was housed in an annex to the Old Courthouse in Fayetteville, but moved to its current location at 2536 N. McConnell Road when the building was completed in late 1995.

1997

- Washington County hosted the third annual Statewide Master Gardener Conference in Fayetteville.

1999

- The Compost Demonstration Site had a grand opening. The compost site was built in part from state funds distributed through a grant from the Four County Solid Waste District.

2000

- Joyce Mendenhall is named State Master Gardener of the Year.

2001

- Extension agent, Merle Gross, retired.

2004

- John Bushkuhl was second runner-up for the State Master Gardener of the Year.
- The Headquarters House garden was the runner-up for State Project of the Year.
- Berni Kurz accepted the position of County Agent and leader of the WCMG program.

2005

- A Volunteer Workbook was created and distributed to all Washington County Master Gardeners.
- The “County 76” (advisory group) was initiated in the state.

2006

- Master Gardeners adopted the Sensory Garden within the Botanical Gardens.
- The Archives Committee was initiated.
- The Membership Committee was initiated.

2007

- Master Gardeners adopted a Mentoring Program.
- *Garden Thyme* won state Newsletter of the Year.

2008

- Washington County Master Gardeners hosted the state conference in Springdale. The keynote speaker was Roger Swain, former host of the TV program *Victory Garden*.
- The Sensory Garden and water feature were dedicated at the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks. The water feature, sculpted by Hank Kaminsky, was dedicated in honor of the late MG, Martha Barton.
- The Junior Master Gardener Program was initiated.
- The Arkansas Air Museum was adopted as a new Sanctioned Project.
- Gail Pianalto was named State Master Gardener of the Year.
- The *Sensory Garden* at the Botanical Gardens of the Ozarks won the state Project of the Year.
- The “Yes I Can” award was initiated to recognize a MG with a “can do” attitude.

2009

- WCMG received the Arkansas Heritage Grant for \$3500 for creating the Junior Master Gardener *Take a Walk on the Wildside* garden and Heritage Day Program.
- WCMGs received the Arkansas Recreation and Parks Dept. *Organization of the Year* Award.
- Two new projects were adopted: Fayetteville City Hospital Gardens and the West Fork Heritage Gardens.
- WCMG volunteer hours record – 26,434.5 hours.
- MGs take responsibility for the Horticultural Building during the Washington County Fair.

2010

- Extension Agent, Berni Kurz, establishes a WCMG blog site to post statewide gardening information.
- An endowment fund was established to support scholarships and other MG horticultural interests.