

Illinois Master Gardener IMAGINE

INFORMATION ♦ NEWS ♦ EDUCATION



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COORDINATORS' COMMENTS

Thanks to all volunteers for your outstanding service to your communities in 2011. We faced many challenges this year but the volunteer work you have done so faithfully has been the central theme to keep us moving forward. We have been and will be welcoming new staff to our counties and programs. With the hiring of these staff and with some staff assuming new roles, I felt it was time to re-evaluate our policies and procedures so that they are implemented uniformly across the state. Very soon your county Master Gardener Coordinator will ask you to fill out paperwork for a background screening. Some of you may already have been asked to do this. Please note that the current volunteer screening protocol has been in place for about 5-6 years. This includes screening all volunteers- not only those who work with youth. Before the reorganization, there was resistance among certain staff to screening all volunteers. Some units screened only those who work with youth, while others screened all incoming and active volunteers. I will admit that I strongly urged units to screen all of their volunteers but did not insist strongly enough that everyone comply. For the past several months, Administration, 4-H leadership, Human Resources, Legal Counsel and I have put considerable time into reviewing our screening and risk management protocols. The Master Gardener state advisory committee has been kept informed of these issues and has offered good input into the procedures and their implementation. It was the decision of all these groups that we must enforce our screening policy uniformly for ALL Extension volunteers. On a side note, Michael Hogan, U of I president has recently charged the staff to review our procedures for working with youth and vulnerable populations. A committee has been formed, including some Extension staff, to accomplish this and to be sure that we are adequately protecting our students, volunteers, staff and the public.

The reason behind the screening is three-fold: to protect the vulnerable populations we work with, to protect our volunteers and to protect the image and reputation of the University of Illinois and Extension. Vulnerable populations include not only youth but the disabled and the elderly. This means projects such as horticulture therapy at nursing homes, work with youth and adults at detention centers and prisons, programs with the blind, programs with Easter seals and on and on.... We have many, many MGs who work with vulnerable populations! Even if you do not specifically volunteer right now with a project that involves a vulnerable population- you will most likely come in contact with some of these clients over the course of your MG career. Secondly, we want to protect our volunteers and minimize your risk. In recent years as we have screened more and more MG volunteers and potential trainees, we have found an increase in the number of volunteers with some type of criminal history. You have all done two parts of the screening procedure- the application and the interview. These help us insure that we are selecting volunteers for our program who will fit with the mission and goals of our organization and who will have successful volunteer experiences with Extension. The other parts of the screening involve a background check with Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois Police Conviction Check and a check of the Illinois Sex Offender website. We require that the screening be repeated every 5 years except for the Sex Offender website which is checked annually. If we rigidly enforce our screening procedures and the public knows we are diligent, this will serve as a deterrent to potential trainees with criminal histories. A few years back, when 4-H implemented the policy to screen every volunteer, they also had to go back and rescreen all of their current volunteers- so this has been done for other Extension programs. This screening procedure does not mean that we lack trust in our volunteers. If we did not think that you as individuals or the work that you are doing was important we wouldn't bother with the screening.

For those of you who are anxious about what will be done with this information, please be assured that the information obtained in the background check will be kept in an individual file for each volunteer. Those files will be kept in a locked cabinet- with limited staff access as designated by the County Director. The staff who do have access to the files must sign an agreement of confidentiality as part of their employment. Volunteers will never have access to the files of other volunteers. You will only have access to what you complete and provide for the process. Extension will not share any of the materials from the volunteer's file with any other individual, agency, or organization. Files are kept for three years after a volunteer leaves the program and then they will be shredded. Because we do not use social security numbers in our screenings, the risk of identity theft is practically nil.

So please don't "shoot the messenger" when your local coordinator asks you to complete the needed paperwork. We value your contributions very much and ask for your cooperation with this policy.

Monica David, Illinois Master Gardener Coordinator

HERB DAY 2011

Herb Day 2012 has been scheduled for Saturday, January 21, from 8:00 am (when registration begins and the retail area opens) through 4:30 pm, at the Holiday Inn Hotel and Conference Center, 1001 Killarney St., Urbana, IL. (217) 328-7900. Hotel rooms are reserved for Herb Day attendees at the special Herb Day rate (\$70, single or double) until January 7. After that date, this rate will only be in effect if rooms at the hotel remain available.

The schedule includes:

Jason Powell, from Petals from the Past, Jemison, Alabama. Jason became one of the “Rose Rustlers” while in grad school in Texas and carried a love for old roses back with him to his home in Alabama. In addition to a wonderful line of old roses, Jason and his family now run an eclectic nursery, garden center, fruit farm, and jam and jelly making business. In honor of the upcoming Herb of the Year, Jason will tell you about a wonderful selection of Tough Old Garden Roses. He will also give a second talk about Herbs at Petals from the Past.

Linda Franzo, from Passionate Platter, in Slidel, Louisiana, will take us away from the Midwestern winter on a culinary adventure Under the Tuscan Sun. Linda is a native New Yorker transplanted to the New Orleans area.

Ann McCormick, the Herb ‘n Cowgirl, Fort Worth, Texas, is heading our way from the Lone Star State to give us her take on Seasoning the Melting Pot, a look at how all the diverse immigrants to the US have influenced its cuisine. Ann is the author of 10 Must-Have Herbs for Cooks.

There will be a retail area, selling a wide variety of herb, spice, and gardening products. Attendees may register through January 13, as long as space remains available. Registrations will be allotted on a first come, first served basis. On-site registration will only be available if all 270 seats are not filled by pre-registration. On-site registration does not guarantee lunch. Cost of registration, is only \$60 per person. This includes seating in the lectures, coffee, and tea during morning registration, an herbal theme lunch buffet (including vegetarian options), and access to the retail area. A vegan plate is available, but only if specified on the registration form. Reservations must be received by January 13, 2012, to guarantee lunch. Those interested in attending should mail checks, payable to the University of Illinois, to: Herb Day 2012, Attn: Linda Harvey, 1005 Plant Sciences Lab, 1201 S. Dornier Drive, Urbana, Illinois 61801. For more information, call (217) 244-1693, or e-mail lharvey@illinois.edu.

NEW YEAR CHECKLIST FOR ILLINOIS MASTER GARDENERS

- Sign my annual volunteer agreement
- Report my volunteer/continuing education hours on the online system
- Complete my paperwork for the volunteer screening procedure
- Consider an application for a Master Gardener mini-grant (due Jan 31)
- Meet and help the new trainees- how about being a mentor for a new intern in your program?
- Check the MG website for updates on educational events and policies
- Take some classes towards the new advanced training certifications

VOLUNTEER TIME

TRACKING SYSTEM

A gentle reminder that your volunteer and continuing education hours are due for 2011. These should be reported through the volunteer reporting online system. If your county has not notified you that the database is ready for your use- they should be contacting you soon. Keep track of those 2011 hours as we still need them to be reported. Active Master Gardeners are required to do 30 volunteer and 10 continuing education hours each year. Your contribution may seem small but we need to document EVERYONES hours so we can show the impact of our work to county, state and national funders. It is more important than ever that we demonstrate our programs impact and relevance. Our reported hours have increased significantly each year since we began reporting in 2000. Last year we had over 187,344 volunteer hours reported at a value of \$4.16 million. The goal for 2011 is for over 190,000 volunteer hours !

NEW MOBILE VOLUNTEER TIME TRACKING APP

Are you always on the go and have a hard time remembering to enter your volunteer hours into the tracking system on the computer? Well the Extension Web Development Team has designed a new application for your mobile phone which makes reporting a breeze. You can report your hours directly via your smartphone. Anyone accessing the volunteer reporting system with a smartphone will automatically see the mobile version. The existing URL <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/volunteer> has not changed and should be used for entering hours via your computer or your smart phone.

MASTER GARDENER PROJECT MINI-GRANTS

The Master Gardener state advisory committee is offering the opportunity for counties/units to apply for mini-grants through the state office. The mini-grants program will be supported by the silent auction held each year at the annual state conference. The auction raises about \$4000 per year through your generous support and it is fitting that the money raised go back to the counties to support your projects. The mini-grants were designed to supply start-up or continuation funds for your local endeavors. Existing projects or new projects will both be considered for grant funds. Maximum grant is \$1200 but most all grants will be for smaller amounts of money. Grants will be awarded annually. A maximum of 1 grant per county per year. The state office will reimburse unit offices for expenses up to the amount of the mini-grant.

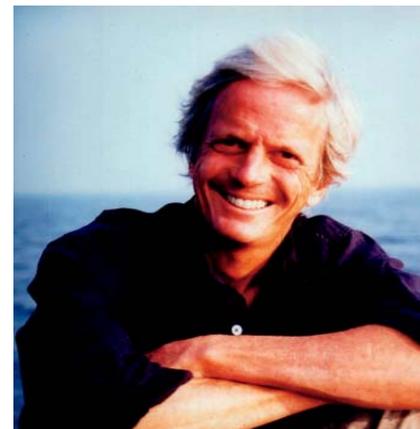
The grant funds are to be used for horticulture programs which meet the goals of the Master Gardener program and should be based on one of the Extension priorities— energy and environmental stewardship; food safety and security; economic development and work force preparedness; family health and wellness and youth development. Preference will be given to programs which make multiple contacts with their audiences— rather than single day events.

There is an application procedure to follow and applications should be submitted electronically to the state office by January 31 of each year. All those applications which are not submitted correctly and do not follow the guidelines will not be considered. The state MG advisory committee will judge the applications and winners will be announced on March 1. Applications **MUST** be written in collaboration with Extension staff and Master Gardeners. The application form calls for a project narrative and a proposed budget and will be heavily weighted to those projects which demonstrate impact and follow-up. The instructions and application can be found on the MG website under “For IL Master Gardeners”.

THE GARDENS OF SPAIN

Only a few spots still remain for the Master Gardener trip to the glorious gardens of Spain. The trip runs September 10-22, 2012 and will visit the cities and gardens of Granada, Cordoba, Seville, Ronda and Madrid. Gardens included in the trip are the Alhambra Palace and Generalife Gardens in Granada; the Royal Palaces of the Alcazar in Cordoba; Plaza de Espana and the Gardens of Murillo in Seville; the Alameda del Tajo Gardens and Palace of Rhonda and the rose garden Parque Buen Retiro in Madrid. The trip also features the UNESCO World heritage Segovia and free time to explore Madrid.

Tour price is \$3,999 per person land only and airfare is \$1150. Visit <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mg/events> to view the entire itinerary. Contact Robyn Gulstrom to hold your spot— rgulstrom@comcast.net or 269-629-9248.



MG CONFERENCE 2012

Mark your calendars for Sept 6-8, 2012 for the annual Master Gardener conference. The Master Gardeners of McHenry and Lake Counties are busy booking speakers and planning tours for the conference which will be held at the Holiday Inn Crystal Lake Conference Center in Crystal Lake, IL.

The keynote speaker for conference 2012 will be Eliot Coleman. Eliot has more than 40 years of experience in all aspects of organic farming, including field vegetables, greenhouse vegetables, rotational grazing of cattle and sheep, and range poultry. He is the author of *The New Organic Grower*, *Four Seasons Harvest* and the *Winter Harvest Handbook*. Four Season Farm is an experimental market garden in Harborside, Maine, owned and operated by writers Barbara Damrosch and Eliot Coleman. The farm produces vegetables year-round and has become a nationally recognized model of small-scale sustainable agriculture.

Please join us for conference 2012 as we share “Our Common Ground”. Watch for more details in future issues of *Imagine*.

IMPORTANT DATES

January 11-13: Illinois Specialty Crops, Agritourism and Organic Conference, Crowne Plaza, Springfield, IL. Conference tracks include fruit, vegetables, herbs, agritourism/marketing, organic production, business management and irrigation. Go to www.specialtygrowers.org for full agenda. For more information: 309-557-2107 or handley@ilfb.org

January 18-20: Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL. Visit <http://www.midam.org/index.html>

January 28: A Winter Day in the Garden, Zwermann Theatre, Lincoln Trail College, Robinson, IL. Early Bird presentation (7:30 am) by Wayne Richards and Judy Burris "BUGS- A Well Balanced Garden". Five experts to speak including Roger Doiron- "A Subversive Plot: Sowing the Seeds of a Global Garden Revolution" and "Kitchen Gardening Step by Step"; Janet Macunovich- "Continuous Color in the Landscape" and "Favorite Gardens Before and After"; Trudi Temple- "Sustainable Lifestyle: Order and Creativity in our Life and Garden" and "Natures Notes" by Wayne Richards and Judy Burris" Registration is \$35; \$45 after January 19. Breakfast and lunch are included. Sponsored by the Crawford County MGs. 618-546-1549 or <https://webs.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=6169>

January 28: Mid-Winter Horticulture Workshop, First Lutheran Church, Geneseo, IL. 8:30 am to Noon. Three sessions will be offered: "Midas Touch" by Martha Smith; "The Language of Flowers" by Rhonda Ferree and "Gardeners Hand Cream". Cost is \$15. Pre-registration is required. Sponsored by the Henry, Stark and Rock Island County MGs. 309-853-1533. <https://webs.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=6214>

February 7: Southwestern Illinois Commercial Tree Fruit School, Holiday Inn, Mt. Vernon, IL. Registration is \$20, \$30 at the door. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mms 618-650-7050>.

February 8: Southern Illinois Commercial Tree Fruit School, Knights of Columbus Hall, Hardin, IL. Registration is \$20, \$30 at the door. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/ccgms 217-243-7424>.

February 10-12: Annual Midwestern Herb and Garden Show, Times Square Mall, Mt. Vernon, IL. The show features educational sessions and Midwestern vendors. Keynote speaker Deborah Lee will present 4 sessions: "Growing and Using Culinary Herbs", "Create a Certified Illinois Herb Garden", "Wild Edible Plants" and "Medicinal Herbs". Also classes on gourds, herbal teas, bats, tools, photography, irises and much more. Free admission. <http://www.midwesternherbandgardenshow.com/>

February 16: Southern Illinois Commercial Vegetable School, Holiday Inn, Mt. Vernon, IL. \$30 per farm, \$40 at the door. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mms/ 618-650-7050>.

February 18: Joys of Gardening, Highland Community College Student Conference Center, Freeport, IL. 8 am to 4 pm. Keynote presentation is "Gardening for Hummingbirds" by Michael and Kathi Rock. Multiple breakout sessions to choose from. Registration cost is \$25. Sponsored by the Stephenson County MGs. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/jsw>

February 21& 22: Gateway Greening Conference, Gateway Center, Collinsville, IL. Keynote addresses by Rick Lewandowski, Director of the Mt. Cuba Center Arboretum "Celebrating the Allure of Garden Layers in Space and Time" and Dave Tylka "Environmentally Functional Native Trees and Shrubs". Two days of sessions include: Diseases of Annuals and Perennials; Native Perennials; Tree Diseases; Flowering Trees; Weed Management; Bulbs; Landscape Design and more. MG admission with ID card or letter of active status is \$35 for 1 day and \$50 for 2 days (includes lunch, classes and trade show). <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/mms 618-650-7050>.

February 25: The Gardener's Pathway: Ideas to Feed Your Passion, Kishwaukee College conference Center, Malta, IL. Roy Diblik, author of *Small Perennial Gardens: The Know Nonsense Approach* will be the special guest speaker. Attendees may choose from 18 different breakout sessions for planning, planting and enjoying your garden. Cost is \$50. Day includes continental breakfast, garden lunch and exhibit hall of unique items. Sponsored by the DeKalb County MGs and Kishwaukee College. Registration closes Feb. 20. 815-825-2086, ext. 2040.

February 25: Beginner Bee Keeping Class, LaSalle County Extension Office, Ottawa, IL.
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/blmp/>

February 25: Nursery School-Lessons in Gardening, iwireless Center, Moline, IL. 8:00 am.to 4:00 pm. The keynote speaker will be Roy Klehm who will present “My Twenty Favorite Garden Plants”. Choose from 15 different classes including Gardening with a Disability; Color in the Landscape; Beekeeping; Milk Baths; Composting; Herbs and more. Cost is \$45 and includes a continental breakfast, lunch, vendors and door prizes. Deadline to register is Feb 13. Sponsored by the Rock Island County MGs. For information or to register call 309-756-9978 or visit <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/hmrs>

March 3: Gardener’s Palette “For the Savvy Gardener”, John Wood Community College, Quincy, IL. 9 am- 3:30 pm. Pat Lanza, author of *Lasagna Gardening* will be the keynote speaker. Breakout sessions include: Flower Power; Sustainable Turf; Horticulture for Children; Newly- Emerging Diseases; Flowering Shrubs; Landscape Solutions; Pest Control; Water-Wise Gardening and much more. Sponsored by the Adams-Brown MGs. 217-223-8380 or <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/abhps>

March 3: Home, Lawn and Garden Day 2012, Central Catholic High School, Bloomington, IL. The event fee of \$40.00 includes several choices of workshops, a keynote speaker, exhibitors, door prizes, and lunch. This year’s keynote address will be given by Shane Cultra of Country Arbors in Champaign, IL. Sponsored by the University of Illinois Master Gardeners in McLean County. Online registration will open in January. For further information, please contact Sharon Becker at 309-663-8306 or email sbecker@illinois.edu.

March 10: Spring Garden Seminar, IL. Valley Community College, Oglesby, IL.8:30 am -3:15 pm. There will be 16 garden and nature-related classes over four sessions. Sponsored by the LaSalle County MGs. 815-433-0707 or <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/blmp/>

March 10: Gardeners Day, Lincoln College, Lincoln, IL. 8:00 am to 12:30 pm. The keynote speaker will be Marshall Dirks, director of marketing and public relations for Proven Winners. The keynote program will be followed by six- 1 hours seminars. Topics include Lawn Care; Creating a Rainbow Garden; Orchids; Vegetable Gardening; A Year in the Pumpkin Patch and Water Gardening 101. Registration fee is \$10 before March 2 and \$12 at the door. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/lms> 217-732-8289.

March 10-18: Chicago Flower and Garden Show, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL. Garden displays, shopping and lots of educational sessions. <http://chicagoflower.com>

March 17: Weekend Gardener, Gateway Convention Center, Collinsville, IL. 8:30 am-2:45 pm. Choose from 16 exciting workshops including: Native Plants; Backyard Pond Maintenance; Daylilies; Tree and Shrub Pruning; Beneficial Insects; Herbs; Landscape Design and much more. Classes will be taught by local gardening professionals, Master Gardeners, and University of Illinois Extension staff. Lunch will be provided. Pre-registration is required. 618-650-7050.

March 17: Gardener’s Day, Western IL University Student Union, Macomb, IL. 9 am to 3 pm. Some of the topics are: Wildlife Damage Management;;Garden Ponds; Plants In and Around; Living Wreaths; New Varieties in Annuals; Fruit Trees; Bird Gardening; High Tunnels for Home Gardens; Invasive Plants; Ages and Stages of Gardening, and Gourds. Registration includes break out sessions, lunch, handouts, door prizes and vendors. Sponsored by the McDonough County MGs. 309-837-3939.

March 24: Garden Day, Jacksonville Extension Office 9 am to Noon. \$10 per person. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/ccgms/>

March 31: Gardeners Big Day, Dickson Mounds Museum, Lewiston, IL. 9 am to 4 pm. \$24 includes lunch, great speakers, workshops, vendors, displays and much more. Sponsored by the Fulton County MGs and the Spoon River Garden Club. <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/fmpt/> or 309-547-3711.

NEW ADVANCED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The Master Gardener State Advisory Committee has approved new guidelines for advanced training. Active Master Gardeners are encouraged to seek out and attend classes which fit into the following four categories.

1. **Master Naturalist**-Volunteers who participate in the training for Master Naturalist will receive advanced training credit. Master Gardeners who have completed the training in the last 6 years will be “grandfathered” in for credit. A minimum of 40 hours of training is required.

2. **Sustainable Landscaping**- A minimum of 20 hours of training is required. Classes such as Master Composter training, rain barrel or rain garden classes or other sustainable landscaping classes. Those who have completed the Master Composter class in the last 6 years will be “grandfathered” in for credit for that course.

3. **Advanced IPM**- A minimum of 20 hours of training is required. Training could include commercial PSEP training sessions (such as insects, weeds or diseases); the NCIPM module on Diagnostics; the IPM online modules to be released by the state office; classes on invasive species, First Detector Training; conference workshops on invasive species, weeds, insects or diseases.

4. **Advanced Local Foods**- A minimum of 20 hours of training is required. Training could include local foods training; local food or specialty crop conference sessions; GAP training or organic sessions such as the Elluminate session on Organics by Rich Tobiasz offered in summer 2011 by the state office.

Advanced Master Gardener Training classes may be taken over a period of up to two years from the initial class period. The local Master Gardener Coordinator will determine if a class counts towards advanced training credit, although they may consult with the state Master Gardener Coordinator if needed.

Advanced Master Gardener Training is open only to Active, Certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners. Master Gardener Interns must first complete their internship before beginning an Advanced Master Gardener course. Upon successful completion of the Advanced Master Gardener course, participants will be awarded a pin and certificate.

RESOURCES ON THE MG WEBSITE

Have you checked out the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener webpage lately? New items are posted monthly. There are two important pages which have significant additions. First the “Educational Events” page has a listing of webinars which will count for continuing education credit. New classes will be posted as they become available. Secondly, check out the “For IL Master Gardeners” page. Information about the new mini-grant program as well as the new advanced training guidelines has been posted on this page. An updated list of horticulture websites has also been added which may be helpful with your hotline and plant clinic questions. Lastly this page now contains information about “Charitable Contributions for University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners”. Thanks to Master Gardener Joan Stehulak from Ogle County for the preparation of this important document.

IS IT BETTER TO GIVE THAN RECEIVE? PLANT DISEASE SENT TO EUROPE CREATES HAVOC!

As gardeners we often moan about the invasive weeds, diseases and insects which have traveled to the United States from other countries. Our native species have not developed resistance to these pathogens and pests and natural predators do not exist here. Well unfortunately we have turned the tables and sent a deadly pathogen to Europe. A fungus carried to Europe by U. S. soldiers during World War II is killing trees across an ever expanding swath of the continent. It is believed that the soldiers carried boxes of ammunition made of infected sycamore wood. The culprit is the deadly fungus *Ceratocystis platani*, for which there is no known cure and the disease is called canker stain of plane tree. The fungus is mainly benign to native *Platanus occidentalis* species across the eastern part of the U.S. But it has killed an untold number of *Platanus orientalis* trees while spreading across Switzerland, Greece, Germany and France over the past six decades. The fungus infects through a wound and then moves into the conducting tissue of the underlying sapwood. Once infected, Oriental plane trees must be cut down and burned. The latest battlefield is the Canal du Midi which has already seen 1000 of the 42,000 plane trees that lined its bank felled and burned last year. The Canal du Midi is one of Europe’s longest and widest canal systems which with its two extensions — Canal de Garonne and the Rhône-Sete canal — it links Bordeaux on the Atlantic to Sète on the Mediterranean before continuing up the coast to the Rhone Basin in the Camargue. In 1994 it was designated a World Heritage Site. The infected trees are being replaced with disease-resistant trees native to Mississippi.

I THINK GREEN

The University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program and 4-H have teamed up to present the “I Think Green” program for youth in Illinois, which will be formally launched in early 2012. The “I Think Green” Program engages youth in investigating how living things interact with each other and with their environment. This program includes three tracks: 1) worms, 2) butterflies, and 3) insects. All three tracks are aligned to Illinois State Goals and follow a sequence of four 40-60 minute investigations in which youth practice observation skills, conduct hands-on investigations with living things, explore different life cycles, identify how living things function/adapt/change, and compare how living things interact with each other and with their environment. The hands-on science inquiry activities will be facilitated by University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners and 4-H volunteers with related subject-matter expertise. Lessons are drawn from the Junior Master Gardener® curriculum, as well as, the University of Illinois Extension curriculum, *Scientific Inquiry with Butterflies* and *Adventures of Herman the Worm*.

This program could be done in a school, after-school, or agency setting. The target audience is 3rd-5th grade students. Groups may choose to participate in one or more of the four-session tracks (e.g. worms, butterflies, insects). While the program may be adapted for use in single events, such as a conservation day, teachers/leaders who commit to engaging youth in the five-session program will receive additional resource materials, including: Fandex flip field guides for bugs and a copy of, *One Small Square: My Backyard*, by Donald Silver. All youth participants will receive a personal “I Think Green” magnifying glass.

This University of Illinois Extension Youth Education Initiative is made possible with support from ADM.

Watch for the new “I Think Green” website and information on how to enroll your youth group very soon.



SFE INFORMATION ON EXTENSION MG NATIONAL BLOG

In the last issue of the Imagine there was an article about the Illinois projects which won International Search for Excellence awards at the IMGCC conference this fall. If you would like more information about award winning projects from other states, visit the national eXtension Master Gardener blog. Blogs have been posted on every award winning project in recent weeks. This is a great opportunity to learn about what other state Master Gardener programs are doing. The blog also contains information on topics such as community gardening in West Virginia or garden calendars offered by MG programs or extending the garden season. There is a link to the national blog on the secondary pages of our MG website or visit it directly at <http://blogs.extension.org/mastergardener/>



MT CUBA CENTER- A WOODLAND PARADISE

I am often asked about my favorite gardens in the U.S. My favorites always include woodland wildflowers and Mt. Cuba is very high on the list. The Mt. Cuba Center is a non-profit horticultural institution in northern Delaware located on nearly 600 acres. They are dedicated to the study and appreciation of plants native to the Appalachian Piedmont Region through garden display, education, and research. The woodland wildflower gardens are recognized as the region's finest- and perhaps one of the country's most outstanding. Both formal and woodland gardens can be viewed if you visit and the Colonial Revival-style home is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Besides the spectacular gardens Mt. Cuba is also well known for its conservation. A total of fifty-five species of rare native plants have been found on Mt. Cuba Center's natural lands. Of this total, seven species are presently ranked as "S1" (five or fewer occurrences in the state). Twenty-one others are "S2" species (occurring in six to twenty sites in Delaware). Among these are Swamp buttercup (*Ranunculus caricetorum*), Nodding trillium (*Trillium cernuum*), Bigleaf aster (*Aster schreberi*) and Spring chickweed (*Stellaria alsine*). Mt. Cuba was recognized by the North American Plant Collection Consortium in 1996 for its collection of wild gingers and in 2001 for its collection of Trillium. The Center is also committed to protecting, preserving and improving the natural lands of Mt. Cuba Center in order to comprehensively benefit biodiversity native to their region. Their natural lands staff monitor and protect rare plant populations, systematically remove invasive species, restore degraded habitats, and manage for wildlife.

Education and research play a big part of the mission at Mt. Cuba Center. They are well respected for their plant research and you can learn about their Coreopsis evaluation on their website. Numerous classes and symposiums are offered at the center and just recently they have begun to offer distance education classes. An online class on Ferns and one on Hummingbirds in the Garden are now available for \$40 each- other classes will be released in 2012. The website for this amazing garden and education center is: <http://www.mtcubacenter.org/>.

EXTENSION VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

Thank you to everyone who completed the Extension Volunteer Survey this fall. Of the 1,802 Extension volunteers who responded, 1,001 were Master Gardeners. We were pleased with your positive comments but we also realize that we have many things to work on to improve the program. It was also apparent that you wanted more consistency in the Master Gardener program across county and unit lines. Although individual counties have different needs I am working to standardize things like volunteer screening, risk management and the application process so that it is the same across the state.

As I read over your comments your suggestions for improvement seemed to follow some common themes. These included:

- More educational opportunities are desired
- MGs would like more information and input on how the money they raise is spent
- MGs would like mentoring programs in each county/unit
- Communication needs improvement- both on the state and the local level
- MGs would like more flexibility in times of volunteer and educational opportunities (nights and weekends)
- The MG program needs to be marketed to the public better
- MGs would like better orientation to the statewide program and to the local office procedures and projects

A first step in addressing your suggestions has been to sponsor a series of workshops for staff. We have offered webinars on both volunteer screening and risk management procedures this fall. In early 2012, I will present 2 more webinars for staff on MG policies and on MG fundraising and fiscal management. Please keep in mind that fundraising and spending have to follow Extension and university guidelines. I hope to make progress on your other suggestions – including more educational opportunities (especially online ones) and better communication in the coming year. Your suggestions are welcome!

Monica David, Illinois Master Gardener Coordinator