Search for Excellence is the recognition program of Master Gardener volunteer work throughout the United States and Canada. Search for Excellence has seven categories in which Master Gardeners can demonstrate their outstanding contributions to their communities. All SFE applications must show that significant learning took place, whether by the Master Gardeners or the general public they were involved with.

All volunteer projects done by Master Gardeners are significant to their communities, but not all are Search for Excellence projects. The Search for Excellence is designed to recognize outstanding group projects, not an individual who does outstanding work.

Project submission must meet the following guidelines to qualify for SFE awards:

1. Choose the category that best fits the project. Only one project may be submitted by a group per category:
   - Youth Programs
   - Demonstration Garden
   - Workshop or Presentation
   - Community Service
   - Innovative Projects
   - Special Need Audiences (Senior, Disabled Audiences or Horticultural Therapy)
   - Research (applied scientific methodology)

2. Projects will be judged on their merit from work done between the years 2008-2010. Projects entered must have completed a full year to be entered. Program projects that have previously won IMGC SFE awards are not eligible in any category.

3. Simple to replicate. A goal of SFE is to share the excellent ideas and programs so that they can be replicated by other MG groups. A 20 acre botanic garden would be difficult to replicate, but the gardening ideas inside it would be easy to create somewhere else. A step-by-step “how to do this” would be a great way to share your project.

4. Practicality. You could develop a wonderful program with a $10.00 admission cost, but if people can’t afford that, they won’t come. A SFE program is one that is easy to use and fits well for the situation it is intended for. You have found the best way possible to meet a need of your community.

5. Original and creative. We don’t want you to recreate the wheel, just maybe parts of it so that it fits your situation. We are looking for that added touch that makes this program your own…or that reflects the personalities of the Master Gardeners who are working with it.
7. **Compatible with Extension and MG missions.**
   - Projects should have an educational component.
   - Projects must be available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientations, national origin, and marital or family status.
   - Projects should extend the resources of the University to the public wherever they live, helping them use knowledge to solve problems at work, at home, and in their communities.
   - Information provided should be university research-based.

**THE APPLICATION Instructions**

1. The Search for Excellence project application should be written by the Master Gardeners involved, not Extension staff. Use the application template and provide your response in a WORD or PDF document. It should include the following information:

   - Name of MG Program, County and State/Province
   - Name, address, phone, email of MG Contact person
   - Name, title, address, phone, email of MG Coordinator/Extension staff
   - Category. Must select and submit in only **ONE** category:
     - Youth
     - Demonstration Garden
     - Workshop or Presentation
     - Community Service
     - Innovative Project
     - Special Needs Audiences
     - Research (applied scientific methodology)
   - Name of Project
   - Description of project. Include target audience, goals, location, and partnerships.
   - Methods. Discuss planning and implementation.
   - Results
   - Significant learning and impact
   - Budget narrative
   - Names of active Master Gardeners ONLY who are involved in the project from start to finish that should receive a certificate. Please do not include their role. Please do not include any other individuals in this listing.

2. An emailed verification letter from your Extension Advisor/Coordinator is required and must come directly from that individual. The Extension Advisor/Coordinator’s email must verify that:
   a. MGs involved are currently in good standing
   b. photo releases are on file for all individuals in the photos or as required by the applicable laws of the local state or province.
c. all attachments have been reviewed.
The deadline for this verification is the same date as the application deadline. Any project submitted without this document will be disqualified.

3. The application document should be in Word or PDF format and must be no longer than 3 pages in length. Up to 5 digital photos in JPEG format should be submitted with the application. Your Extension Advisor/Coordinator must email the verification letter along with the application and pictures to: Monica David modavid@illinois.edu. Please put the MG program, county and state/province in the subject line of all emails. Questions should be directed to Monica David at 217-265-5256 or preferably via email. No hard copy of mailed applications will be accepted.

4. Do not send handouts or other large files with this application. If possible size your photos for use in a PowerPoint presentation- no large picture files please. Submit only the items listed in instructions 1-3 above. Any files, extra pictures, handouts etc. will be disqualified. Any applications longer than 3 pages will also not be accepted for competition.

5. Receipt of the Extension Coordinator’s email containing the application and attachments along with the Extension Coordinator’s verification comments will be verified via email from the IMGCSFE Committee within two days of receiving it. If the Extension Coordinator fails to receive verification within 4 business days of submission, contact Monica David. We cannot be responsible for applications that we do not receive due to spam mail blockers etc.

**SIGNIFICANT LEARNING AND IMPACTS**
Significant learning, change in attitude and practices are outcomes that Extension uses to evaluate the impact of their services and programs. Impacts from Extension Master Gardener projects should improve people’s lives. Explain how this project augmented learning, increased knowledge, or changed practices to enhance quality of life. These impacts could be economical, environmental, educational, health, community-based, etc. SFE projects should be developed to reach the most people possible from the target audience. Impact numbers are not as significant if the target audience does not learn or utilize information. Make sure you ask participants how this information helped them and record this as an impact. Depending on the nature of the project the evaluations may be very informal (i.e. casually asking questions) or formal (i.e. pre-test/post-test). For example: Evaluation questions that ask, “How do you plan to use this information?” or “Can you share specific information that you learned today?” can help show impact—especially if you can show that 70% of the participants plan to use fewer pesticides.

Look to the National Master Gardener website at: [http://www.extension.org/pages/IMG_Search_for_Excellence](http://www.extension.org/pages/IMG_Search_for_Excellence) for information about the previous winning SFE projects.
EXPECTATIONS
1. If you are selected as a Search for Excellence first place winner, you will be expected to provide a short (3 minute maximum) talk about your project at the International MG Conference. This presentation can be done in person by a designated representative or by sending a pre-recorded video. The presentation must be coordinated in advance with the SFE committee. Second and third place winners will be acknowledged at the conference but will not be asked to give a talk.
2. POSTER: The top three entries in each category will be asked to prepare a poster to be displayed at the International MG Conference. Posters should include photos of the project, a state map showing where the project is located, name of the MG group and information about the group, as well as other pertinent information. Size will be determined by the states or province hosting the conference.
3. There is no reimbursement for your registration fees or travel expenses to the International MG Conference.
4. The Master Gardener program, rather than individual Master Gardeners, will receive a monetary award and plaque for winning first place in each Search for Excellence category. Second and third place winners in each category will receive a certificate but no monetary award.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION
1. 100 point scale. All applications are judged independently by at least three Extension Faculty and three Master Gardeners who are members of the SFE Committee. They will use the following criteria:
   a. Simplicity of project (easy to replicate)..............10 points
   b. Practicality, usefulness or relevance of project for situation….10 points
   c. Originality or creativity.....................................10 points
   d. Consistent with Extension and MG missions……20 points
   e. Clarity and completeness of project application…..20 points
   f. Did significant learning occur?..........................20 points
   g. Number of people impacted........................10 points
   TOTAL..................................................100 points

   All of the judge’s scores will be totaled and divided by the number of judges.

2. Projects that do not achieve a score of 80% or better will not receive a SFE Award.
3. A judge will be excused from judging an application from the state in which they work or volunteer as a MG.
4. An aggregate score sheet along with all of the judge’s comments will be returned to the applicants as soon as possible. We hope that the comments will help to strengthen your volunteer work. All decisions and scoring by the judges will be considered final.
5. In the case of a tie, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

We applaud all the volunteer work done by the Master Gardeners. We hope that this work is being recognized on the local, state and regional levels. The International Master Gardener recognition is a SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE of the highest quality within Master Gardener programs across the United States and Canada.