

MASTER GARDENER SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE GUIDELINES

(adapted for Alabama from the IMGC guidelines)

Search for Excellence recognizes Master Gardener projects throughout the United States and Canada. It was developed by the International Master Gardener Conference Committee. The award has seven categories to describe the outstanding contributions of MGs to their communities. All SFE applications must show that significant learning took place.

All volunteer work done by Master Gardeners is significant to their communities, but not all is a Search for Excellence project.

Determine if your project meets the SFE guidelines

1. First it must fit into one of the seven categories

- a. Youth Programs
- b. Demonstration Garden
- c. Workshop or Presentation or Hands-on Programs
- d. Community Service
- e. Innovative Projects
- f. Special Audiences, Senior/Disabled Audiences or Hort Therapy
- g. Other or General MG Accomplishment

Your project may cover more than one category, but choose one main category to describe it. It must have completed at least one cycle and be an ongoing project. Previous SFE winners are not eligible for a second award for the same project.

2. Search for Excellence is designed to **recognize a group project**, not an individual who does outstanding work. AMGA has several awards that recognize outstanding individual Master Gardeners.
3. **It must be simple to replicate.** A goal of SFE is to share the excellent ideas and programs so they (or parts) can be replicated by other MG groups. Example: 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. **It must be practical for its designed audience.** A SFE program is one that is easy to use and fits well for the situation it is intended for. A practical project finds the best way possible to meet a need in the community.
5. **It should be original and creative.** We don't want you to recreate the wheel, just maybe parts of it so that it's unique to your situation. We are looking for that added touch that makes this project your own.

6. ***It should meet the Extension and Master Gardener missions.***
 - a. All projects should have an educational component. Applications should show how your group changed or affected peoples' lives. It is important to show what was learned.
 - b. All Extension and MG programs are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status.
 - c. All Extension and MG programs 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.
 - d. Information provided should be research-based.

7. ***The project application should be written by the Master Gardeners*** involved, not Extension staff. Use each of these criteria and provide your response in a Word-type document.

Apply for this award (the application format)

1. Name of your MG Association and location
2. Name, title, address, phone, email of MG Coordinator/Extension staff
3. Name, title, address, phone, email of MG Contact person
4. Name of Project
5. Category. Select and submit in only one category
6. Names of Master Gardeners involved in project from start to finish. Please don't include any other individuals in this listing.
7. Description of Project. Include instructional **methods** – planning & implementation of project/instruction, **number** of participants, **results** – learning & impacts in participants, **budget** narrative. Describe how this project is a good candidate for SFE and could be repeated by others.
 - a. Simple to replicate (methods)
 - b. Practicality (methods, budget)
 - c. Originality/creativity (methods, budget)
 - d. Extension and MG Mission/Goals (methods, results)
 - e. Significant learning and impacts (results)
 - f. Number of people impacted (number)
 - g. Support from other community groups (methods, budget, results, numbers)
 - h. Budget (budget)
8. Verification letter with three signatures
9. Other considerations for the application:
 - a. Be as creative in your description as you can.
 - b. Limit application to 3 pages, single-spaced. The verification letter (see item 8) can be page 4.
 - c. The verification letter shows that the MG's involved are in good-standing with their local program. This may be a short, form-type letter written by

the applicant and signed by the verifying agents. Three verifying signatures are required: the local MG association president, the sponsoring ACES agent, one community representative. The community representative should be someone who participated in the project or someone from a cooperating community group with this project.

- d. DO NOT include any pictures. If your project is selected as a winner, digital pictures will then be requested from you.
- e. Please don't send a huge file with your handouts, etc.; just the three page document and the verification letter.
- f. These applications may be sent by email to smithkp@auburn.edu .

Details to consider for the Project Description:

- Significant learning is one area that we need to encourage and should emphasize. The teaching and service done by Master Gardeners is excellent. We may have evaluations that tell us that the speaker was good, the class was fun or the room was comfortable but these don't show if or how we made an impact. These questions describe what was taught. We should also be describing the amount of learning.

All of Extension is being asked to show impact or "How a person's life will be changed by what we do". It is important to show what was learned by either the MG or the participants. Following are some examples.

Questions that ask, "How do you plan to use this information?" or "Can you share specific information that you learned today?" can help to show impact. An example: you show that 70% of the participants plan to trellis and prune their muscadines in the way taught. Consider open-ended questions that allow participants to write out what they learned.

- How many people and Master Gardeners were impacted. Did you reach the most people possible? A SFE project will help to make your community (however you describe that to be) a better place.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION... 100 point scale.

- Simplicity of project (easy to replicate)....10 points
- Practicality, usefulness or relevance of project for situation...10 points
- Originality or creativity....10 points
- Consistent with Extension and MG missions...20 points
- Clarity and completeness of project application...20 points
- **Did significant learning occur?...20 points**
- Number of people impacted...10 points
- TOTAL.....100 points

Expectations if awarded: (adapted for Alabama)

If you are selected as a Search for Excellence winner, you will be expected to create a display about your project. The State Coordinator will need digital images to use in a Powerpoint presentation at the award ceremony.

There are potentially seven winners each year.

Mail or email applications to Kerry Smith, Alabama Master Gardener State Program Coordinator. Applications are due to the State MG Program Coordinator by January 1.

We applaud all of the volunteer work done by Master Gardeners. We hope this award from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System will further show our appreciation of your efforts.

Thank you for your interest,
Kerry Smith
101 Funchess Hall
Auburn University, Alabama 36849

334-844-3036
smithkp@auburn.edu