Our Program’s Mission

The Alabama Master Gardener program trains individuals who volunteer their expertise and services supporting the educational outreach mission of Extension. The program aspires to create an environmental awareness and enhance the development of an environmental ethic in the citizens of Alabama.

In 1971, two Washington State Extension Agents, David Gibby and Bill Scheer, seeing the high demand for home landscape information, explored the novel concept of recruiting and training volunteers to meet this need. Their success started what is now a national Extension program educating volunteer-minded people.

The Alabama Master Gardeners program started when a Master Gardener from Cornell Extension, Mary Lou McNabb, shared her love of the program with Madison County Extension Agent, Gary Murray. Along with Extension Specialists, they organized the first Alabama Master Gardener training series in Huntsville.

Since 1981, Alabama Master Gardeners have partnered with Alabama Extension and various community groups, hosted displays and information booths at county fairs, assisted botanical gardens with numerous efforts, worked with historic properties, implemented civic beautification projects, partnered with local schools, donated many of tons of fresh produce to charity, supported academic scholarships, and much more.

Bolstering the Land Grant mission of Extension in 2017, Alabama Master Gardeners reached an additional 590,164 people, supporting community projects and sharing research-based horticulture information.

(Photos: 1. Coffee County MGs & Regional Extension Agent at Agriculture/Agribusiness fair for high school students; 2. Limestone MGs, Ask an MG booth at Athens Home & Garden Show; 3. MGNA at horticulture therapy gardens; 4. Border Forsythia, *Forsythia x intermedia*; 5. Capital City MGs host Lunch & Learn at Armory; 6. Three Alabama MGs attend the International Conference, Portland OR)
AMGA Endowment
Helping Fund Education for the Next Generation

The Alabama Master Gardeners Association, and many local MG associations around the state, continued to grow the AMGA Graduate Endowment, current balance $44,000. The AMGA Undergraduate Endowment has now surpassed $100,000. Both endowments help horticulture students cover school expenses. Master Gardener associations also donated financial support to many local, community organizations. Their combined 2017 local philanthropy totaled more than $60,000.

Harvest for Health
A New Start for Cancer Survivors

Led by the UAB, Comprehensive Cancer Center, and Alabama Extension’s Homes Grounds Team, Harvest for Health uses a backyard garden to teach new, healthy habits to cancer survivors. Extension-trained MGs mentor the survivor to learn gardening. The initial results showed cancer survivors ate more vegetables, improved their strength and flexibility, and were more motivated to daily exercise because of the garden.

(Photo: Auburn University students raised awareness for the project during Tiger Giving Day.)
Helping Those in Need

MGs Help Provide Education & Food Across the State

For many years, Master Gardener associations have been growing and donating fresh vegetables. Their gardens are all across the state, (Autauga, Baldwin, Calhoun, Central, Coffee, DeKalb, Jefferson, Limestone, Marshall, Mobile, Lauderdale, St. Clair, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Houston) and making a difference in their communities. The fresh produce is distributed to food banks, children’s facilities and programs, rehabilitation facilities, and homebound individuals. All 2017 efforts combined, Alabama MGs provided enough food to feed one meal to 5,500 people!

Through these gardening efforts, MGs have been able to provide educational materials to people of all ages as well. These gardens are tools to teach children, seniors, and the community about gardening. These teaching venues have been implemented in schools, botanical gardens, boy’s and girl’s ranches, as community gardens, and as demonstration gardens.

(Photos: 1. MG working in the Prattville-Autauga Demonstration Garden; 2. Fresh produce harvested from the Prattville-Autauga Demonstration Garden, 3. Capital City MGA & Autauga MGA sending relief supplies to Houston after Hurricane Harvey; 4. Chilton County MG running irrigation at the Demonstration Garden, Chilton Research and Extension Center)
Volunteers partner with an organization when they feel it is meaningful, develops their skills, creates impact, and taps into their abilities and interests.

Forge Garden Club Workshops

Partnered with the Forge Breast Cancer Survivor Center, Alabama Extension, the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, and Jefferson County Master Gardeners hosted “Gardening for the Breast Cancer Community.”
Throughout the spring, summer, and fall, local breast cancer survivors and their families attended monthly classes that focused on the mental and physical health benefits of consistently gardening. Participants studied topics such as gardening in a small space, fresh flower arranging, vegetable gardening, and holiday decorating. All classes emphasized environmentally sustainable practices, such as smart water use in the garden.

Bee Biodiversity Initiative

The Bee Biodiversity Initiative (BBI) strives to gain a better understanding of Alabama’s native insect species; specifically the beneficial, pollinating insects.

Alabama Master Gardeners volunteered to support the initiative by setting pan traps in their yards once a month and recording data. The volunteers submitted insect samples to Auburn University’s Dr. Charles Ray for identification.

The BBI is a forward step in learning more about Alabama’s native pollinators, as well as ensuring that Alabama farmers produce a diverse and high quality crop with the help of these tiny workers.

(Photo 1. Participants learning at a Forge Garden Club workshop.)

(Photo 2. In the genus Epeolus, this kleptoparasitic bee was found in the Auburn area. As a kleptoparasite (or klepto), these bees lay their eggs in another bee’s provisioned nest. When the klepto larvae hatch, they consume the pollen and the other bee larvae.)
Master Gardeners of North Alabama (MGNA) have coordinated and implemented The Morris Elementary School Project for four years. The goal of this project is to teach the students the principles of horticulture, promote healthy food decisions, and agriculture as a whole. MGNA members work with the teachers to introduce students to new fruits and vegetables, the concepts of sustainability and conservation, and introductory topics in horticulture, and photography. Hands-on lesson plans guide the students to maintain a greenhouse and raised-bed gardens on the school grounds. Students are taught the importance of community involvement through donating the majority of garden produce to the Madison County Food Bank.

DeKalb County Gardeners partnered with the ARC (Association for Retarded Citizens), an organization that assists people having intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities. Along with help from their Extension Agents, they built raised bed gardens at eight ARC group homes. Several local businesses donated materials. Each group home was “adopted” by pairs of Master Gardeners who came weekly to supervise the residents’ work in the beds and offer help and advice. Master Gardeners lead programs to educate members at the ARC group homes about fresh produce, garden management and harvesting. The members of the group homes appreciated their new gardens and were inspired to work together on other projects too.

The Marshall County Master Gardeners manage a garden that donates to CASA (Care and Assurance for the Homebound and Elderly). This project started several years ago, but 2016 was by far the most successful to date with almost 12,000 lbs. of vegetables harvested and donated to the elderly and homebound; fresh produce for those who may not have access to fresh and healthy foods otherwise. Additional Extension partners, new growing techniques, new plant types, and an expanded garden scope helped to make this project even more successful. The Marshall County CASA garden is now also used as a teaching and learning environment. “Because the 2016 harvest beat our annual goal by almost 2,000 pounds, we can’t wait to see what the 2017 season will grow.”

*This article was published prematurely in the 2016 report. These MG associations are the 2017 Search for Excellence Winners.

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