

EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE GUIDELINES

(adapted for Alabama from the IMGCC guidelines)

Search for Excellence is the recognition program of Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteer work throughout the United States and Canada. It was developed by the International Master Gardener Conference Committee. Search for Excellence has six categories in which EMGs can demonstrate their outstanding contributions to their communities. All SFE applications must show that significant learning took place, whether by the Extension Master Gardeners or the general public they were involved with.

The plaque awarded as recognition will hang in the local ACES office as a public announcement of the accomplishment.

All volunteer work done by Extension 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 six categories*

- a. Youth Programs
- b. Demonstration Gardens
- c. Innovative Projects
- d. Workshops/Presentations
- e. Special Needs Audience
- f. Community Service Projects

Your project may cover more than one category, but you **MUST** choose one main category to describe it. It must have completed at least one cycle. Previous SFE winners are not eligible for a second award for the same project. There can only be one winner per category.

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 Extension 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 EMG 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. ***It must be practical for its designed audience***. 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. 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 individual to your situation. We are looking for that added touch that makes this project your own...or that reflects the personalities of the Extension Master Gardeners who are working with it.
6. ***It should meet the Extension and Extension Master Gardener missions.***
 - a. *Do not assume that the judge can figure out that your project aligns with Extension and EMG missions. Describe how your project does.*
 - b. All projects should have an educational component. Award applications should show how your group changed or affected peoples' lives. It is important to show what was learned.
 - c. All Extension and EMG programs are available to everyone. In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, we are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. ([Nondiscrimination - Alabama Cooperative Extension System \(aces.edu\)](http://aces.edu))
 - d. All Extension and EMG 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.
 - e. Information provided should be research-based.
7. ***The project application should be written by the Extension Master Gardeners*** involved, not Extension staff. Use each of these criteria and provide your response in a Word or Wordperfect document.

APPLY TODAY - The Application Format

1. Name of your EMG Association and location
2. Name, title, address, phone, email of EMG Coordinator/Extension staff
3. Name, title, address, phone, email of EMG Contact person
4. Name of Project
5. Category. Must select and submit in only one category
6. Names of Extension Master Gardeners involved in project from start to finish that should receive a certificate if this is a winning project. Please don't include their role. 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.
 - a. Simple to replicate (methods)
 - b. Practicality (methods, budget)
 - c. Originality/creativity (methods, budget)
 - d. Extension and EMG 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. Limit application to 3 pages, single-spaced. The verification letter (see item 8) can be page 4.
 - b. Be as creative as you can.
 - c. A verification letter or email must be included. This verification is that the EMG'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 EMG 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.
 - 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 this three page document and the verification letter.
 - f. These applications may be sent by email.

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 Extension 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 EMG 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 use fewer pesticides. Don't use canned answers that they choose from, let them write out what they learned.

- People and Extension Master Gardeners 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.

[The State EMG Coordinator has a tip sheet on describing the impacts of programming if you need more ideas.]

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION...100 point scale.

- Received by the deadline, January 1 5 points

- 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 EMG missions 15 points
- Clarity and completeness of project application 20 points
- **Did significant learning occur?.... 20 points**
- Number of people impacted 10 points
- TOTAL..... 100 points

There are potentially six winners each year, one per category.

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

Expectations if awarded: (adapted for Alabama)

State winners – If you are selected as a Search for Excellence winner, you will be expected to create a table display about your project and email 2-3 project photos to the EMG Program State Coordinator. For the table display, include photos to illustrate the project, a description about the project’s details, name of the EMG group or MGA who submitted the project, and information about the group. The photos emailed to the State Coordinator will be used in the award presentation during the AMGA Business Meeting at the AMGA Conference in spring.

[The guidelines for this award at the International level, IMGCA, are found on [Extension Master Gardener Coordinator Resources - Search for Excellence Awards \(google.com\)](#)]

We applaud all of the volunteer work done by Extension 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,
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