



Smith County Office 1517 W. Front St., #116, Tyler, TX 75702
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Internet: <http://EastTexasGardening.tamu.edu>

October 17, 2005

Dear Master Gardener Applicant:

Thank you for your interest in the Smith County Master Gardener program. *Please read this letter carefully, complete and sign the enclosed Application, and Background Screening Consent Form, and return to the above address by December 16, 2005.* No applications will be accepted after Dec. 16. We will review the applications and notify you regarding your status in the program by December 29, 2005 (see note at end of this letter regarding the December 2 Orientation Meeting).

The following information will help you better understand the functions and requirements of the Texas Master Gardener program. ***The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to extend the ability of Texas Cooperative Extension to provide educational programs to the public in the areas of horticulture and gardening through use of certified volunteer Master Gardeners.***

A Master Gardener is required to participate in a 10 week training period in plant and horticultural science. You are expected to attend all sessions. Cost of the training is \$100. Lectures will begin Tuesday, January 10, 2006 and continue every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon through Tuesday, March 16. Most classes will begin at 1:00 p.m. and end at 5:00 p.m. Enclosed is the tentative course agenda (*note varying locations and times for some classes*). Attendance at all classes is required. At the end of the training, an exam will be given.

Following the training and exam, interns must provide a minimum of seventy-two (72) hours of Master Gardener volunteer services in Smith County during the next 12 months. All interns are required to give 32 hours (over a one year period) in the Smith County Extension office assisting phone and walk-in gardening inquiries. Other required activities include working 20 hours in the Heritage Rose Garden and I.D.E.A. Garden, both at the Tyler Rose Garden. The remaining hours can be fulfilled only in Extension-approved educational program areas.

After training and initial volunteer service have been completed, participants become "Certified Texas Master Gardeners" for 1 year only, after which time you must maintain certification as a Master Gardener through annual volunteer service (12 hours) and continuing education (8 hours).

We are seeking persons who have some basic experience, skills and/or knowledge in gardening, ornamental horticulture, vegetable gardening and/or related areas. We are also seeking volunteers who would be able to communicate with the public by telephone, personal contact, group programs or through written correspondence. Master Gardeners are supervised by the Extension Horticulturist who provides support to the volunteer Master Gardener program and assigns, reviews and assists the Master Gardener work.

The 2006 class of Smith County Master Gardeners will be limited to thirty-five (35) persons.

Preference is given to qualified residents of Smith County. The \$100.00 fee (due first day of class) covers the Master Gardener Handbook, other reference materials, 'lab' and other miscellaneous costs.

In its twelfth consecutive year in Smith County, Master Gardeners have been involved in many community projects including:

- * Maintaining the Heritage Rose Garden
- * Publication of annual *Northeast Texas Gardening Guide and Calendar*
- * School garden projects; Jr. Master Gardener program
- * School classroom worm composting
- * Writing weekly gardening tips for area newspapers and the internet
- * Fall Garden Conference & Bulb Sale
- * Spring Home Garden Tours program
- * Creating and maintaining demonstration gardens (e.g. I.D.E.A. Garden)
- * Creating and staffing exhibits at the fair and other community events
- * Speaker's Bureau
- * Telephone answering service at the Extension office, answering homeowner gardening questions
- * Helping in the administration of the Master Gardener Association and its programs
- * Testing of plants, new materials, techniques, etc.
- * Habitat For Humanity landscaping assistance

Smith County Master Gardeners have formed an Association which meets monthly for educational programs, informal exchange of information and plants, program and project planning, and fellowship. And, Master Gardeners from across the State meet annually for more of the same. There are currently 150 certified and interning Master Gardeners active in Smith County.

Along with the enclosed application, please complete and return the Volunteer Background Check Consent Form. Texas Cooperative Extension Youth Protection Standards (YPS) – Qualifications of Volunteers program was implemented to provide a safe and positive environment for youth and adult volunteers. The YPS program involves national criminal background checks of all direct adult volunteers 18 years of age or older who are involved in teaching roles, which includes Master Gardeners. Volunteers who have been screened by another entity, such as their employer, school district or other youth organization, may indicate this on their enrollment form. Prior screenings with similar criteria to YPS are accepted by Texas Cooperative Extension.

Thank you for showing an interest in this exciting volunteer program to expand gardening knowledge and proficiency for the residents of Smith County. If you have further questions regarding this program, please give me a call (903-535-0885). **We will hold an orientation meeting December 2, from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. at the Extension meeting room in the Smith County Cotton Belt Building for you to learn more about and ask questions regarding the Master Gardener program. No pre-registration is required. If you return an application, we ask that you please attend this orientation meeting.**

Sincerely,



Keith C. Hansen
County Extension Agent - Horticulture
Enclosures

TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, SMITH COUNTY

2006 MASTER GARDENER APPLICATION

Please read and sign the following agreement & return no later than Dec. 16, 2005.

"I wish to become a Master Gardener in Smith County. I want to be accepted in the Master Gardener Training Program offered by Texas Cooperative Extension. I understand and agree that in exchange for the training I receive I will volunteer at least 72 hours of my time to the Smith County Master Gardener program within one year, including the required projects as noted in the cover letter and in the application below. I understand that I will become a certified Master Gardener only upon completion of the training and volunteer work. I also agree, as part of the application process, to complete the enclosed Background Check consent form."

Name (Signature) _____ Date _____

(Print) _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ (night) _____

Email _____

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING

Place of current employment _____

If retired, what was your profession? _____

Can you attend a 10 week training session every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon January through mid-March? _____

Times available for volunteer work (please check all that apply):

	Morning	Afternoon
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

NOTE: 20 hours are required over the next 12 month period to work **Tuesday mornings** in the IDEA/Heritage garden projects. **This is a requirement to be accepted into the program.**

Can you commit, over the next 12 month period, to work **8 1/2-day** periods during mornings or afternoons in the Smith County Extension office to answer homeowner telephone requests for information? (**Note, this is a requirement to be accepted into the program**).

Yes _____ No _____

YOUR GARDENING EXPERIENCE

Years gardening experience: _____

Number of years living in Smith County/East Texas: _____

Type of informal or formal gardening experience and related training (if any): _____

List areas of interest/specialization or hobbies (e.g. flowers, vegetables, ornamentals, house plants, fruits, youth, etc.)

List any garden clubs or plant societies with which you are currently or have been affiliated.

List any present or previous volunteer involvements and length of service. _____

Some activities may involve public speaking. Do you feel comfortable speaking before a group?

What special talents or skills do you have (computer, photography, typing, art, public speaking, teaching, working with youth, crafts, carpentry, etc., other)?

Please write a short paragraph explaining why you want to become a Master Gardener.

You will be notified by December 29 whether you have been accepted into the program. The \$100 fee will be collected on the first day of lecture.

If you have any questions or wish to contact us, please feel free to call the Extension office at (903) 535-0885.

Please mail the completed forms to:

Master Gardener Program
Smith County Extension Office
1517 W. Front St., Suite 116
Tyler, Texas 75702



VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND CHECK FORM

CONSENT FOR CRIMINAL BACKGROUND HISTORY CHECK AUTHORIZATION/WAIVER/INDEMNITY

I verify that I have been previously screened including a criminal background check and **PASSED**. Yes No

If yes, by who? _____ When (year)? _____

For what purpose? _____

Did you pass? _____ If not, what restrictions were imposed? _____

Please sign at the bottom of the form. If you have not been previously screened, please complete section below.

APPLICANT'S PRINTED NAME _____

COUNTY _____

_____/_____/_____
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

_____/_____/_____
BIRTHDATE

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZIP _____

DRIVER'S LICENSE NUMBER (optional) _____

Male / Female
GENDER (Circle One)

Are you of Hispanic ethnicity? _____ Yes _____ No

RACE (Circle One): White / Black / Asian / American Indian / Alaskan Native / Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander

I hereby authorize VeriFYI and or its Service Provider and Texas Cooperative Extension to request and receive any and all background information about or concerning me, including but not limited to my Criminal History, Credit History including a consumer report under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681. I authorize Texas Cooperative Extension or any of its components to make reference checks relating to my volunteer service. I understand that this information will be used to determine my eligibility as a volunteer/employee with Texas Cooperative Extension.

The criminal history, as received from the reporting agencies, may include arrest and conviction data as well as plea bargains and deferred adjudications and delinquent conduct as committed as a juvenile. I understand that this information will be used, in part, to determine my eligibility for an employment/volunteer position with this organization. I also understand that as long as I remain an employee or volunteer here, the criminal history check may be repeated at any time. I understand that I will have an opportunity to review the criminal history as received by client/agency and a procedure is available for clarification, if I dispute the record as received. I also understand that the criminal history could contain information presumed to be expunged.

I further release and discharge VeriFYI and their Service Provider and all of their Subsidiaries, Affiliates, Officers, Employees, Contract Personnel, or Associates, from any and all claims and liability arising out of any request for information or records pursuant to this authorization, procurement of an investigative consumer report and understand that it may contain information about my character, general reputation, personal characteristics, and mode of living, whichever are applicable.

I understand that I have the right to make written request within a reasonable period of time to VeriFYI for additional information concerning the nature and scope of the investigation. I acknowledge that I have voluntarily provided the above information for employment/volunteer purposes, and I have carefully read and understand this authorization.

Date

Applicant's Signature