Definition of the Master Gardener Program
The Master Gardener program is an educational activity that is offered by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. The purpose of the program is to increase the availability of horticultural information and improve the quality of life of local residents through horticultural projects and activities. Goals are implemented through the training and employment of local volunteers, known as Master Gardeners. These volunteers aid Extension in a variety of ways, including: conducting youth gardening projects; answering telephone requests for horticultural information; providing horticultural presentations to community groups and the general public; establishing and maintaining demonstration gardens; working with the handicapped, the elderly and other special groups in the community; designing and implementing community improvement projects; and assisting the County Extension Agent—Horticulture with various activities and projects.

Objectives of the Master Gardener Program
The objectives of the Master Gardener Program include the following:
• To expand the capabilities of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service to disseminate research-based horticultural information to individuals and groups in the community.
• To develop and enhance community programs related to horticulture. (Depending on community needs, these might include consultation on landscape improvement activities with civic groups, horticultural therapy projects, demonstration fruit, vegetable and ornamental gardens, and educational activities designed to improve conditions of minority and/or low income groups.)
• To enhance 4-H programs through the establishment of 4-H Junior Master Gardener garden clubs.
• To develop a Master Gardener volunteer network that is administratively self-sufficient, under the guidance of the County Extension Agent in charge of the program.

Policies
Master Gardener Title Defined: The title “Master Gardener” is to be used only by individuals trained in the Texas Master Gardener program to assist the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. A trainee must receive a minimum of 50 hours of instruction, pass an examination administered by Extension and volunteer a minimum of 50 hours of service in order to earn the title of Texas Master Gardener. Once a trainee completes the instruction and examination phase, the individual gains the title of Master Gardener.
**Intern.** From that point, the Intern has **10 months** to complete the 50 hours of volunteer service, from January 1 through October 31. These 50 hours are a continuation of the Master Gardener training that began in the classroom. It is hoped that once certification is completed, Master Gardeners will continue to contribute to the Master Gardener Program even after their 50 hour minimum requirement has been met. Although minimum requirements must be met by October 31, hours accumulated in November and December still count as part of that program year.

**In order to retain the Texas Master Gardener title,** individuals are annually required to provide a minimum of 24 hours of volunteer service and attend a minimum of 6 hours of continuing education classes (both of which must be approved through the local Extension office). Master Gardeners have 10 months to complete the minimum requirements for re-certification, from January 1 through October 31. Although minimum requirements must be met by October 31 every year, hours accumulated in November and December still count as part of that program year. The title of Master Gardener is valid **only** when participating in a Master Gardener program that is being conducted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. **When individuals cease active participation in such a program, their designation as a Texas Master Gardener becomes void.**

**When to Use the Texas Master Gardener Title**

Graduates of the Master Gardener Program should not display credentials, or give the appearance of being a Texas Master Gardener, at a place of business, unless that location is designated by the local Extension office as the location of an **official** Master Gardener educational activity. Texas Master Gardeners must not use the title “Texas Master Gardener” in any form of advertisement. Implying the endorsement of any product or place of business by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is improper. The Master Gardener program is a public service program operated by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service to provide unbiased information, and the Texas Master Gardener title is to be used only when performing unpaid volunteer work in this program.

**Pesticide Recommendations by Master Gardeners**

When making recommendations that include the use of pesticides, Texas Master Gardeners must follow the current recommendations found in the various publications available from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Use of other pesticide recommendations, chemical or "organic," is not approved. When making pesticide recommendations, if more than one product is listed as satisfactory, each product should be recommended. Cultural problems which are not specifically covered by Extension recommendations may be handled by suggesting non-pesticide treatments that an experienced Master Gardener considers appropriate (this does **not** include “home remedies”). Questions concerning commercial production of crops and pest management on such crops are to be referred to the local County Extension Agent.
Coordination of Volunteer Efforts and Programs
While more experienced volunteers can and should coordinate and manage other volunteers, an Extension Agent must still manage the overall program so that it meets the parameters of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and does what it is designed to do. Interns are encouraged to participate in ongoing, Extension-approved Master Gardener projects, but are not allowed to be in charge of any one particular project until they have achieved the title “Master Gardener.

Managing the Organization
To satisfy the needs of volunteers and to utilize their assets in a manner that meets Extension goals, the Master Gardener Program must be managed as efficiently as possible. As manager, the local Extension Agent must plan, organize, staff, direct and control the various activities of the Master Gardener Program and its volunteers. This may be, and often is, achieved by placing experienced Master Gardeners in charge of an event, project, or program.

Master Gardener Associations
One of the primary reasons for an association is financial independence. Extension wants the best for its volunteers, but many times cannot provide extra funding. A Master Gardener Program does not need a large amount of money to be effective. However, Extension offices often cannot provide even the small amounts necessary for limited projects, and System policy prevents the Agent from soliciting money from the community. An Extension Agent must serve as Advisor to any local Master Gardener Associations and must ensure that Extension policies and guidelines are followed.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.
The Texas A&M System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.