

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 8-16-06) Recruiting Master Gardeners © 2006

Even though it's only August, in two more months we'll be mailing out the 2007 Kitsap County WSU Master Gardener application packets. Group interviews are held in November. Classes are on Fridays beginning January 19 and continue through April 13.

What is a Master Gardener? It's someone with a love of gardening or an interest in gardening who wants to share their education in horticulture with others. Master Gardeners complete 72 hours of coursework. In the first year they're required to give back 50 hours of volunteering which includes answering questions at local Master Gardener clinics (at the Extension Office and locations throughout Kitsap County). Master Gardeners also plan, plant and care for learning gardens located at Retsil Veterans Home and Cemetery, Port Orchard Visitor Center, Anna Smith Park in Tracyton, Raab Park Youth Garden and P-Patch in Poulsbo and at IslandWood on Bainbridge Island. They volunteer at environmental learning centers and events throughout the county; conduct workshops and classes for adults; teach kids about gardening; give talks to groups and provide information and resources on horticulture to the public.

After completing their first year in the Master Gardener Program some Master Gardeners take courses to further specialize as Native Plant Advisors, Master Composters and Weed Advisors. These courses provide from 24 to 60 hours of additional education. Every year after their first year is completed the Master Gardeners must volunteer 25 hours and take ten hours of continuing education classes in horticulture to remain in the Master Gardener Program.

Master Gardeners can only use their title when they are doing unpaid volunteer work. Many horticulture professionals in Kitsap County are WSU Master Gardener volunteers in their non-work hours but they do not advertise themselves as Master Gardeners for their work. Once a Master Gardener stops volunteering they can no longer call themselves a Master Gardener.

There is a fee for the Master Gardener course. Each year the course fee ranges from \$200-\$275 depending on the cost of the materials and instructors for that year. Payments are acceptable and scholarships are available. Classes are held at the Norm Dicks Government Center at 345 Sixth Street in Bremerton. Master Gardeners carpool in to Bremerton and share parking fees.

Come visit the Kitsap County Extension displays and staff at the Kitsap County Fair this year, we're there from opening to closing. You'll find us in the Cat and Archery Barn across from the Van Zee Food Circus Building. We'll be signing up people who'd like to be WSU volunteers as Master Gardeners, Clothing and Textile Advisors, Food Safety Advisors and 4H Leaders. Come visit us to learn more about great WSU Extension volunteer opportunities.

In our display area we'll be providing free educational materials and will also be conducting surveys regarding agriculture in Kitsap County. You want to learn about the

KCAA (Kitsap Community Agriculture Alliance), the display is in our area. You'll find interesting posters, facts and information about farming in Kitsap County.

Our popular Passport Booklet, introduced last year, has returned. The Passport Booklet will lead you to agriculture and learning areas throughout the Fair. You'll visit 21 passport stations to receive a stamp. Return the Passport entry page and you'll be eligible for a prize at a drawing later in September.

Come see us at the Extension area in the Cat Barn at the Fair and be sure to ask us lots of questions so we and our volunteers can help you learn all about WSU Extension and agriculture in Kitsap County.