



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Why Call a Master Gardener? (September 16, 2023)

By Kate Mackey, Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardener

Why call a Master Gardener? I am so glad that you asked that question. Bear with me as I give you a little background. The Master Gardener Program is under the Cooperative Extension of the University of California. In 1914, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, which connected the Department of Agriculture with universities across the country. It was instituted to educate people about "the current developments in agriculture, home economics, economic development, and many other related subjects." Farmers no longer had to depend on local lore, word-of-mouth, and other non-scientific information to manage their crops. This established for farmers a science-based resource for improving their practices, equipment, and crops. Agriculture grew from an art to a science. This was a game-changer.

The Master Gardener program initially started in the state of Washington when two Cooperative Extension Agents became overwhelmed by citizens' requests for information and guidance on home gardens and urban horticulture. I quote: "In 1971, David Gibby and Bill Scheer, Area Extension Agents, had started separate assignments in the major metropolitan areas represented by King and Pierce Counties. They focused respectively on urban and commercial horticulture. Public demand for information about plant problems was so intense that it made educational programming for either of them virtually impossible."



With some trials at mass media presentations and other attempts at education for backyard gardeners, it was finally decided that the recruiting and training of experienced, enthusiastic gardeners could fulfill this need. Three hundred Master Gardeners started the educational experience, and it is believed that about two hundred graduated and qualified.



The state of California started its program in 1980, with Master Gardener programs being established in Riverside and Sacramento counties. From there, the program opened in counties across the state. There are now 52 counties with active MG programs managed by the county Cooperative Extensions. Master Gardeners in Kings and Tulare County started in 1996. Master Gardeners receive a 17-week course taught by Cooperative Extension advisors and specialists, faculty from the University campuses and Experiment Stations, community college and state university faculty, other experts from industry, and experienced Master Gardeners. The [California Master Gardener Handbook](#) is now in its second edition (2015). It is available through our offices and through booksellers on the internet.

Being a Master Gardener means being curious. Most MGs have a wealth of information on ornamental horticulture areas before starting the training, because this is an area of interest to them. The classes and the libraries available to MGs allow them to research problems posed to them by the public. We also have access to experts who taught our classes. Most experts I have spoken to love to teach, and they love to talk about their areas of expertise.

Being a Master Gardener means wanting to promote current, accurate, science-based information about gardening, the environment, pest management, and horticultural practices. The internet is jam-packed with all kinds of supposedly "scientific" knowledge. And "they say" is a dangerous path to take when you are trying to figure out what is wrong with your great aunt's begonia that you have kept alive for years but is now beginning to look peaked. Better to call someone who will look into the problem and come back with a possible solution backed by credible information. MGs not only go to the references, but we also have experts we can ask about, "Why does this tree have a big crack in it?" or "What is wrong with this rose with the spots on its leaves?". I had a call a while ago about oak trees that took me a week, and a call to a tree expert in UCCE Ventura County to figure out the problem.

What can you do before you call to help us help you? First, make notes. What is the problem, and when did it start? How old is the plant in question, and has it been altered recently (transplanted, pruned, fed, etc.)? How often is it watered, and when? Second, take pictures! In today's cell phone era, we now have access to a "thousand-word" essay in the form of one image. Third, call, email, or visit us in person during our office hours. In Tulare County, the MG office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:30 am to 11:30 am. In Kings County, because there are fewer of us here locally, we are only in the office on Thursdays from 9:30 am to 11:30 am. But you can email us any time or leave a voice message on our telephone helpline!

Don't be shy. We are eagerly waiting to help you.

**Are you interested in becoming a Master Gardener?** Our next class runs January 26 through May 24, 2024. We will be holding a mandatory orientation on Fri., October 13 @ 1 pm. Register online: [https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/)-- select "Become a Master Gardener".

Please call our office with any questions (559) 684-3300

**The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:**

September 16 - Hofman's Nursery Plant Clinic, 12491 W Lacey, Hanford, 10 am – 1 pm

September 16 – Visalia Farmers Market, NEW Location: Tulare Co. Courthouse North parking lot

September 21 - Kings Co. Resource Fair, Hanford Civic Auditorium, 5-7 pm

September 28 – Hanford Farmer's Market, 219 W. Lacey, Hanford, 5:30 – 9 pm

**Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:**

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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