

Texas Master Gardener Association

MULTIMEDIA AWARD

Association Membership: Medium
(Small, Medium, or Large)

County: Hood
Address: 200 N Gordon, Rm 22
City: Granbury, Texas Zip Code: 76048
Phone: (817) 579-3280 Fax (817) 579-0396 e-mail m-vahlenkamp@tamu.edu

Multimedia Title: Hood County Master Gardeners.org

Brief description of Multimedia entry: (150 words or less)

The hoodcountymastergardeners.org website was created in April 2003. It features horticultural articles and links for the public and members. The Navigation menu provides easy access to educational items such as the Garden Patch articles, Scholarship information, Gardener's Calendar, Educational Events, County Extension site, a Resource page with hyperlinks to gardening information, a Feedback form, Master Gardener information, Local Projects, our monthly newsletter with garden tips and a Members Only area. The site is easy to navigate, highly educational and informative. Pictures of plants, projects, and people enhance the web pages. The home page content is changed each month to keep information fresh. Design ideas are provided to the Webmaster by the membership, the HCMG Executive Committee and the Extension Agent. Content is determined by feedback from the public, membership, Extension Service, and horticulture trends. The Master Gardener's educational goals and objectives are always kept in mind.

Doug Richards
Name of person submitting the nomination

Signature of County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

Please answer the following questions as they relate to the entry. **Do not exceed four (4) pages of questionnaire and one (1) page of narrative in relationship to your entry!**

I. Organization and Leadership (100 points)

1. Describe the Association or Corporation organization (individual or committee) for internal and external outreach Multimedia.
The HCMGA produces two multimedia programs: The *Garden Patch*, a weekly newspaper column, and hoodcountymastergardeners.org, an educational website. Each program has been developed and implemented separately under the supervision of the HCMG Executive Committee and the Extension Agent. Each program has a chairperson who is responsible for the overall implementation including solicitation of participants, resources and feedback. The Webmaster is the chairperson of the Web Committee and the individual responsible for the operation of the website. Both multimedia programs are regularly evaluated to ensure they meet educational goals and objectives of both the HCMG program and the Cooperative Extension Service.
2. Describe how the individual, committee or group determines the Multimedia program for the calendar year.
The Executive Committee meets quarterly and determines projects that are beneficial to the community and membership. For example, based on membership and community feedback, it was determined that a website featuring garden advice and links to educational material would benefit both the public and our membership.
3. What is the involvement of the Association or Corporation leaders?
As detailed above, our officers and leaders are involved in every aspect of our website. They oversee and approve the structure, articles and links.
4. What is the involvement of the membership?
Members are very involved in making recommendations for articles and links to feature on our website. The web committee receives input from members verbally, via e-mail and by a feedback form on our home page.

5. What is the involvement of the Extension Office professional staff?
The Extension staff is instrumental in getting the web publications to the targeted audience. They provide information when needed, attend meetings, offer recommendations and are available to our association at all times. They also field telephone calls requesting horticulture information and forward them to Master Gardeners for response/action when appropriate.
6. What is the involvement of the county residents?
The calls to the Extension office from county residents are reviewed and frequently questions are the basis for determining links and articles for our website.
7. What percentage of the Multimedia program is focused internally to increase the knowledge base of the Master Gardener members?
Both multimedia endeavors benefit both the public and our members. Approximately 30% of our website content is devoted to internal use for our members. An up-to-date list of Events provides members with educational opportunities. A private "Members Only" section contains electronic forms for updating personal information and volunteer hours. Members have the ability to view up-to-date information on their volunteer hours, rosters and personal data. Gardening links enable members to quickly research horticulture information.
8. What percentage of the Multimedia program is focused on providing educational information for local residents?
Approximately 70% of our website content is devoted to educational information for local residents. Links to TAMU horticulture sites provide easy access to gardening, insects, disease, trees, shrubs, lawn, and fruit questions. The public also has access to the Educational Events, Garden Calendar, Backyard Banter and Scholarship information. Our multimedia project Garden Patch is available on our website and in the local newspaper – it is 100% educational.
9. Explain the process for selecting the subject, authors and material for Multimedia productions.
The leadership and web committees regularly review feedback from the membership and public to determine the subject matter. Research and/or assignments are delegated to members based on their expertise on specific topics.

II. Planning. (150 points)

1. What are the objectives or goals of the Multimedia program?
The key objectives are to provide the public with quick and easy resources for gardening information and to expose the public to the Master Gardening program. Our website provides a quick means of disseminating information to both the public and our membership. This information is designed to enhance their horticulture knowledge. A secondary objective for the website is to provide our members the ability to electronically update their personal information, submit volunteer hours, view their hours on line and have access to an up-to-date membership roster.
2. How do you track and document the progress of objectives or goals to determine if they are being met?
We receive feedback from the public and members. We also have a program that provides statistical data such as number of visitors and hits to our website on an hourly, daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. Information is stored in a local database. Updates are shared at monthly HCMG meetings and evaluated by the Web and Executive committees.
3. Is there a multi-year plan? (How many years?)
Due to the rapid change in technology and demographics in our county, a two-year plan has proven to be the most effective. Plans are reviewed annually and updated so that we always have a rolling two-year plan
4. Is there an annual, semi-annual or monthly planning session?
Monthly planning sessions are held to determine new content for the next month's home page. The Executive committee holds quarterly sessions to review and approve the overall web structure and content. Semi-annual sessions are held to brainstorm new ideas for content and design. Annual sessions are held to review and update our two-year plan.
5. Identify the key participants involved in the planning process?
The Executive committee, Web committee, and Webmaster are the key participants involved in the planning process for the website along with regular feedback from individual members.
6. How and from whom is final approval obtained to proceed with a Multimedia production?
The chairpersons with extensive input and supervision determine the content for multimedia productions. The Web committee submits proposals for the website to the Executive committee for final approval.
7. Describe how additional talents are sought and utilized.
All members including Interns are asked to participate and make their talents available for multimedia work. The web committee maintains a list of individuals with expertise in photography, writing, computer skills and specific plant knowledge. These individuals are utilized as needed.

8. Describe any partnerships with organizations outside of the Master Gardener Association or Corporation.
We rely on internal resources to produce and maintain the website. The local newspaper prints Garden Patch.

III. Work System (150 points)

1. How are the Association/Corporation members utilized in the Multimedia program?
Individual talents are considered and members are utilized monthly based on need.
2. How are new members or interns encouraged to participate in the Multimedia program?
All members are encouraged to participate during monthly meetings, via e-mail, phone calls and personal contact.
3. Explain how new methods, techniques and technologies are incorporated into the Multimedia program. (Give an example.)
The Webmaster regularly reviews new software and techniques that might be utilized. As a result we are now utilizing PDF files to post newsletters, rosters and volunteer hours on our website.
4. Is special training encouraged to utilize new methods, techniques or technologies? (Give an example.)
Computer based instructions are utilized to develop the webmasters knowledge. This has provided the ability to incorporate more complex Java scripts in our web pages
5. Has your Association or Corporation developed any specialized training programs? (Give an example.)
One-on-one instruction is provided to any members who request assistance learning how to surf the web. Individuals who do not have Internet access are trained on the county library computers so that they will be familiar with a specific computer and desktop.
6. Is there an award program to recognize the work of the Multimedia personnel?
During 2003 we did not have a specific award, however, individuals were given recognition on our website, in meetings and in our monthly newsletter.

IV. Critique and Review (100 points)

1. Is there a standardized procedure for review or critique? (Annual or monthly review, survey or documentation of user opinions)
The Executive committee reviews and critiques the website monthly prior to publishing the new home page. They also meet quarterly to critique the overall site. Users provide ongoing feedback via e-mail, web form, calls to the Extension office or verbally during monthly Association meetings.
2. How does the Multimedia committee determine if the publication is providing educational material?
Committee members review content to ensure that it provides information that is specific to our area. Input is also solicited from the County Extension Agent.
3. Explain how the Multimedia are critiqued or accessed to determine improvements in subject matter, authors, materials, modes or distribution of Multimedia.
The Executive committee meets quarterly and reviews the website content to ensure that it is meeting our goals and reaching our intended audience. They are consulted regularly for advice and direction.
4. What role does the membership provide for accessing the effectiveness of information intended for Master Gardener continuing education? (Internal education)
Members are surveyed for effectiveness of information provided for recertification hours. Reports are compiled to determine the number of members that take advantage of the educational opportunities.
5. What role do the community residents provide in accessing the effectiveness of information intended for the education of the general public? (External education)
Opinions are solicited from individuals and organizations that regularly access our website. Each month we send our link to individuals outside our Association and ask for their feedback.
6. Describe how the Multimedia committee determines if its Multimedia production is reaching the intended audience.
We utilize a program that provides statistical data pertaining to number of hits on our website, number of visitors and where they come from, how long they stay on our site and which pages are viewed. Data is broken down by hour, week, month and year.

V. Multimedia Entry (500 points)

1. What are the key objectives of this Multimedia?
The key objectives are to provide the public and membership with a quick, easy resource for gardening information and to expose the public to the Master Gardening program. The primary focus is to further the education and knowledge of the public as well as our members.
2. Describe the target audience for this Multimedia?
The website is directed to people interested in horticulture who want to learn more about gardening and landscaping. It is intended as a resource for information sharing for both the public and our members. The website is promoted through e-mail, inclusion in news articles, project pamphlets and the Extension Office.
3. When was this Multimedia first produced?
April 2003
4. What is the period(s) of distribution? (Once, annually, quarterly, monthly, weekly or as needed)
The website is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
5. How many copies were distributed during the Award year?
We had 5,130 visitors since the first month of operation in Apr 2003 (9 months). The number of visitors steadily increased each month. During the last 3 months of 2003 we averaged 1,000+ visitors per month.
6. What price, if any, is charged for this Multimedia production?
Free – The intended audience only needs Internet access.
7. Describe outside partners and their role in the production of this Multimedia.
We do not partner with any outside organization. We have the resources internally to publish and distribute the product without any outside assistance.
8. What is the annual budget for this Multimedia production?
\$80.00 for hosting and domain name. The Webmaster, a HCMG created and maintains the website for no charge.
9. What were the costs for this Multimedia production for this Award year?
\$80.00
10. How was the Multimedia production funded?
The production was funded through internal funds.
11. How many Master Gardeners were involved in the production of this Multimedia?
Ten Master Gardeners are key contributors. The entire membership provides feedback and assistance when needed.
12. How many volunteer hours were contributed in the production of this Multimedia.
Total volunteer hours: 340
13. Has this Multimedia production won any awards outside of your organization? (Include past TMGA awards)
This is the first year of production for the website, therefore it has not won any previous awards.

Optional – One page of Narrative.

Form Number TMGA 1-c
(Rev. 10/2003)

Narrative

MULTIMEDIA AWARD

As a result of the many questions received on the Master Gardener “Hot Line”, we recognized a need to have a consolidated resource where horticulture information could be easily located by both the membership and public. Most answers to the gardening questions may be found on the web. However, due to the massive amount and various locations, it requires considerable searching to find specific information.

We also recognized a need to streamline channels of communication within our association. Frequently membership data such as phone numbers and addresses changed. As our membership grew, we needed to continuously update our roster. Reporting volunteer hours required printing forms, collecting data from members and time-consuming data entry.

The Executive committee decided that the best way to address both the public and internal issues was through the creation of a website. The idea was presented to the membership and they unanimously approved the project. A Web Committee was formed and objectives were established. The key objective was to create an educational site for both the public and our membership. The secondary objective was to allocate space for a private membership area.

Brainstorming meetings were held to determine web content. Items for the Navigation menu were established with the following headline topics:

- Home – A link back to our Home page
- About Us – Information about our association such as officers, projects, and awards
- Backyard Banter – Our local Association newsletter
- Events – Information on local, regional and state educational events
- Texas Cooperative Extension Office – A link to Hood County Extension site
- Garden Patch – A newspaper column written by Master Gardener Phyllis Webster for the local newspaper
- Garden Calendar – Monthly garden tips
- Master Gardener Program – Information about becoming a Master Gardener
- Members Only – A private area that can only be viewed by our membership (record keeping, roster, etc.)
- Resources – Links to horticultural information with emphasis placed on TAMU sites
- Scholarship – Information and forms for applying for our local Master Gardener scholarship
- Feedback – An electronic form for submitting suggestions or garden questions

It was further decided that pages must have a professional appearance, a consistent theme throughout, and no moving objects or sounds that might distract or annoy users. Pictures and graphics are used, however, they are sized and optimized for rapid loading. The Home page would be changed each month with new information and a fresh look. Assignments were made to committee members to produce needed data for each web item.

The Executive committee, Web committee and membership worked diligently to produce all the data. After careful critique and review, hoodcountymastergardeners.org website was created and put online in April 2003. The Webmaster, a HCMG member with considerable web expertise, spearheaded this effort.

The positive feedback received from both the public and members, as well as the increased visitors to our site, have validated the value of our website. The hyperlinks and gardening information have proven to be good resources and educational tools. A side benefit is the ability of our membership to access a private area where rosters, pictures and volunteer information are stored.

The website is updated each month with a new look and fresh educational information. This keeps interest high and attracts new visitors. We now consistently average 1000+ visitors to our site each month. Since we are an association of 55 members, it is evident that the Hood County residents utilize the educational and horticultural information that we provide.