

**Texas Master Gardener Association**

**PUBLICATION AWARD**

Association Membership: Medium \_\_\_\_\_

(Small, Medium, or Large)

County: Hood \_\_\_\_\_

Address: 200 N Gordon, Rm 22 \_\_\_\_\_

City: Granbury \_\_\_\_\_, Texas Zip Code: 76048 \_\_\_\_\_

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Publication Title: **Backyard Banter** \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Description of Publication: (150 words or less)

The *Backyard Banter* is the HCMGA monthly educational and informative newsletter targeted to our members. Content includes a comprehensive review of monthly gardening tasks, the President's Message and information on Recertification opportunities as well as upcoming educational speakers at our monthly meetings. To provide the public access to the information in our newsletter, the *Backyard Banter* is posted monthly on our web site, [www.hoodcountymastergardeners.org](http://www.hoodcountymastergardeners.org). The gardening tasks are also incorporated into the web site in calendar format. At first, the newsletter was intended for internal use by our members. However, with the launch of the web site, we have broadened the content of *Backyard Banter* to include educational information that is useful to the public as well.

Karen Bitnar \_\_\_\_\_

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 publications.

The Executive Committee discusses and votes on all publication projects. The projects are then carried to the membership for a vote. A project chairman and a committee are appointed to do the work on the projects. Janet Sue Burns is chairman/editor for *Backyard Banter*.

2. Describe how the individual, committee or group determines the publications program for the calendar year.  
The Executive Committee determines the publication program each year by examining the needs of members and community. At times, a member will work independently to finalize a publication concept with input from the project chairman. The concept is then brought to the Executive Committee and later to the membership for discussion and vote. With an established publication such as the newsletter, the Executive Committee reviews content, design and effectiveness.

3. What is the involvement of the Association or Corporation leaders?  
Our Association leaders comprise the Executive Committee. They propose the subject matter for publications and offer feedback and support to members working on them. The President provides a monthly column and gardening tips for *Backyard Banter*. Other leaders contribute articles as needed.

4. What is the involvement of the membership?  
The membership votes to accept or deny publications as projects and give valuable feedback, tips, suggestions and evaluations. At times the members are asked to help on specific tasks regarding a publication like *Backyard Banter*, such as writing, editing or contributing photos. They also answer questionnaires regarding the content of publications and give written evaluations.

5. What is the involvement of the Extension Office professional staff?  
The Extension staff is instrumental in distributing our publications. They make copies and track phone calls. By giving feedback and offering suggestions to improve publications, they are very helpful.
6. What is the involvement of the county residents?  
All of our publications are readily available to the county residents and their input regarding content is encouraged either by phone call or e-mail. Copies of the Habitat for Humanity Handbook *Educating through Sharing* are kept at the Extension Office. The *Backyard Banter* is posted on the web site, available for all to read via the Internet. It is also distributed to our members by e-mail and postal service.
7. What percentage of the Publications program is focused internally to increase the knowledge base of the Master Gardener members?  
About 10 % is focused internally for our members' use.
8. What percentage of the Publications program is focused on providing educational information for local residents?  
About 90 % of our publications are for the education of county residents.
9. Explain the process for selecting authors and material for publication.  
Once a publication is accepted as a project, a committee that is comprised of our members who are most knowledgeable in the subject area is formed. Materials are collected from our library and the Internet. Committee members write the material included in the publications. The content may be reviewed by the members before finalizing.

## **II. Planning (150 points)**

1. What are the objectives or goals of the Publications program?  
Our goal is to educate and inform the community about the Master Gardener Program, its activities, the role of the Extension Office and gardening in general.
2. How do you track and document the progress of objectives or goals to determine if they are being met?  
We track the progress of educational goals through feedback received by the Extension Office and individual members. We also utilize a "hit" counter on the web site to assess the number of visitors to individual pages contained there. We track the number of handouts processed by the Extension Office.
3. Is there a multi-year plan? (How many years?)  
The *Backyard Banter* is ongoing and has been in production for 8 years. Other publications are planned and produced according to need.
4. Is there an annual, semi-annual or monthly planning session?  
Publications are discussed at monthly Association and Executive meetings. Committees hold ongoing planning, evaluation and general discussion meetings.
5. Identify the key participants involved in the planning process?  
The Executive Committee selects the subject matter, appoints a knowledgeable committee to research/write/produce publications and is available for editing and critiquing the final project. All members have input. The President keeps all members informed.
6. How and from whom is final approval obtained to proceed with a publication?  
Final approval comes from a vote of our HCMGA membership after receiving information from the Executive Committee or an individual. The Extension Agent is also asked for input.
7. Describe how additional talents are sought and utilized.  
Members are asked to fill out questionnaires to offer suggestions, ideas etc. Members are asked for information and photos and are asked to do research on topics to be included in the publications. We utilize all the special talents of our members to help in the production of publications.
8. Describe any partnerships with organizations outside of the Master Gardener Association or Corporation for Publications.  
We produce *Backyard Banter* entirely in house.

### III. Work System (150 points)

1. How are the Association/Corporation members utilized in the Publications program?  
Members are encouraged to share ideas, do research, provide photos, write or edit, join committees and give feedback.
2. How are new members or interns encouraged to participate in the Publications program?  
Interns and new members are asked to participate in the same manner as long-term members.
3. Explain how new methods, techniques and technologies are incorporated into the Publications Program. (Give an example.)  
We always look for new, innovative ways to improve our publications. For example, we achieved a huge goal in 2003 with the launch of our web site — most of the information contained in our publications is readily available there. Computers are utilized for both web and traditional design purposes. The *Backyard Banter* is 100 % electronically produced and is distributed via e-mail and the web site to all members with Internet access.
4. Is special training encouraged to utilize new methods, techniques or technologies? (Give an Example.)  
We encourage computer use to strengthen our communications abilities. Our web master conducts meetings to obtain ideas for the web site and instructs members in use of the web site.
5. Has your Association or Corporation developed any specialized training programs? (Give an example.)  
We have limited computer training available to aid members in using our web site. The Extension Office staff provides training on the computers as well as the audio-visual equipment and power point presentations.
6. Is there an award program to recognize the work of the Publications personnel?  
The County holds an annual Recognition dinner. Members participate in the TXMGA State Awards program.

### 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)  
Information is shared at monthly Association meetings. Reviews are also done by surveys. Project chairpersons and committee members review this feedback and make recommendations for any changes.
2. How does the Publications committee determine if the publication is providing educational material?  
The publication Committee asks for feedback from target audiences to determine if publications meet goals for specific groups. For example, the Habitat for Humanity Handbook reaches a specific targeted group and its content is 100% horticulture education. The *Backyard Banter* was expanded in 2003 to include garden tasks and tips, continuing education opportunities and information on monthly speakers in an effort to provide additional educational material to our members and the community. Educational effectiveness is informally evaluated on a project-by-project basis.
3. Explain how publications are critiqued or accessed to determine improvements in subject matter, authors or distribution of published material.  
All publications are discussed at Executive and project committee meetings for the purpose of making improvements. Members are asked for comments via survey, in person, by phone and e-mail.
4. What role does the membership provide for accessing the effectiveness of information intended for Master Gardener continuing education? (Internal education)  
Educational content on *Backyard Banter* is evaluated informally in monthly discussions and by input via the web site.
5. What role do the community residents provide in accessing the effectiveness of information intended for the education of the general public? (External education)  
Residents ask questions/give feedback via the Extension Office, HCMGA members and the web site.
6. Describe how the Publication committee determines if its publication is reaching the intended audience.  
The newsletter is sent to all members every month and is posted on our web site. We use a web based 'hit' counter and feedback option to determine the newsletter audience.

**V. Publication. (500 points)**

1. What are the key objectives of the publications?  
The key objective is to provide educational material to the public and HCMGA members.
2. Describe the target audience for the publication?  
This publication targets HCMGA members and the gardening public in the North Central Texas Region.
3. When was it first published?  
It was first published in 1997. It was first published via e-mail in 2002 and by web in 2003.
4. What is the period(s) of publication? (Once, annually, quarterly, monthly, weekly or as needed)  
It is published monthly.
5. How many copies were distributed in this Award year?  
660 copies were distributed to members and there were 9,000 visitors to our web site.
6. Describe outside partners and their role in the production of this publication.  
We have none.
7. What price, if any, is charged per item?  
The *Backyard Banter* is free.
8. What is the annual budget for this publication?  
The budget is \$150.00.
9. What were the costs for this Award year for this publication?  
The costs for 2003 were \$123.77.
10. How was this publication funded?  
By HCMGA funds.
11. How many Master Gardeners were involved in the production of this publication?  
Four members were involved.
12. How many volunteer hours were contributed in the production of this publication?  
HCMGA members contributed 97.5 hours on this publication.
13. Has this publication won any awards outside of your organization? (Include past TMGA awards.)  
The *Backyard Banter* has won prior TMGA awards, but its redesign, change of content and its availability on the web site are new this year.

**Optional – One (1) page of narrative.**

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

***Narrative***

*Backyard Banter* was first published in 1997 and was originally intended for HCMGA members only. In 2003, HCMGA President Karen Bitnar expanded the educational content of the newsletter. Educational opportunities and gardening tasks and tips were included on a monthly basis. By adding *Backyard Banter* to the HCMGA web site, it is now available to the public.

Extensive research was required to obtain the educational information presented in the *Banter*. Research was done utilizing the Internet, gardening books in our library and Texas A&M publications.