

**Texas Master Gardener Association
ASSOCIATION AWARD**

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

Date: Jan 20, 2006

County: Hood
Address: 200 N Gordon Rm. 22
City: Granbury, Texas Zip Code: 76048
Phone: (817) 579-3280 Fax: (817) 817-408-2533 e-mail: m-vahlenkamp@tamu.edu

Association Name: **Hood County Master Gardeners**

Brief Description of Association Entry: (150 words or less)

Our primary goal was to develop programs and projects that provided the most educational and useful value to residents of our county. Important horticulture issues were identified and we developed the following:

- Demonstration Garden
- Speaker's Bureau
- Fall Garden Fair, Field Trips
- Farm Safety
- Landscape Seminar
- Master Garden Tour
- Horticulture-Type Scholarship
- Landscaping for the Chamber of Commerce, Courthouse, County Annex, Justice Center and LaRoe Park

We also added several educational communication elements:

- Garden Patch, a weekly garden column with color pictures in the local newspaper (20,000 readers).
- Backyard Banter, a monthly newsletter containing horticultural articles.
- Spring and Summer Plant Book for gardeners.
- Utilized the educational web site (28,303 visitors per year).
- Developed an individualized plant handbook for each Habitat for Humanity homeowner.
- Our volunteers educated 3,986 individuals through home visits, phone calls and public events.

Doug Richards
Signature of person submitting the nomination

Marty Vahlenkamp
Signature of County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

Please answer the following questions as they relate to this entry. **Do not exceed the five (5) pages of the questionnaire. Note: Please submit a group photo of membership if available.**

I. Organization and Leadership (200 points)

1. What is the leadership structure of the Association or Corporation?

Annual elections fill the positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. The Executive Board is comprised of the elected officers and the County Extension agent. The Executive Board and membership approve all chairpersons, projects and budgets.

2. How does the leadership set and communicate goals?

The Executive Board establishes a yearly plan and holds quarterly meetings to review the progress of our goals. Goals are communicated to the membership at our monthly meeting, via e-mail, our web site and frequent phone conversations.

3. How do the leaders solicit input/ideas from the membership?

Ideas are solicited via one-on-one discussion, meetings, written surveys, e-mail and web site feedback forms. We encourage open two-way communications by listening to our membership. All ideas are openly discussed, with respect, and are considered as a possible means of educating our community. As a result, members freely make suggestions and provide valuable feedback regarding proposed plans.

4. How do the officers inspire members to support and participate in programs or projects?

Positive motivation is used to inspire support and participation. We lend guidance, support and always present a positive attitude. Individuals are recognized for their accomplishments and receive special awards. However, we have found that a sincere thank you for accomplishments and contributions is one of the best motivators. We work very hard to make everyone feel that their contributions are important. The key to our success is just plain good communications.

5. What percentage of the membership participates in programs or projects?

We enjoyed 100% participation by our membership in one or more projects.

6. Describe how the Association or Corporation addresses the needs of the county residents.

We address residents' needs through news articles, home visits, web site feedback and informational links, Speakers Bureau, Seminars, and our weekly garden column, which is published in the newspaper. Questions posed to the Extension staff are relayed to a Master Gardener for response. When necessary, Master Gardeners visit in the community to give first hand experience to the problem or situation. Through this feedback, we develop programs and projects for county residents. The Extension agent publicizes our projects and garden tips on his weekly Radio/TV show. The public is invited to our monthly meetings, which always includes educational programs.

7. Describe partnerships with other organizations. (i.e., city, county, non-profit, or profit)

We collaborate with other agencies and organizations to help educate the public with sound, useful horticulture information. Many of our business partners contribute to specific projects and assist in publicizing our projects. We provided landscape design and plant selection for the Granbury Beautification Counsel, the County Courthouse, the Chamber of Commerce and the County Courthouse Annex.. We also designed an educational demonstration landscape for the new County Courts Building. The local newspaper publishes frequent press releases regarding upcoming educational seminars and programs.

8. Explain the procedure for yearly certification of members.

We maintain a database that stores volunteer and advanced training hours. Guidelines are established on the type of hours that may be counted. A minimum number of hours are established that corresponds with Texas Master Gardener Association guidelines. Re-certification certificates are presented annually to qualifying members.

9. How are volunteer hour kept?

Hours are reported to the timekeeper via the Internet. Hours are automatically imported directly into a database. Each member has a private location on the Internet where they can view their accumulated volunteer hours and continuing educational hours.

II. Planning (150 points)

1. Is there a multi-year plan of objectives or goals? If yes, please describe.

Each year we establish goals for our organization. Accomplishments from previous years are evaluated and new projects considered. Our primary goal is always education for both our members and the public. Due to the ever-changing environment, we have found that a two-year plan is best suited for our organization.

2. Is there a regularly scheduled planning session(s) for the programs or projects to achieve the objectives or goals? If yes, how often or when, and who attends the planning session(s)?

The Executive Board hosts an annual meeting to plan, evaluate and approve all projects. All members are encouraged to attend this planning session. Follow-up quarterly meetings are held to evaluate our progress toward reaching our goals. Individual project committees meet as needed to plan and evaluate their projects. The President attends most committee meetings and the Extension agent is available to provide guidance and direction. All our projects and programs are a team effort.

3. How does the planning process consider the needs of the county residents/communities?

We solicit and review feedback from the public and our membership. We work closely with the Chamber of Commerce, Visitors Bureau, civic organizations, county officials and our Extension agent to determine the current, as well as, future horticultural needs of the community. All calls to the Extension office and questions received via our web site are evaluated to determine the needs of the public.

4. Describe how specific portions of the community are targeted. (i.e., children, senior citizens, handicapped, minorities, socio-economically challenged.)

We participate in youth educational programs such as the 4-H program, Livestock Fair and Farm Safety Day. 4-H students are invited to speak at our meeting. We encourage and assist senior citizens and the handicapped to participate in, and enjoy our expertise at the Fruit and Vegetable Show, Pecan Show, Seminars, Speakers Bureau and the Fall Garden Fair. A tree is planted at each Habitat for Humanity home and each new homeowner receives our garden guide designed specifically to identify plants that grow in their yard.

5. Describe any ability and process of the Association to respond to seasonal or emerging educational needs of the county residents/communities.

The **Garden Patch** newspaper column and our web site are our most prominent ways of addressing seasonal gardening issues to the most people. Calls to the Extension office are referred to Master Gardeners who work with individuals to address their problem and maximize positive results. Frequent trips are made to homeowners' residences to diagnosis problems and educate them on good horticultural practices. Seasonal to-do lists are published on our web site identifying monthly seasonal tasks to perform. Our web site also has many informational links to help identify problems and provide remedies.

6. Describe how the individual talents and resources of the Master Gardeners are considered and/or utilized during planning?

We survey members to determine their specialties, talents and abilities. Leaders use this data to consider new project opportunities or to design a new project to fit some member's unique talents. We consider the special talents of each member and encourage them to attend planning sessions. We appointed mentors to assist and encourage interns to become involved by attending planning sessions and workdays. Mentors help guide interns toward projects where their talents can be best utilized.

7. Are outside partnerships utilized during planning? If yes, how?

Partners who have been supportive in the past, either for funds, supplies, or other assistance are considered in planning. Depending on the project, we invite applicable partners to our planning and project meetings to ensure we receive on-going feedback on our plans.

III. Evaluation, Promotion and Community Awareness of Programs and Projects (200 points)

1. Describe any evaluation or review process to determine the progress and impact of programs or projects, specifically regarding the objectives of the program, project, Association, and/or Extension.

The Executive Board meets quarterly to analyze all ongoing activities. Individual committees meet frequently to review their project. Project reports are given at our monthly meeting and input is solicited from our members. When we partner with another organization, the partner is included in project meetings and evaluations. Each completed project is reviewed to determine strong points and areas for improvement. We also do surveys at all public events, which are reviewed by the Extension agent.

2. What role does the membership play in evaluating or reviewing programs or projects for the Master Gardeners program?

Reports are given at each monthly meeting and feedback is solicited from the membership. We are fortunate to have a membership that openly participates in the review and critique of our projects. We receive constructive as well as positive feedback. Our membership views all programs as a team effort and is always eager to find ways to improve.

3. What role does Extension personnel play in evaluating or reviewing programs or projects for the Master Gardeners program?

The Extension agent is very involved in all projects. He attends planning sessions, reviews all programs prior to implementation and offers his expertise to help us achieve our goals. He stresses that we are educators and encourages us to expend our time and energy on educational programs. He actively participates in projects by providing exhibits and giving educational talks. He also creates and reviews survey forms that help us determine the effectiveness of programs and projects.

4. Do local residents play a role in evaluating programs or projects for the Master Gardeners program? If yes, describe the methods utilized to assess resident satisfaction with the programs or projects; and how resident responses are utilized.

Yes. We solicit feedback from residents who attend public programs or projects. We also ask questions and ask for feedback by survey form, telephone, e-mail or web site. If an organization partners with us on a project, we include them in the assessment process.

5. Describe any use of mass media for evaluation, promote, or increase community awareness of Master Gardener programs or projects.

Our web site had 28,303 visitors this year. Visitors frequently request information, as well as give us feedback. We receive very valuable feedback from our follow-up with these individuals. This also gives us an opportunity to survey them for needed programs. The weekly **Garden Patch** news column with a circulation of 20,000+ readers also generates phone calls and questions. The Hood County newspaper is extremely helpful in promoting programs and runs several Master Gardener feature articles each month. Our Extension agent utilizes his weekly radio and television shows to promote our programs and services. Radio Station KPIR targets 25 to 84 year old people in Hood, Parker, Somervell, and Johnson Counties. This radio program helps us to reach a large audience that we might not otherwise reach. The television program on Channel 7 has 30,000 viewers and is live on the internet. Both of these programs enable us to provide sound horticultural information to both answer questions and meet the horticultural needs of our listening and viewing public. Many of our members participate in the Speakers Bureau. This gives us many opportunities with diverse organizations to increase public awareness of water conservation, composting, Firewise Landscaping and good horticultural practices.

6. Describe any events for individuals or groups to evaluate, promote or increase awareness of Master Gardener programs and projects.

Non-profit organizations and elected county officials attend the annual Extension Program Counsel Recognition dinner. Leaders are recognized and projects highlighted. We also send monthly emails to Non-Master Gardeners soliciting their feedback. Our Garden Tour, Educational Seminar and Fall Plant Fair attract a large audience. All public events and speaking engagements include evaluation surveys.

IV. Educational Programs and Projects (300 Points)

1. List On-going Programs and Projects of the County Master Gardener program.

The Demonstration Garden, Courthouse & Annex landscape, Justice Center landscape, Chamber of Commerce, **Habitat for Humanity Handbook**, **Backyard Banter** newsletter, **Garden Patch** column for the newspaper, 4H Farm Safety, Hood County Pecan Show, Fall Garden Fair, Fruit and Vegetable Show, Speakers Bureau, Plants for Hood County book and our Outreach program. We also offer a generous scholarship for students interested in pursuing a degree in a horticultural related field.

2. List any New Programs and Projects.

Educational field trips, Master Gardener of the Month, Educational Seminar, **Spring and Summer Favorites** plant book. La Roe Park landscaping, landscaping for new county court building, Emeritus status, Master Gardener of the year and a new expanded format for our web site to include more educational events.

3. List any Community Partners and the Programs or Projects with which they are associated.

Hood County News, Chamber of Commerce, Silver Creek Materials, Granbury Beautification Counsel, local garden clubs, Tarleton State University, Extension Program Council, Extension Horticulture Committee, Convention and Visitor's Bureau, County Commissioners, Arrow Feed & Ranch, Accent Rock & Landscape Material, Architectural Landscape & Design, The Cutting Edge, Wal-Mart, Stuart Nursery, Turfgrass America, Martin's Business Supply, Texas Bank, Community Bank, Liberty Bank and Texas State Forestry Service are all our Community Partners in one or more ways. Many provide us with various forms of advertising and/or public relations to get our messages about our projects out to the residents of our community. Some act as sponsors for our projects, contributing \$250.00 or more. This money is normally used to help pay the expenses of the project and help fund our scholarship program. Many give us discounts on materials or supplies that we need to use in our different projects. One of the banks matches our funds for our Habitat for Humanity Project. Some are helpful in identifying the horticultural needs of our community, and after these needs are met, are helpful in the evaluation process. Since the Master Gardeners strive to meet the horticultural needs of the community, we work with all of these Community Partners to determine, and then, in some way, resolve these needs.

4. How are the leaders or chairpersons of Programs and Projects selected?

Interest is solicited from the membership. The Executive Board selects individuals based on their expertise and leadership ability

5. Describe any special training programs developed, presented, or attended for Master Gardeners to assist with programs and projects.

We offer training on the computer, Word, Excel, PowerPoint and projection equipment. Members attend specialist training and seminars sponsored by the Texas Master Gardeners and Master Gardeners of other counties. We host a mentor training program for all members that will be paired with new Master Gardener interns.

6. How are new members and interns integrated into existing programs and projects?

All interns and new members are matched with a mentor to answer questions, involve them in projects and help them to complete their volunteer hours.

7. What percentage of Master Gardeners participated in the programs and projects?

We enjoyed 100% participation by our membership in one or more projects.

8. What was the total number of volunteer hours contributed by the Master Gardeners for the Award Year?

8,385 total volunteer hours were contributed or 140 average per member.

9. Describe the best educational program or project for the community (external).

Our Garden Tour was our best educational program. The Garden Tour not only provided an opportunity to visit beautiful sprawling gardens, but also an opportunity to learn about landscaping, plant selection and soil preparation. Each garden selected to be visited on the tour visually educated those attending, showing unique features that could be utilized in this area. A handout containing information on each garden provided plant information. Visitors were assigned a personal tour guide who explained detailed information about each plant that they view as they stroll through the garden. Artists painting in each garden gave visitors the opportunity to see how color fits in the landscape. We also held demonstrations on rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation. The tour and demonstrations proved exceptionally popular with local residents as well as Master Gardeners. Our overall attendance was 590 garden enthusiasts. Feedback was extremely positive.

10. Describe the Abest® educational program or project for Master Gardeners (internal).

Members requested more in-depth educational programs. Therefore, we designed monthly programs dealing with topics of interest. The most popular program was "Native Landscaping." A landscape architect was the featured speaker. Both our membership as well as the public attended the program. This had a positive impact on our organization. Attendance increased at future meetings and members were inspired to attend educational training programs to expand their knowledge of landscaping in our area. The program also stimulated visitors to continue attending our meetings.

V. Awards and Recognition. (150 points)

1. Is there a County Master Gardener awards program? If yes, please describe.

Yes. The award programs are:

- A fall banquet sponsored by the Extension Program Counsel recognizing the Master Gardener programs and interns who completed their volunteer hours.
- Honorary membership - awarded to individuals who make a significant contribution to our organization.
- Master Gardener of the Month
- Master Gardener of the Year
- Intern of the Year
- A Certificate of Appreciation - given to members of the community who have a positive impact on our organization
- Re-certification Certificate – given to members who complete the required volunteer and advanced training hours
- A scholarship for a horticulture student
- Name badges with attachments identifying founding members and past presidents
- 5, 10, 15 year pins – given to members who complete appropriate number of years
- Master Gardener Emeritus status

2. List any awards or recognition presented by local or state organizations for service rendered by the Association or individual Master Gardeners.

Each year we receive numerous awards from local and state organizations, such as:

- 1st place for Outstanding Association
- 1st place for Outstanding Multi Media (Web site)
- 1st place for Outstanding Publication
- 1st place for Outstanding Program
- 2nd place for Outstanding Project
- 2nd place for Outstanding Visual Art
- 3rd place for Outstanding Individual Master Gardener
- Master Gardener Week in Hood County