

**Texas Master Gardener Association  
Mass Media Award**

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

Date: Jan 20, 2006

County: Hood  
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Mass Media Piece Title: **Garden Patch**

Brief Description of Mass Media Piece: (150 words or less)

**Garden Patch** is a weekly educational horticultural column written entirely by Master Gardener Phyllis Webster for the Hood County News (HC News), a newspaper with a circulation of 20,000+, as well as an online audience. The column, which is researched and developed with the input of fellow Master Gardeners (MG) and Extension staff, seeks to answer questions, provide information and offer insights into best practices and methods for gardening/landscaping in Hood County. The content is determined by public interest, MG/Extension goals and objectives, questions received by telephone or Internet, surveys and horticultural trends. The public is invited to ask questions and seek further information by way of the published phone number and website address. The column is also available on the HCMG website. In 2005, HC News dedicated a page in their Saturday paper to horticulture, with **Garden Patch** and an accompanying photo as its centerpiece.

Phyllis Webster  
Signature of person submitting the nomination

Marty Vahlenkamp  
Signature of County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

Please answer the following questions as they relate to the entry for the Award Year. **Do not exceed two (2) pages of questionnaire.**

## I. Planning and Production (300 Points)

1. Describe the process for determining a clientele need for the mass media piece.

The Extension office handles numerous calls requesting gardening and landscape advice. Many of these calls are fielded by Hood County Master Gardeners (HCMG). It has been extrapolated that since the office fields a significant call volume, there are likely more people who have questions, but are hesitant to call. By utilizing the mass media (free of charge) HCMGs can reach more people to provide them horticultural information. HC News has the largest circulation of any media in Hood County and reaches a broad, diverse audience (including fellow MGs). The newspaper agreed to publish a horticulture column furnished by HCMG. It was published sporadically at first, but the popularity of its subject matter soon led to it becoming a weekly feature. The decision to continue and expand **Garden Patch** in 2005 was based on reader feedback, cooperation by HC News and economics — the fee received for publication of the column adds to the HCMG treasury.

2. What is the objective of the mass media piece?

The primary objective of **Garden Patch** is education. The secondary objectives include furthering the goals of MG/Extension programs and generating exposure for MGs. The column is aimed at people with basic to intermediate horticultural skills that want to learn more about gardening and landscaping. The intent is to educate people who garden for recreation and/or to produce small crops or maintain/develop personal property. In addition to delivering basic education, the column attempts to persuade people to utilize best horticulture practices, such as water conservation, use of native or adapted plants and firewise landscaping. The column's content is such that it is aligned with MG/Extension programs and often helps to meet project objectives. Column topics are chosen based on their educational merit, seasonal appropriateness and relationship to the county's environmental concerns. The **Garden Patch** additionally provides learning and sharing opportunities for fellow MGs. For example, in 2005 members contributed information to a written survey of "best plants for Hood County" and results were published in **Garden Patch**.

3. Was the mass media piece jointly sponsored by Texas Cooperative Extension and/or other organization? If yes, describe.

Yes. At the end of each column is the disclaimer, "For answers to your horticulture questions, please call the Texas Cooperative Extension, Hood County at 817-579-3280 and ask to speak to a MG or visit their website at [hoodcountymastergardeners.org](http://hoodcountymastergardeners.org)." The Extension office fields the calls and forwards them to an appropriate MG. The column is printed by the HC News. The newspaper pays a small fee to the HCMG organization for each column published.

4. How many Master Gardeners were involved in developing the mass media piece?

An individual HCMG, who is a professional writer, researches and writes each column by herself. However, she relies on other MGs to review drafts for content and asks specific members to assist her depending upon their area of gardening expertise. For example, in 2005 MG "experts" reviewed columns on topics such as water gardening, botanical names and propagation. The Extension agent, Texas Forest Service agent and others were also asked for advice. Members are regularly asked in person and by written survey to contribute ideas and to critique the column. The HCMG website manager publishes the column on the Internet.

5. Describe the roles Master Gardeners served in developing the mass media piece (i.e., author, editor, desk-top publisher, artist, talent, host, producer - no names of Master Gardeners should be mentioned).

MGs research, author, edit and photograph the column while maintaining relations with the publisher, HC News, and posting the column on the HCMG website.

6. How many Master Gardener volunteer hours were contributed in developing the mass media piece?

The column's writer/editor works 3-6 hours per week. Individuals who assist give approximately 1 hour per column. The website manager works about .5 hour per column. A total of 288 volunteer hours were recorded this year. (Not inclusive of telephone calls.)

7. Was Extension personnel or others involved in developing the mass media piece? If yes, how?

Yes. The Extension agent is asked to provide ideas, feedback and review. Extension personnel field telephone calls generated by the column and forward calls to MGs. The calls generate subject matter. The HC News editor arranges for photos if they are not supplied by HCMG. The newspaper editor and the author resolve any questions regarding publish date and content.

8. How was the accuracy of the information in the mass media piece assured/insured?

Well-respected and accredited texts and websites serve as sources for column information; with Texas A&M horticulture texts used as the general authority. Fellow MGs with specific areas of expertise are asked to advise, edit or review columns. The Extension and Texas Forest Service agents are asked to advise and to review columns. Each column is proofed by the newspaper editor, but fortunately not altered by him. Quoted or paraphrased information is referenced in each column and texts/websites are mentioned for the reader's further edification.

9. How many copies of the mass media piece were distributed, and how (i.e., multiple media outlets, circulation of newspaper, listening audience of show)?

A total of 52 entirely new columns were published in 2005 by HC News, which boasts a circulation of 20,000+. The newspaper also publishes online. The column is also available on the HCMG's web site.

10. Is this a regularly occurring mass media piece? If yes, what is the frequency (i.e., weekly, monthly)?

Yes. The column appears weekly as the centerpiece of the newspaper's Saturday horticultural page.

11. How was the development and production of the mass media piece funded?

The MG responsible for **Garden Patch** is a professional writer, but produces the column free of charge. The HC News publishes the column free of charge. In fact, the newspaper pays the HCMG organization a fee for each column. There is no cost associated with **Garden Patch**.

12. Describe any plans to revise or expand mass media piece? How would this be funded?

The column has grown from 150 words published sporadically to 600-800 words published weekly. It has become the main story on a page that's now dedicated to horticulture and published each Saturday. The column is now accompanied by a banner headline and at least one color photo. This year, the **Garden Patch** articles were even more closely aligned with MG's goals and objectives, such as promoting Firewise Landscaping and discussing educational aspects of the Garden Tour. In the future, this same type of cross-promotion and education is expected to increase. Also, the columnist will work with the newspaper's recently designated horticulture reporter to educate and inform the public about timely, pertinent subjects, such as ways to conserve water in a time of drought. There are no costs associated with the production of **Garden Patch** and no funding needs are anticipated.

13. Describe any evaluation process for the mass media piece and/or impact of the mass media piece on meeting its intended objective?

Each year, the column is critiqued by fellow MG's in a written survey. The number of additional questions fielded by MGs and the Extension office staff also measures the column's success — increased phone calls indicate that the public sees MGs and the Extension as responsible and accurate sources of horticultural information. This year, the HC News offered a byline to the column's author, a sign that they respect MGs as a reliable, credible source and trust this MG to write for their audience. The newspaper editor commented recently, "I not only want the **Garden Patch** column each week, I need it."

14. In addition to the above comments, describe any other involvement the Master Gardener organization had in developing the mass media piece?

MGs constantly query the public about their gardening interests and relay this information to each other. They also seek questions during their Speakers Bureau presentations. Questions/comments are considered as future content for **Garden Patch**.

15. Has this mass media piece won any previous TMGA awards? If yes, explain the changes that were made to this publication.

The **Garden Patch** last won an award in 2002. Since then, the column has expanded to 600-800 words published weekly on a dedicated horticulture page. The page is now produced in color accompanied by at least one photo. More important, each column is a timely, fresh article. A new column is presented each week in an effort to keep the public reading and therefore, keep the public informed and educated. Content is original, authored by a single MG to keep the tone consistent, the information accurate and the writing style professional.

## II. Mass Media Award. (700 Points)

These points are attributed to will be given to the mass media piece itself compared to all entries received in this category.