

**Texas Master Gardener Association**  
**NEWSLETTER**

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

Special Merit Program/Project/Activity Title: **Backyard Banter**

Brief Description of Newsletter: (150 words or less)

The **Backyard Banter** is a monthly newsletter, which provides Hood County Master Gardeners (HCMG) and the community with an educational horticultural document. The document contains:

- An outline of gardening tasks for the month.
- Articles inspired by calls received in the County Extension office.
- Lists of educational seminars, Master Gardener (MG) conferences, Specialist Training Classes and educational tours, which provide horticultural information for MG and the community.
- Computer tips to help in administrative tasks, communication between members and projects requiring computer knowledge.
- Special interest articles on plants, insects and environmental concerns stimulated by MG projects.
- Statistics and information on members in relation to MG's participation in community programs related to horticulture.
- Monthly MG meeting date, time, place, and educational program topic.
- Articles reporting on awarded Master Gardener efforts such as Master Gardener of the Month.

Polly Parmer  
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 newsletter.

In 1997, the Extension office was receiving a large number of calls in relation to the MG program as well as requesting gardening and landscape advice. In addition to the calls, the membership of the organization was growing. With the large volume of calls and an expanding MG program, the organization established the **Backyard Banter** to address these needs. The newsletter became an important communication tool to provide HCMG and residents of Hood County with monthly educational information, MG meetings date and project reports. In 2003, to provide the public better access to the newsletter, the **Backyard Banter** was posted on HCMG's newly developed web site. Web site visitor information and the feedback function have expanded our ability to determine areas of interest and provide a better communication link to the community.

2. What is the objective of the newsletter?

The objective of the newsletter is to inform HCMG and the community of current horticultural topics of interest, progress reports on MG projects related to horticulture and MG meeting dates, meeting time and programs. Statistical data obtained from our web site based 'hits' has shown the newsletter to be a successful tool reaching not only MGs but also the public. With this capability, timelier, specific educational information has been added to the newsletter to aid the Extension agent in education of the public on horticultural topics.

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

No

4. How many Master Gardeners were involved in developing the newsletter?

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5. Describe the roles Master Gardeners served in developing the newsletter (i.e., development, publishing, soliciting information-no names of Master Gardeners should be mentioned.)

The editor wrote articles on plant and insect of the month, addressed questions stimulated by calls to the Extension office and selected educational events of interest from the Texas Master Gardeners web site. A member researched and wrote the article on gardening tasks for the month. Information in regard to the meeting and educational program was provided by the vice president. Project committee chairmen provided articles on projects. The president provided information related to web site activity. This information indicated progress of the organization toward meeting its goal of helping the Extension agent distribute horticultural information. The web master formatted the newsletter using Microsoft Publisher. The publication was then, via email and the web site, electronically distributed to the public and all members with Internet access. The editor mailed copies to members not having access to email.

6. How many Master Gardener volunteer hours were contributed in developing the newsletter?

90 hours per year, 7.5 hours per month

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

The Extension agent was involved in providing guidance on the publication of the **Backyard Banter**. Each month discussions take place with the Extension agent, MG members, officers and the editor of the newsletter in regard to topics of interest generated by the public. The Extension agent offered suggestions for timely topics which were generated by telephone calls from the community received in the Extension office

8. How was the accuracy of the information presented in the newsletter assured/insured?

Research was required to obtain the educational information for articles in the newsletter. The Texas A&M web site and web sites referred by Texas A&M were used as the major authority. Well-respected and accredited texts suggested by Texas A&M and MG seminars were also used. After articles were researched and written, MGs knowledgeable in those areas proofed the information. The Extension office gave the final proofing before the newsletter was published.

9. Describe the format of the newsletter (i.e., single event, series, monthly, regional).

The Backyard Banter submitted for this award was one of the monthly published newsletters in 2005 for HCMGs and the community.

10. How many people received the newsletter?

The **Backyard Banter** was 100% electronically produced and distributed via email to 63 MG members and Interns. It was also placed on the HCMG's web site and linked to the Texas Master Gardener's web site for MG members and the public who have Internet access. Copies were mailed to 8 members who did not have Internet access. A copy was placed in the Extension office and the HCMG library for reproduction.

11. How was the development and implementation of the newsletter funded?

HCMG had a Garden Tour to raise revenue for projects and scholarships. An educational gardening seminar also raised revenue for community horticultural projects and scholarships. The **Backyard Banter** was written and published by volunteers. It was sent via email to 100 % of the members and by the HCMG's web to the public. Due to the method of publication, only a small amount of money was required for the publication.

12. Describe any plans to revise, expand, or continue the newsletter. How would this be funded?

- Plans are to include more educational information in regard to the MG's Speakers Bureau. This will provide the public with a broader understanding of the available information existing through the MG program. Also, due to public interest, more specific information will be included on landscaping, pruning and planting.
- In order to increase community awareness of the MG program and its purpose, plans are to increase the circulation of the newsletter by emailing city officials, civic organization, and garden clubs.
- The newsletter is a vital part of the monthly educational materials for members and the community. The size and format must be adapted to meet the needs of the content; therefore changes will periodically take place. The changes made will not require any additional funds.

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

The MG members and the community use the newsletter as a reference for meeting dates, educational programs provided, and progress of MG projects. Members were asked for comments via survey, in person, and email in regard to the impact of the newsletter. The web based 'hit' counter and feedback option was another evaluation process. These various forms of feedback show that the newsletter is a necessary informational resource for our members and the community.

14. In addition to the above comments, describe any other involvement the Master Gardener organization had in developing the newsletter.

Educational effectiveness was evaluated on a month to month basis through constant inquiries of members, officers and Extension agent. Changes were constantly made to meet the educational needs of the program.

15. Has this newsletter won any previous TMGA awards? If yes, explain the changes that were made to this program.

Yes. The newsletter added articles containing educational information stimulated by the public and MG's questions. The information added was on plants, insects, environmental problems, project reports and educational opportunities.

## II. Program/Project/Activity Award. (700 Points)

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