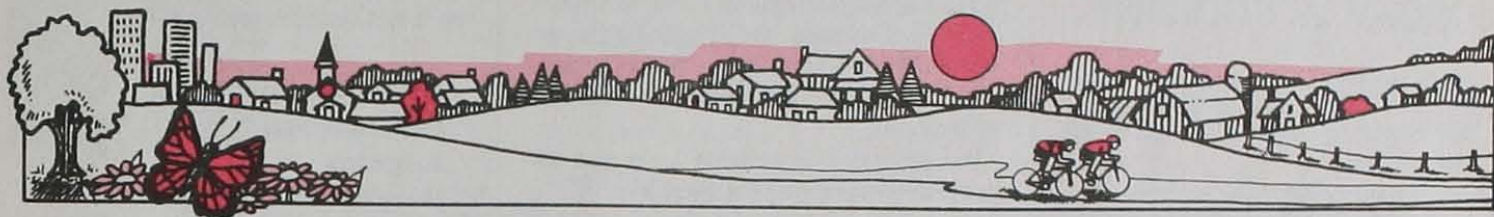


HOME & COUNTRY



Regional Profile: Western

Master Gardeners:

The Way to Grow

By Jean Crawford

A Master Gardener is a volunteer who must give at least 30 hours of gardening service a year. At least twenty must be providing advice to the public and helping gardeners solve problems. Another ten hours must be devoted to administrative work, attendance at garden related meetings and events, and preparation work in order to keep up-to-date.

To become a Master Gardener you have to attend an orientation meeting and take a test comprised of basic gardening questions. The test is prepared and marked by the University of Guelph, but given by the local Horticultural Society. Those who pass the test are interviewed by appointed Master Gardeners and the successful candidates are admitted and become Master Gardeners in Training.

Gardeners in Training take three Independent Study courses - Horticulturist I, II and III - by correspondence through the University of Guelph. The courses include books, cassettes and video tapes. Written tests are mailed in, marked and returned. Once you have successfully completed the courses and fulfilled the required volunteer commitment for two years, you have become a certified Master Gardener.

There are several ways to accomplish your volunteer requirements. You can help out at a Master Gardener booth at a fair, home show, garden centre or farmers market. Or, you can answer questions over the phone, write articles for publications, speak at meetings or participate on a Master Gardener discussion panel. The advice you give must be consistent with the latest research at the University of Guelph and you cannot promote trade marked products.

Each Master Gardener group is unique, but each is set up in a similar fashion. Locally, the program is managed by a coordinating committee, including a coordinator, a horticultural society member, a local OMAFRA contact and other volunteers. Provincially, the Master Gardener Program is managed by a steering committee composed of representatives from the Ontario Horticultural Association, the University of Guelph, Landscape Ontario, OMAFRA and Master Gardener Coordinators.

Each fall, the provincial steering committee reviews applications from horticultural societies wishing to sponsor a Master Gardener group. A minimum of 15 people should be interested and the group



Jean Crawford is pictured above with her husband, Alistaire, at their beautifully designed home garden.

should have ideas for activities needed in their community. The Rural Community Advisor in your local OMAFRA office can provide you with information and an application for the program.

As well as being a Master Gardener, Jean Crawford is President of the Mitchell Square WI in the Simcoe-Kempfenfeldt District.



The Master Gardener Program began in Washington State in 1972. Dr. David Gibby, an extension agent for horticulture, created the program in response to the overwhelming number of requests for gardening information. Volunteers were trained in horticulture to provide gardening information to the public.

Created in 1985, the Ontario Master Gardener Program is directed by a provincial steering committee and co-sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and horticultural societies.

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