



## Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

**Meeting Date:** August 28, 2012

**Prepared By/Phone Number:** David A. Salazar 854-4107

**Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head:** Sherri E. Fleming,  
County Executive for Health and Human Services and Veterans Service

**Commissioners Court Sponsor:** Judge Samuel T. Biscoe

**AGENDA LANGUAGE:**

Receive Update from Texas AgriLife Travis County on the Master Gardener Program.

**BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:**

This update provides an opportunity for the Court to remain informed regarding its partnership with the Texas A&M system and the Master Gardener program operated in Travis County.

With the hiring of a state-wide coordinator, the Texas Agricultural Extension Service made an official commitment to a state-wide Master Gardener program in 1987. Minimum state guidelines for becoming a certified Texas Master Gardener were developed for the program, including a minimum of 50 hours of formal training and 50 hours of volunteer service. The 500-page training handbook was also completed at that time.

The Texas Master Gardener Program is a volunteer development program designed to increase the availability of horticultural information and leadership to improve the quality of life through gardening and horticultural projects. The first Texas Master Gardener class was held in 1979, in Montgomery County, and drew about 25 people. The 50-hour course was taught by Extension agents and specialists from Texas A&M using a manual compiled from Extension publications and news articles.

In 1994, Travis County's Master Gardener program was started by County Extension Agent Ted Fisher, now retired. Program objectives are

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implemented through the training and "employing" of local volunteers, known as Master Gardeners.

Master Gardeners provided 99 presentations to the public, with over 3000 participants. In addition, they answered almost 1500 requests for information via phone and drop-in clients, and answered over 350 emailed requests.

As of 2010, there were almost 6,200 Texas Master Gardeners based in 88 counties throughout the State. These volunteers contributed over 500,000 hours of time and talent to the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and their volunteer service is equivalent to 247 full-time employees which translates into an economic benefit to the State in the amount of \$9.8 million.

In 2010 in Travis County, 225 volunteers, both Master Gardeners and Interns, contributed over 16,000 hours, representing a benefit to Travis County of almost \$240,000.

#### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:**

N/A

#### **ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:**

Community service and leadership are vital in educating the public on issues affecting our natural resources. Landscape irrigation in Texas accounts for 40% to 60% of the total residential water use during peak hot/dry months (June to September). Water conservation is a critically important issue for residents throughout the state of Texas. Moreover, proper use of fertilizers and other landscape chemicals is important to the long term health and safety of residents in Travis County. Finally, programs that promote reduction and recycling of landscape wastes will assist in maintaining land-fill availability. This issue is critically important in preserving and protecting our valuable natural resources.

Texas AgriLife Travis County offers an annual 14 week training program covering all of the basic horticultural topics that will help to build a foundation for future horticultural learning and those horticultural topics most enquired about in our community. In order to maintain quality, the course is kept relatively small (30 to 35 trainees per program) and is only offered once per year. This also helps to ensure that participants are interested in becoming volunteers for Extension once the training portion of the program is complete. Absences are limited and participants must pass

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a final examination in order to complete the program and become an intern Master Gardener.

Highly-trained Master Gardener volunteers aid Texas AgriLife by answering telephone/in-person/email requests for horticultural information; providing monthly horticulture seminars on currently relevant topics; establishing and maintaining demonstration gardens; working with special audiences in the community; conducting school garden projects; and designing and producing horticultural publications that are especially targeted to Central Texas Gardeners.

**FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:**

This item will not increase the County Budget.

**REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:**

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