

THE MASTER GARDENER IN GEORGIA: A BRIEF HISTORY

In the early 1970's interest in home gardening mushroomed, and County Extension offices were overwhelmed with requests for horticulture information. Washington State University Extension agents found a solution – train knowledgeable gardeners who could help them respond to the public – and in 1973 the Master Gardener program was planted in Tacoma, Washington.

Here in Georgia gardening interest was also growing. A group of Metro Atlanta Extension Agents, led by Newton Hogg of DeKalb, decided to see if the "Master Gardener" idea might take root in our state. They organized the first Georgia training with 140 students in Atlanta during the fall of 1979. The next year Savannah, Macon, and Columbus began offering Master Gardener classes and Extension Specialist Dr. Butch Ferree was assigned by UGA to help standardize instruction and develop a handbook for statewide use. To date, thousands of Georgia Master Gardeners have been trained from over 100 counties throughout the state. The idea has indeed taken root . . . comparable to kudzu!

With so many Master Gardeners popping up all over the state we began looking for means to communicate among ourselves and to continue the learning process. UGA Extension Service helped by naming Dr. Gary Wade Statewide MG Coordinator in 1984. With his help the first state Master Gardener Conference was held July 28, 1988, in Athens. The 45 people who attended begged for more such meetings. One was held at the Atlanta Botanical Garden in January '89 and another at Athens Botanical Garden in July '89.

It was then that a number of Master Gardeners, most of them from Metro Atlanta, determined to create a "Georgia Master Gardener Association" that would help us all communicate, learn, and serve the public better. As a result of their efforts, GMGA held its first official meeting on January 13, 1990, at the Atlanta Botanical Garden, where officers were elected and a Constitution & Bylaws adopted.

Now those nearly 1,100 Master Gardeners who have chosen to join the Georgia Master Gardener Association, Inc. can benefit from our bi-monthly newsletter (The Scoop), an annual educational conference plus additional day tours in various parts of the state.

GMGA proudly hosted Master Gardeners from all over the Southeastern United States and beyond at the 2000 Southeastern Region Master Gardener Conference held in Athens, GA.

Conference hosts have included: Athens, Atlanta, Augusta, Canton, Carrollton, Columbus, Dahlonega, Gainesville, Helen, Lawrenceville, Macon, Perry, Rome, Savannah, and Watkinsville.

PAST PRESIDENTS OF GMGA, INC.

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A celebration of 20 years of Master Gardening in Georgia was held at the '99 spring conference in Macon, Georgia. The 25th Anniversary Celebration was held in January 2005 at the New Perry Hotel in Perry, Georgia. The 35th Anniversary Celebration was held in Dahlonega in 2015.

(Thanks to Becky Pickett for her original history to which we added and updated--with apologies to all those movers and doers who go nameless for fear of overlooking others. You know who you are, and you have our perennial gratitude.)