Dear Prospective Master Gardener:

You have requested to be considered for a slot in the 2010 Master Gardener training program. This letter will give you a more complete look at what we would expect from you and what you can expect to get from the program. Hopefully after reading it you will still have an interest in becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer in Clay County – note you must live in Clay County to enroll through us. If you do not, you will need to contact the County Extension Office in the County you reside to enter through their program. In addition you must keep a current email address with us because this is the only way we now communicate in this program.

Clay County will be recruiting 35 people in the 2010 Training session and we will accept them on a first-to-apply, first-to-be-included basis so please complete the appropriate forms and get them back to us as soon as you make a decision to be involved. You can do this by sending it back to us by mail (Attn. MG Program, Post Office Box 278, Green Cove Springs, Florida 32043); by Fax to 904-529-9776; or as a Microsoft Word attachment to an email sent to rzerba@ufl.edu. No packets will be accepted after July 1, 2010.

For more information you can call our office at 904-269-6355, 904-284-6355, or 352-473-3711.

By way of introduction, the following information is given at this time:

The Master Gardener Volunteer will be given 54 hours of intensive training in horticulture beginning Wednesday, August 18, 2010, and continuing for nine (9) Wednesdays thereafter. These sessions will be conducted using materials prepared by the University of Florida specifically for the training of Master Gardener Volunteers by five Extension Faculty members with the University of Florida. Four of the sessions will be held at the Clay County University of Florida/IFAS Extension Center, and five at the St. Johns County University of Florida/IFAS Extension Office. There is one optional field trip to the University of Florida Campus and graduation ceremonies will be held at the St. Johns County Extension Center. Sessions will include in-depth training in the techniques of pest control on plants, pruning, fertilizing and general maintenance. The applicants selected will receive training in the care of vegetables, woody ornamentals,
lawns, interior plants and fruit trees. Graduation ceremonies (catered banquet) will be held on the evening of **Thursday, October 21, 2010**.

Upon completion of these 54 hours of instruction, the Master Gardener will begin his/her volunteer service in a pre-accepted project that supports a program thrust by Clay County’s Horticulture Agent. Under the terms of this position, the Master Gardener will have one year from the date of completion of his/her training to provide the **minimum 75 hours of volunteer service**. Before acceptance into the program, the prospective Master Gardener must agree to provide volunteer service in one of the following projects:

**Project 1 Option: Work with Florida Youth Challenge to help “at risk” youth**

At the current time, the Florida National Guard (on Camp Blanding) has a grant to help troubled youth develop learning skills using a very structured type of learning environment. Unlike a “boot camp” however, Florida Youth Challenge participants voluntarily participate in the program. Youth Challenge applicants are carefully screened, are 16-18 years old, must be a high school dropout for at least one month prior to application, must be a citizen or legal resident of the United States, resident of the state where the program is operated, must be unemployed, drug free, not on parole or probation, not indited or charged and must be free of felony convictions or capital offense. They must be physically and mentally capable of completing the program with reasonable accommodations for physical or other handicaps. Eligible youth must apply and be selected by a state-appointed committee. During this program, youth participants will receive educational instruction that will help them obtain their GED. They will also receive vocational-based instruction through the completion of a series of job training modules.

The volunteers selected for this Project will be working hands-on with those youth who have expressed interest for working in the “Green Industry.” Volunteers will assist with the completion of various Horticulture-based learning modules to include projects in Plant Propagation, Hydroponic Growing, Greenhouse & Nursery Operations, Landscape Maintenance, Vegetable Production, and/or other Horticultural tracks they may have personal interest in sharing and acceptable to the FLYCA Project Coordinator. All resources to perform this service will be provided by the Clay County School System under the Florida Youth Challenge Grant.

**Project 2 Option: Work with Bannerman Learning Center in Green Cove Springs to help “at risk” youth**

At the current time we have an on-going cooperative project with the Industrial Arts Program at Bannerman School in Green Cove Springs to develop a school-based Horticulture Demonstration site. As of this date we have installed a demonstration vegetable garden, wildlife habitat area, greenhouse, rose garden, herb garden, and a demonstration plant propagation facility for the school system on this site. The volunteers selected for this program and approved by school administration would be asked to spend two hour blocks of time every other week working through a Program Assistant and 3 to 6 youths to accomplish the assigned tasks associated with this project as directed by the Industrial Arts Instructor. All resources to perform this service will be provided by the Clay County School System or our Clay County Extension Office. We are seeking volunteers who are willing to work with a small
group of supervised teenage youth on a horticulture project in a structured environment provided by the Clay County School System.

**Project 3 Option: Work with other Master Gardeners to maintain, install, plan a Low Maintenance Demonstration Site at the Clay County Extension Center**

At the current time, our Extension Campus west of Green Cove Springs has a Demonstration Shade Garden designed to show an alternative to grass when the landscape is shady. Planted (and identified with signage) are a number of plants that will survive with greater success than turfgrass under varying levels of shade. This demonstration garden was installed in 1991 by Master Gardener Volunteers and has been maintained by them but has had little planting of new species – especially ferns and other ground covers. It will be the goal of this project to increase the number of shade loving plant types growing in the demonstration. In addition, volunteers in this project will also be asked to help implement the planting of drought tolerant species around the main building of the Extension Office to demonstrate the 9 basic principles of Florida Friendly Landscaping as outlined in the University's Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program. Direction will be given to volunteers in this project by the Extension Horticulture Agent. All materials needed will be supplied for the project out of funds already in place and dedicated to this purpose. The volunteer will not be expected to incur any cost in meeting their volunteer service hours in this project other than the expense involved with travel to the work site.

The volunteers selected for this Project will be working hands-on (for the most part) in an outdoor setting. They will be able to choose the conditions under which they wish to work (weather, time of year, type of activity) but would be expected to be able to work during normal weekday work hours, unless pre-approved for a particular activity at another time by the Horticulture Agent.

**Project 4 Option: Man a plant Information booth at various community gatherings (i.e. Farmers Market, various festivals, holiday events, etc.) throughout county**

At the current time there is a need for Extension to increase its visibility in all parts of the County. Volunteers selected for this activity will be asked to make arrangements to have an information booth representing the University of Florida at various community functions during the year. Examples of such functions would be Cary Clarke Day in Orange Park, the 4th of July Festival in Middleburg and other communities, the Memorial Day Celebration in Green Cove Springs, Arbor Day in Keystone Heights, Master Gardener Booth at Clay County Fair, etc. No volunteer will be expected to participate in all events but in fact could restrict their activities to their own community. Expected of this volunteer is help identifying suitable events to have a presence, help in setting up the display for the event, and a reasonable time volunteered in manning the booth. Everything needed to create the display (tables, chairs, bulletins, signs, reference materials, etc.) would be provided. The volunteer would be asked only to help provide a visible presence for the University of Florida throughout the county at major events/gatherings and assist in identifying the most suitable ones to be at.

**Project 5 Option: Work manning phones and responding to computer received horticultural related inquiries at the Clay County Extension Office during normal business hours**
At the current time there is a need for Extension to be more available to handle one-on-one requests for information on plants in a timelier manner. Due to the increased work load of the Horticulture Agent to meet the needs of a growing population in the county, more time is required out of the office. This means that clients with phone/on-line inquiries sometimes must wait more than a day for an answer to their questions. The volunteer selected for this project will be asked to come into the office for 4 hours every other week (8 hours per month) on either a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday (AM or PM) to be available for phone/on-line inquiries. Reference materials, access to the internet, and a private office dedicated to Master Gardener use will be provided to the volunteers selected for this project. Sufficient training and resources will be given to the volunteers to make them feel comfortable in this activity.

**Project 6 Option: Work with a dedicated teacher in or of Clay County Schools to assist in providing a horticulture experience to students in an after-school gardening/plant related activity**

At the current time, Master Gardeners are working with four schools to help provide a horticultural experience for children interested in learning more about plants. In some cases this involves working with a school garden (herb, butterfly, hay bale vegetables) and in others by participating in landscaping projects. We are hoping to continue these projects but also to increase their numbers. If the Master Gardener volunteer selected for this program has a lead to a school teacher looking for assistance in offering such opportunities, we would work with them to set-up an after school program. Last year Master Gardeners had a very successful dedicated fund-raiser that generated a small amount of funds that could be used by each school that enters into such a cooperative effort with Extension. If a Master Gardener has children already enrolled in the county school system, this would give that Master Gardener a great opportunity to be more involved with their child’s school while giving Extension’s 4-H Youth Special Interests Program a strong presence in that school – win-win for all.

**HOW TO APPLY:**

Download and complete the Application Form found at this website as well as a brief bio on yourself (where you have lived, what schools you have gone to, what activities you like to do, etc.), and return both to our office no later than July 1st. Everyone who does so will then be emailed with confirmation of receipt and asked which of three dates/times they would be willing to come in for a group interview (Wednesday, July 7 from 9:30 to 11:30 AM or from 1:30 to 3:30 PM or Wednesday, July 14 from 9:30 to 11:30 AM or from 1:30 to 3:30 PM – only one interview is necessary and this will be done in a group setting – not one on one). At this interview each person will be asked to tell why they want to become a Master Gardener in Clay County and then tell how they feel they are particularly well suited to volunteer for one of the above projects. At that time a decision will be made on their acceptance into the program. There are only 35 slots available for this year’s class so selection will go to the first 35 qualified applicants. Obviously this means it would be in your best interest to attend one of the early interview sessions. To set up an interview date call Michelle Alters (my secretary) and she will email you with the time slots and wait for you to get back to us on which of these would be convenient for you. If you know you will not be available for any of these scheduled times, please contact me at rzerba@ufl.edu
Please note: If accepted into the Master Gardener Volunteer Program, a fee of $55.00 will need to be paid by no later than August 13th, 2010 to cover the cost for supplies – this is not a tuition fee. For this money you will be provided with all reference materials needed to complete the course on a CD disk, materials needed to participate in hands-on activities, and refreshments during training break-times.

Also note: This training is offered on Wednesdays between the hours of 9:30 AM and 3:30 PM. Participants must be able to attend 7 of the 9 sessions (the campus trip and graduation ceremony/dinner are optional) to graduate. The third absence is an automatic drop from the program. Attached find a flier with the dates of all classes; subjects to be covered; and meeting sites. It is important that you make sure that you can make the commitment needed to attend these sessions. Please do not prevent someone else from being able to get into the program (because of class size limits) if you feel there is a good chance you might not be able to complete this program.

In compliance with ADA requirements, participants with special needs can be reasonably accommodated by contacting Extension Administration at least ten working days prior to the first class. We can be reached by telephone at:

Phone Nos. (904)269-6355, (904)284-6355, or (352)473-3711  
FAX: 904-529-9776  
Email - rzerba@ufl.edu

Thanks again for your interest in this important University of Florida Program.

Sincerely,

Raymond H. Zerba Jr.  
Extension Agent IV, Horticulture

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