

Sudden Oak Death! Pierce's disease! Star Thistle! Termites! Where can you go to get good information?

Master Gardeners are volunteers who have gone through many months of training through the University of California Cooperative Extension office. The training begins with soil science and botany, and extends through plant pathology and entomology. The trainees apply, are interviewed and pass a fingerprint clearance. An extensive final exam must be passed in order for the volunteers to begin to work in the community. In exchange for the training sessions, Master Gardeners work in a wide variety of approved volunteer projects throughout Contra Costa County, returning 50 hours of time for the basic training. The volunteers provide phone-in gardening advice Monday-Friday from 9-12pm. on the Master Gardener Help Line, (925) 646-6586. Free lectures on Integrated Pest Management (a complicated term for learning to use less toxic products in homes and gardens) are provided to any group that so requests. They provide advice tables in farmers markets, teach and demonstrate best gardening practices in community and school gardens, maintain a website and write weekly gardening articles for the local newspaper. After the initial training is completed, the local cooperative extension office continues to provide advanced training sessions that probe into horticultural issues in more depth. UC specialists and advisors bring their skills and knowledge to the volunteers, along with local experts. Master Gardeners take the best and most current research that pertains to gardening and landscaping and make that information available to the general public at no cost.