

Life in the Garden

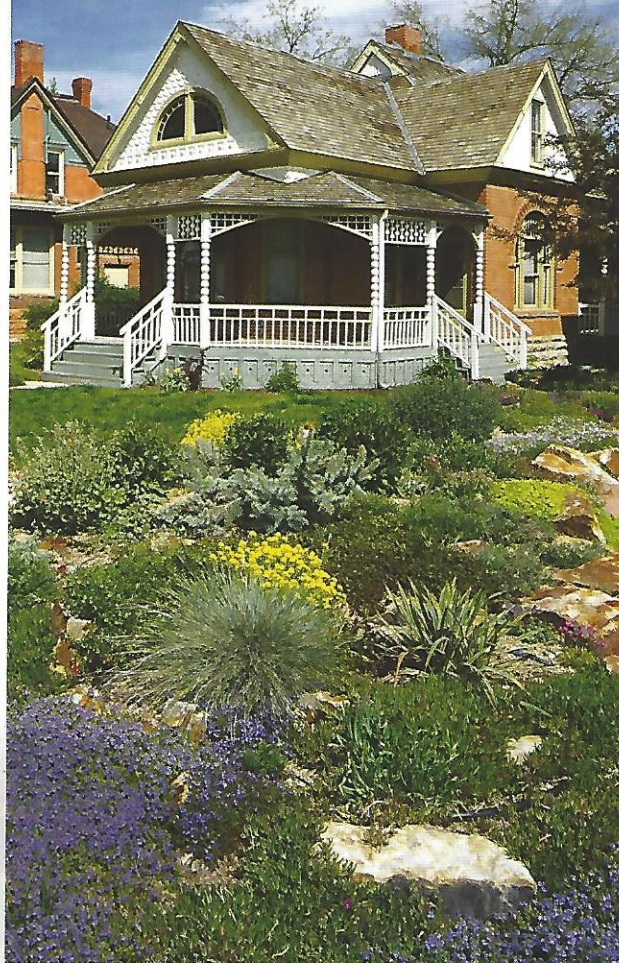
■ by Tyler Curtis

How does your garden grow? This question, a line from a child's nursery rhyme, could be posed to anyone who tends a garden—and each answer would be unique. Gardening is a favorite hobby for many people and often requires meticulous designing and planning. To garden successfully, one must be patient and nurturing, and open to learning throughout the process.

A MASTER GARDENER is someone who is trained in the science and art of gardening. These individuals pass on the information they learned during their training, as volunteers who advise and educate the public on gardening and horticulture.

According to the 2009 Extension Master Gardener Survey, there are nearly 95,000 active Extension Master Gardeners in the United States, who provide approximately 5,000,000 volunteer service hours per year to their communities. Once volunteers are accepted into a Master Gardener program, they are trained by cooperative extension, university, and local industry specialists in subjects such as taxonomy, plant pathology, soil health, entomology, cultural growing requirements, sustainable gardening, nuisance wildlife management, and integrated pest management.

Locally, that training is offered through the University of Wisconsin—Extension. To become certified, Master Gardeners must complete the Level 1 Training course, pass the Level 1 exam, and complete and report a minimum of 24 hours of approved volunteer service during their first year in the program. To maintain certification, a minimum number of hours of continuing education (10 hours) and volunteer service (24 hours) must be completed annually. Master Gardener Volunteer Level 1 Training is held September through December each year. For more information or to be put on the mailing list for the next Level 1 Training, call 414-256-4672 or email Elizabeth.vokac@ces.uwex.edu



Just as each garden is designed differently, so, too, is the experience of a Master Gardener. Ana Maria Tolentino grew up in Wauwatosa, but now claims Colorado as her home. Ana shares her passion for gardening with everyone she knows.

When did you earn your Master Gardener certification?

Ana: I earned my Master Community Gardener certificate in 2013 through Denver Urban Gardens. It was a 13-week training program with 30 hours of community service. Since becoming a Master Community Gardener, I have continued to teach classes on different organic gardening topics, such as pest management, building a donation garden, companion planting, and water conservation in the garden. Last summer, I was the keynote speaker at the American Community Garden Association's national meeting in building a community donation garden. And this summer, I presented for the Denver Urban Gardens' leadership conference on the same topic. Most recently, I have been working with the golf course next to my community garden and

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the horticulturalist of the Denver golf courses to put in a large community donation garden on the side of the golf course. They broke ground three weeks ago and it's going to provide thousands of pounds of food to Project Angel Heart in a local food pantry.

What motivated you to pursue this program?

Ana: I was a leader in my community garden for about five years when I heard about

the Master Community Gardener program. It was sponsored by Denver Urban Gardens (DUG), the umbrella organization for Rosedale Community Garden, where I've gardened since 1999. I knew many of the staff members at DUG from my leadership work at Rosedale and I decided to apply. I was very excited about learning more about organic gardening and about working with community gardens. I was ready to expand my horizons and was fortunate to have been accepted.

What is your favorite part of gardening?

Ana: I am very interested in all aspects of gardening and learning new things. I started a blog—Ana's Garden Karma—in which I write about gardening topics, events, places I visit, cooking, canning, etc. What I like most about gardening is how I can share my knowledge and enthusiasm to teach others about gardening and how to share the wealth. I enjoy growing food to share, teaching others how to preserve their harvest, teaching children how to garden, and encouraging others to grow extra to bring to the food pantry.

What is the most gratifying part of your volunteer work?

Ana: It is the sharing of knowledge and how it can positively impact new gardeners and their ability to grow food successfully for themselves and others. Additionally, I really love the exchange of ideas, stories, and experiences with other gardeners. I'll be the first to admit that I have so much to learn and always come away with new ideas and information when I teach a class.

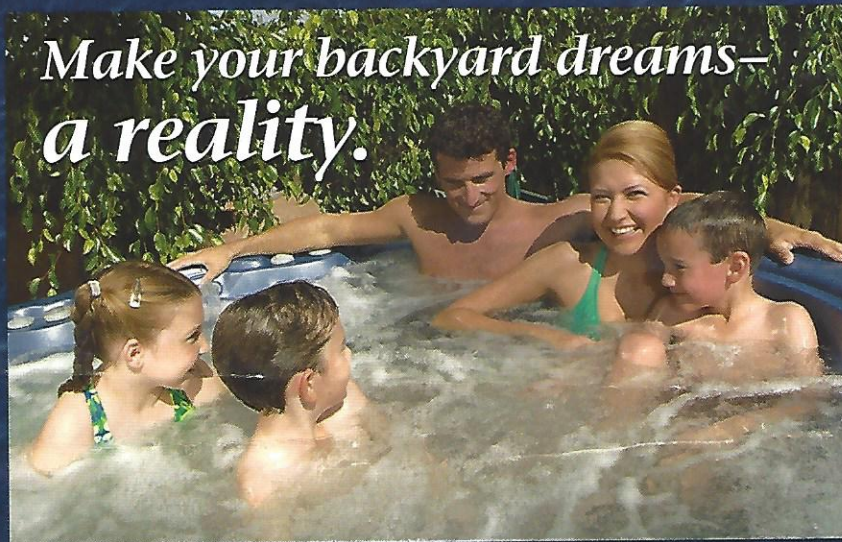
Is there one particular project you worked on that makes you the most proud?

Ana: Aside from eventually learning how to have a productive garden in arid Colorado, I am especially proud of being able to put my expertise and organizing talents toward building and maintaining a large donation garden at my church. Last year, I submitted a proposal to build a large garden (60 X 30 foot plot) in the back of the church for the purpose of growing organic food to donate to a food bank the church supports. My proposal was accepted and I received a grant of \$1,000. With a crew of 10 volunteers, including my family, we broke ground on May 24, 2015. We built eight raised beds and plowed the rest of the land. By early July, we started harvesting 10-30 pounds a week through the end of October. A bountiful success. We are in our second year and have expanded to include several community plots. We just finished planting in late June. It's going to be another banner year!

Inspired by Ana's passion for gardening and giving back to her community? Visit her blog and read her stories of success in the garden, <https://anaincolorado.wordpress.com/>

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