

## Find Out What Master Gardeners Do

By Susan Camp

At the Gloucester Extension Master Gardeners' May meeting, Bob Beyea reported that we have been offered the opportunity to spend Saturday, June 28<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Brent and Becky's Bulbs to let community members know exactly what we do; also, it is time to sign up for the 2025 Extension Master Gardener class, and we want you to enroll.

When I reread a column that I had written in 2017 about what Master Gardeners do, I was amazed at how much has changed since that time, when most of the Master Gardeners were retirees.

In most states, the land-grant universities— in the Commonwealth, they are Virginia Tech and Virginia State— administer Cooperative Extensions that offer outreach programs to local communities. Since 1972, Master Gardener programs have been developed in at least 48 states to provide science-based education to home gardeners.

In 2025, Gloucester Extension Master Gardener trainees will complete a 14-week virtual course with several hands-on experiences and a 50-hour internship during the first year. Twenty volunteer hours and eight continuing education hours are required annually to maintain active Master Gardener status. The move to an online program, necessitated by the pandemic, but discussed prior to that time period, has proved instrumental in opening up the Master Gardener program to younger people who are still in the workforce.

Each local Master Gardener unit develops programs to fulfill community needs and provide specific services. Programs are approved by Virginia Cooperative Extension and reviewed annually. Some programs are more visible than others; the "Gardening Corner" column, for example, is published almost every week in the Gazette-Journal. The purpose of the column is to provide educational information and resources on home gardening and environmental issues to readers.

Another program in the public eye includes Master Gardener-guided tours of the gardens at Brent and Becky's Bulbs and their home gardens during the Daffodil Festival.

Master Gardener interns are actively involved in maintaining two learning gardens, which include raised vegetable beds at Woodville Park and a pollinator garden at Beaverdam Park.

If you have a gardening question or problem, you can call the Gloucester Extension Office at (804) 693-2606, and a Master Gardener will respond, often the same day, to offer science-based information, or even make a home visit to inspect for and diagnose problems concerning soil, flowers, fruits, vegetables, and trees. Several Master Gardeners have completed the Tree Steward course, an advanced Master Gardener program, to expand the resources and knowledge we have to offer.

“Master Gardeners Present” is a free lecture series on a variety of topics, offered on the third Saturday of each month at Brent and Becky’s Bulbs.

Other projects include visits to a local convalescent center to provide opportunities for residents to enjoy gardening activities; the Ready, Set, Grow program to teach 5<sup>th</sup> graders about photosynthesis; and Gateway to Gloucester, with colorful seasonal decorations at the Coleman Bridge.

Our book, “Home Gardening in Gloucester,” written by Gloucester Master Gardeners and last updated in 2021, is available for free download on our website. The material is written specifically for the Middle Peninsula climate and environment.

Our big event is the Annual Plant Extravaganza every September. Master Gardeners spend the spring and summer gathering, growing, and nurturing plants to sell. We also man an educational booth where community residents can find information and brochures on many gardening topics. A percentage of the profits goes toward providing scholarships for deserving Gloucester High School seniors and 4-H Camp scholarships for younger children.

Join the Gloucester Extension Master Gardeners at Brent and Becky’s Bulbs on Saturday, June 28<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and find out more about what Master Gardeners do. We hope you will decide to join us as members of the 2025 class. See the Gloucester Extension Master Gardener website at [www.gemg.org](http://www.gemg.org) for details about the upcoming class and some great photos of Master Gardeners having fun. Class registration ends July 7<sup>th</sup>.