

## **Ready, Set, Grow!**

If you're reading this article (you are) or have read it before (maybe), you're likely familiar with the LSU Ag Center, especially the Extension Service. Though we serve in many roles, our job as Extension (County) Agents is to educate the public about agriculture, especially horticulture in my case.

Extension Agents perform this task in many ways, including home visits, answering gardening questions, and giving educational seminars. But our staff is, of course, limited and there's only so much we can do. Since 1994 a volunteer corps called "Louisiana Master Gardeners" has helped to greatly extend what our Extension Service can do.

Begun in East Baton Rouge Parish, the program now currently exists in most parishes in the state. It is run parish-by-parish (or groups of parishes) and can be very different in different areas. What they hold in common is that the volunteers receive extensive training in horticulture, then go into the community to help with a wide variety of service projects.

In our area we have the "River Region Master Gardeners," who mostly reside and volunteer in St. John and St. Charles Parishes. St. James residents are also welcome to join (We have a few.), but they may also choose to join Ascension's group. The River Region Master Gardeners (RR MG's) are now accepting applications to join a training that will start in early 2019.

For a cost of under \$200, class participants will get an education in about 14 horticultural topics, including botany, weeds, lawns, ornamentals, vegetables, etc. There are some educational reference materials as well as lectures. The lectures are *typically* three-hour sessions on a given topic, taught by County Agents and LSU Professors.

The upcoming training for RR MG's will be a little different. We'll use the "flipped classroom model" for some of the trainings. This means that a video on the topic will be made available for students to watch at their own convenience. Then we'll meet weekly for laboratory exercises in the given subject matter. Orleans Parish is currently using this method, and student feedback has been mostly positive. Ascension is also using this model for some of their classes, though it's just begun a few weeks ago.

Laboratories will cover the topic in review, and we'll field any questions participants have after viewing lectures. Then we'll have some hands-on activities pertaining to the subject. You probably know (and studies have shown) that most people learn better when they do something rather than just talk about it. We think it will work out well.

Besides the "flipped classroom," we'll also have some traditional lectures. And we'll have field trips to Hammond, Baton Rouge, and maybe a couple of other places. We'll get to see some ornamental and vegetable production in the field trips, plus gain some perspective about how the Ag Center works.

After the class, members are obligated to help with at least 40 hours of community service with the group in their first year. Current Master Gardener projects in our area include the St. Charles ARC greenhouse, St. John school gardens, and St. James' Fast Food Farm. We're always willing to try new projects, including a "pet project" you may have in mind.

You can find more information at [http://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn\\_garden/master%20gardener](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/master%20gardener) . For more specifics or if you're interested in joining, Please contact the St. Charles, St. John, or St. James LSU Ag Center offices.

You can contact the St. John / St. James Parishes County Agent André Brock at [abrock@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:abrock@agcenter.lsu.edu). Also, the LSU Ag Center's website can be accessed at [www.lsuagcenter.com](http://www.lsuagcenter.com) with lots of user-friendly information, including this article.