

Questions on Soil, Insects, Vegetables, oh my!

Story and photo by Andria Cummings, TriCounty Master Gardener Web site, www.aces.edu/counties/Limestone/TriCounty/

One of the most visible ways for Master Gardeners to reach out to the community is when **Dorothy Thomas** takes her **Ask a Master Gardener** files on a road trip. She even brings her own table when necessary.

In doing so, she has set up shop at Home Depots, Lowes, Wal-Marts, churches, community plant swaps and, for the past three years, the Family & Disaster Preparedness Expo at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

“The Family & Disaster Preparedness Expo was a huge success this year,” Dorothy said. “I had several comments from newly transplanted folks from Utah about how big the bugs are in Huntsville. To this I replied ‘Yes, aren’t they wonderful!’”

Popular questions she is asked include:

- Why can’t I dig a hole in the ground?
- How do I start a vegetable garden?

To these questions, she responds: “Take the Master Gardener’s class and visit the ACES web site!”

Of course she gives more specific answers to individual questions and gladly hands out reams of pamphlets

from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Dorothy is not alone at the Ask tables. Other Master Gardeners and Master Gardener Class Interns volunteer to help out.



Center, clockwise, behind table: Master Gardeners Jeff Reynolds, Joe White and Dorothy Thomas give advice to three of the many people who stopped by the Ask A Master Gardener booth at the Family & Disaster Preparedness Expo at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on Aug. 27, 2011.

Working the Ask tables are a real bonus for Interns if they cannot volunteer their required 10 hours of Administrative time during the week. Volunteering for the Ask session can be counted as Administrative time for Interns!

In 2009, her first year as the Ask chairwoman, she attended three events, spoke to almost 400 people, and was assisted by as many as 12 Master Gardeners and Interns at one of the events.

In 2010, she attended seven events, at which close to 500 members of the public received information. She also had as many as 10 volunteers help her at one of the events.

In 2011, she attended six events, gave information to almost 600 visitors and was assisted by 18 volunteers.

“The pesky tornados in April cut down on our events this year,” Dorothy said.

So if you are having an event where gardening information would be beneficial, be sure to contact Dorothy Thomas!



Ask a Master Gardener Project

This program responds to requests from businesses (usually garden centers) garden clubs, churches, and schools wishing to have Master Gardeners on hand to answer questions. These are usually scheduled for weekends during the day.

Master Gardener volunteers and Interns set up a table in an area designated by the host and answer gardening questions for the attendees. Master Gardeners do not sell product.

The Project Chair usually provides reference books. Alabama Cooperative Extension System publications and soil test kits are sometimes offered as well. Usually this is a team effort; most of the time volunteers will be scheduled in teams of at least two per shift.

This is a project of Master Gardeners of North Alabama.

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