



2006 Master Gardeners boast 9,932 volunteer hours

— Galen Scott

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Jon Green's last name is a fitting one.

The Parker County extension agent gave commissioners his annual report on the Master Gardeners Program and its latest green-thumb operations Monday.

Green told the court, which supplies funds to the extension office, about a momentous 9,932 hours of community service hours donated by volunteers working toward the master gardener certification.

Volunteers are required to attend training classes, held twice a week, for six weeks.

After completing the course and passing a test, the volunteers are then ushered into a 1-year special internship program where they are assigned to a specific project.

"The project has to meet certain criteria," Green said. "It has to be educational and purposeful and the people have to gain from it."

Former projects include trail gardens and demonstration beds such as those featured at the North Main Extension Office, as well as a garden at Aledo City Hall and a section of Chandor Gardens.

"We stress the projects selected don't have volunteers acting as a work force — not just free labor," Green said.

Green pointed out one of the program's gardens at the Aledo Community Center serves as a tool to educate the public on plant selection.

The care and attention to detail paid by the Master Gardeners is evident in their intricate product, but the State says it's worth quite a bit of money too.

Green told commissioners hours donated by volunteers in 2005 were valued at \$171,136, according to state coordinators.

"These volunteers accomplished a lot," he added. "I think they are a good extra outreach for our office."

Homer Babbitt, the group's president, said plans for 2006 include a focus on water conservation.

"Forty to 50 percent of total estimated water usage goes to landscaping," Babbitt told the court.

He urged commissioners to help inform the public about the importance of conservation.

Babbitt unveiled a future plan to include a rain-water harvesting program at the extension office.

Precinct 2 Commissioner Joe Brinkley said Babbitt's programs were useful.

"[Babbitt] has an exceptionally informative program for any community group that is interested," he said.

Other Master Gardener projects include a national rose trial at Clark Gardens.

"It's really a pretty neat deal," Green said. "Mister Clark put it in according to the extension office's specifications and it includes 30 different varieties of roses."

He said the goal of the project was to determine which plants would prove to be "earth-kind," which signifies a plant that doesn't require human intervention after being planted.

"The Master Gardeners will be utilized in the evaluation of these roses," he said. "It's like a research plot really."

The project will obtain data over three years and is expected to yield valuable insight into "earth-kind" plants in Parker County.

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