

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post

Deb Walker-Class of 2008

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Now that our final exam is over, this newest master gardener class can relax and concentrate on some hands-on learning from our experienced master gardener friends, and from the multitude of projects we have to choose from in order to fulfill our volunteer hours requirements for this year.

I've got to admit, that at my age, taking a new course in horticulture was a bit daunting, and the 15 weeks brought a wealth of information. What I liked most about the experience, I think, was the variety in the lessons. We would learn about basic horticulture in one class and then concentrate on fruit trees, soil amendments, or lawn maintenance in others. The lectures and examples also included insect pests & diseases, landscape design, working with wildlife, home vegetable gardening, and field trips to get hands on experience trimming fruit trees and crepe myrtle.

The slides that Darrell Blackwelder presented each week were great examples of the information in the training manual. (My personal favorite was the slide showing the 'slightly' overgrown trees planted too close to a home. Apparently, reading a label is pretty important when you purchase a plant.)

Knowing what grows here in the county is pretty important as well. We learned that just because a nursery sells something, doesn't mean it's intended for a healthy life here in the Piedmont. That's where a master gardener's knowledge and experience comes in, so we have a lot to learn this summer and fall, participating in projects like the West End Horticultural Demonstration Garden, Xeriscaping gardens at the

library, programs for local schools, workshops, information booths, and offering presentations for community groups. This will give us a tremendous opportunity to experience situations where our learning can be expanded. What is a good type of grass to plant? There are experimental plots for us to take care of, to find out. How do I propagate garden plants, trim a crepe myrtle or grape vine? There's a workshop on that. How do I attract birds with my flowers? It will be great fun sharing that information with a class helping students build bluebird boxes. What plants grow best without a lot of rain? After volunteering to care for the library gardens in Xeriscaping, we can share that information as well.

And an added benefit is becoming part of the Rowan County Master Gardener Association, which meets on a monthly basis for educational programs. We should have a lot of fun learning from this "seasoned" group, which is very eager to pass on their knowledge. Lots of field trips to nurseries, school and community projects, and social gatherings appear to be in the near future for us. During the course, they gave us much needed support and encouragement, so we all look forward to working with them this year.

Knowing where to look for the answers is almost as much fun for us, as having the answers at our fingertips. As new master gardeners, we might not know everything about gardening, but we'd love to find out for you! So when you ask us a question this year, our response, most likely will be "I'll get back to you on that." And we will!

Deb Walker has recently completed the Master Gardener Volunteer class and is an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer in Rowan County.