

**Tennessee Master Gardener Search for Excellence
2014 Application**

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 31, 2014

NAME OF PROJECT: Shady Acres Arboretum

NAME OF MG GROUP: Dyer County Master Gardeners

COUNTY(IES): Dyer

MASTER GARDENER CONTACT:

NAME Eileen Elliott / Marlene Wilson

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MASTER GARDENER COORDINATOR/EXTENSION STAFF:

NAME William Taylor

TITLE Dyer County Agricultural Coordinator

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CATEGORY---MUST SELECT AND SUBMIT IN ONLY ONE CATEGORY

- Youth
- Demonstration Garden
- Workshop or Presentation
- Community Service
- Innovative Project
- Research
- Special Needs Audience

COMMENCEMENT DATE OF PROJECT: January 2011

LIST THE NAMES OF MASTER GARDENERS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT. Do not include their roles or any other individuals in this listing. *(Place the cursor in the box to type a name.)* You may attach an additional page if necessary.

Project Leaders' Names:

Eileen Elliott
Marlene Wilson
Betty Stephens
James Stephens
Dyer County Master Gardener's Association

Number of Master Gardeners participating: 35

Place your cursor in the box and type. The box will expand.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT (include name, location, target audience, goals, and partnerships) 500 words or less.

Upon graduation from our TN Master Gardener program, our coordinators challenged us to “do something with what we learned that will make a significant difference in your communities”. We feel that we have. We have taken our city park and turned it into a Level IV Arboretum, certified by TN Urban Forestry Council. This 32 acre park is a beautiful natural resource in the city of Trenton, in Gibson County, but it has suffered significant damage to and loss of more than fifty trees over the past three years due to severe drought and wind storms. Because the park is important to our community, as a family recreational site, picnic, as well as sports area (16 acres), our approach was to attempt to restore and preserve this natural setting, without causing a financial burden to our community.

Our target audience is all of our community, as well as visitors who elect to visit our lovely small community. Our city population is just over 4,000 and our county is about 49,000, covering 604 square miles of rural topography. We are the “Teapot Capital of the World”, part of the Civil War Trail, TN Quilt Trail, Cotton Junction, home of the “Freed House”, as well as the Trenton Battle Tour (a major battle was fought here) and other notable sites. We are visited by vacationers from all over the world who come to see these sites. We are within 30 minutes of Discovery Park in Union City and hope that Trenton and Shady

Acres Arboretum becomes another site “not to be missed”. In this arboretum you can see a great variety of tree species seldom seen in Tennessee, as well as beautiful species native to our state. We have several species that are not found elsewhere in Tennessee. (one is the Varigated Chinese red Pine). We hope that the many varieties will inspire others to plant trees for future generations and perhaps add a tree to their yard or community.

Our goals include: erosion control, reforestration, preservation of this natural resource and to maintain certification as a Level IV Arboretum.

We need to control erosion at the park, this was becoming a significant issue, and to replant trees that have been lost. Our primary goal is to leave our community as good / or better than we found it, for future generations to enjoy, as well as to increase learning about the benefits of trees for our future as a world. By appropriate labeling of the species, anyone can compare the attributes of each species and how each species might impact our environment, and allow personal selection by physically seeing how the trees look as they mature. This helps the individual evaluate a particular species for their landscape.

DESCRIBE THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT. 500 words or less.

Initially we sought approval from our Agricultural Extension Agent, as head of our Master Gardener Group in December 2010. Next we presented our plan to the City of Trenton’s Mayor and Council. It was approved. Our next task was to do a physical inventory of the existing trees as well as evaluate the overall health of the existing trees. We learned that more than fifty trees had been lost over the past three years due to severe drought and wind storms. Because of the loss of these trees significant erosion was occurring in the main picnic area, which in turn jeopardized the remaining trees. We also found that no plan for reforestation was being considered.

The inventory showed that of the 300 trees present there were only twenty different species. In order to certify as a Level I arboretum, a minimum of thirty species is required.

A reevaluation of the project determined that it was, in fact, possible for us to reach the goal of thirty species.

We determined, with the expertise of our agricultural extension agents (Dyer, Gibson/ Madison Counties) and what we learned in our course, that we would need to cautiously evaluate what species would be desirable and where in the landscape that particular species should be planted for optimal impact, growth and longevity.

Because the park has wet as well as dry areas and some areas of very poor soil due to the creation of sports areas / fields it would be a challenge to find interesting species and to place each species in the appropriate area. We considered the educational component in trying to select species that might be interesting as well as environmentally functional.

Implementation began by enrolling in the Arbor Day Foundation and selecting

trees determined appropriate.

We dug 3 foot diameter holes, planted the tree, mulched, watered (according to established criteria), on an ongoing schedule and “babied” each of the new trees through the worst drought our community has seen. Water was physically carried to each tree because there were no water lines available

We were fortunate to come into contact with a gentleman who became our “mentor”. He is part of the TN Urban Forestry Council, has experience with a famous Arboretum / Botanical Garden, and enthusiastic about teaching. He, along with our UT staff guided our decisions on species to be sought. These donations made a Level II certification obtainable.

We applied for certification and were able to meet all of the criteria for Level III on our initial inspection. At that time we were seven species short of the number required for Level IV. We reevaluated the project and felt that we could meet the additional criteria for the Level IV. (Brochure, map, news letter, tours, ect.)

Additional species were added. Citizens became more aware of the project. We achieved Level IV certification in March 2013 and at present have 181 different species.

HOW HAS THE PROJECT BEEN FUNDED AND HOW HAVE THOSE FUNDS BEEN SPENT? 500 Words or less.

Funds for this project have been completely by donation. When we presented the project to the Mayor, it was made clear that there was no money available from any of the city budget lines.

Although the city does have a full time park employee, there was no “extra” money in that budget to cover purchases of trees.

We researched grant, to no avail, matching grants were out of the question.

We approached the local newspaper and the editor agreed to allow us to write articles for publication, which we immediately began to do. We “introduced” our trees to our citizens by telling them about the species.

This stimulated interest in donating trees. As the project became known, citizens began donating a tree in honor or memory of an individual or special event in their lives.

Numerous (35) local (small) business’ donated a tree designated as “donated by”... Most of these were minimal amounts but allowed us to purchase a tree and the name plate for that tree, in that price range. To date we have 91 individuals and 35 small business’ who have donated a tree at Shady Acres Arboretum, with fifteen more being requested for fall planting.

Our Master Gardener group voted to pay the certification fee, and that was paid directly to the Urban Forestry Division. All monies received have gone directly into the purchase of trees and the name plates for the trees.

The Rotary club sponsored our multicolored brochure.

At present we have no ongoing expenses.

We have obtained mulch without charge from the Gibson County EMC and the road department, which is set aside near the park for use as we need. There is no fee for visiting the Arboretum and free guided tours are offered by request. The Arboretum is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and all are welcome, regardless of race, color, nationality, etc...we encourage visitors to spend time here.

The city does have a paid employee who is assigned to maintain the park facilities. (sports areas, picnic areas)

We anticipate planting 10-15 more species this fall, at which time we plan to “watch them grow”.

DESCRIBE THE OUTCOMES OF THIS PROJECT. HOW HAS IT AUGMENTED LEARNING, INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OR CHANGED PRACTICES TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE? INCLUDE THE METHODS YOU USED TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT. These impacts could be economical, educational, environmental, health or community based. 500 words or less.

An important outcome is the interest and enjoyment of this arboretum by citizens. People use the park, learning different species and looking forward to the changes as the trees grow and develop. People tell us how much they are enjoying the changes that have occurred. There is increased interest in the different species, and inquires as to what might do well in local yards. More people are walking the trails and we encourage them to “learn a tree” each time they walk. Citizens are learning the names and characteristics of the species. People talk with us about the trees while we work. We encourage our schools to include the Arboretum in field day excursions as a learning tool, teaching environmental studies, health and wellness, ecology, animal husbandry, among the potential learning experiences. Fifteen YMCA participants learned the importance of trees in our environment and learned to identify 6 species during the 6 week period. With knowledge imparted by our “mentor” and our UT Agricultural agents, we have been able to pass our knowledge on to others. We can help a donor select the species and plant it appropriately for it to develop. The actual number of people impacted is impossible to determine. We have done presentations to community groups (Exchange Club/ Rotary / church and educational) about the Arboretum and its impact on our environment, and have written articles for publication in local newspapers to encourage our community to visit the arboretum and become part of the Tennessee Master Gardener family. We are on Facebook, have a web site linked to the city web site and posted on the TN Urban Forestry web site, with the brochure and map displayed. Our brochure includes a map showing the location of each species in the arboretum. This is available in print (at the park, city hall, and local businesses) and on line. We have a photo inventory the species present in the Arboretum. This includes a photo of the name tag, a current picture of the tree itself and a close up of the

leaves. We will expand this to show the fruits, nuts, berries, flowers, fall leaf color, and winter characteristics.

We participate in local events promoting Tennessee Master Gardeners. We distribute brochures, free flower seeds and answer questions .

Our local newspaper, with a circulation of 36,000, received the Urban Forestry Councils newsprint award for their support of our project.

Our two primary project coordinators received the council's Award of Excellence (Citizen Activist) in 2013 for their work.

Erosion is being controlled (visually apparent) within the park because of this project.

Keep Tennessee Beautiful council plans to use our project to highlight how a few people can make a big difference in our state and local communities. It is impossible to know the numbers of contacts, only that each one has the potential to be a significant person in helping to make our community / world a better place, and we are a part of that.