

## Secret Lives of Master Gardeners

Judy McGowen suggested developing a column in the newsletter that interviews Master Gardeners and profiles their wisdom, specialties and interests.

My impressions of Master Gardeners have been so awestruck in scope, depth and variety that I eagerly embraced this vision.

For my initial interview, I had the privilege to meet with Becky Blades, one of two current members of the first Master Gardener Class of 1979.

Becky Blades is a third generation vegetable gardener. She grew up in Fort Lauderdale FL with a side of family farm setting in North Carolina. Her grandfather was partial to tomato production and she has fond memories of family gatherings in North Carolina to harvest and eat vegetables in mid-to-late August, after most of her cousins were back in school.

She arrived in Georgia as the wife of Jerry, a graduate student at UGA and eventually settled in Decatur. She was teaching nursery school and is still very "hands-on" centered in her educational philosophy. She has always had a garden. When the Master Gardener Program opened up, Becky applied and was accepted as one of the state's first 144 trainees. The training was held at the North Fulton Access Center.

Upon graduation, Becky was active in the state program and has served in a variety of positions on both the state and county boards. She moved to Cobb in 1987. Her current projects include: the McEachern School, the Midway School Junior Master Gardener Program and the Hospital Garden.

"Gardening should be fun," is her basic credo. She is a people person, and is always looking for answers. I observed her in action at the Midway School. It was very cold outside and the 15 11- and 12-year olds involved in the program showed their enthusiasm and interest in plant life in the middle of January inside a classroom. They were reading and talking about insects. It was fun!

As for future programs to develop across the country, there is a movement to train teachers to be Master Gardeners, thereby addressing the issue of making school gardens into maintainable/sustainable classroom projects. It will be interesting to see how things progress over the next few years.

Becky has raised two daughters and is a proud grandparent of three. She is active in her church mission program and will host two Christ College students from Taiwan in this next year.

Becky recently attended the Master Gardener Meeting in Parry, GA which celebrated her 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with the Club. She said that there were three individuals from that first class that attended.

Being a Master Gardener is a way of life. What is a Master Gardener? Simply, someone with a wealth of practical experience and training that chooses to share this information with her community. Thank you, Becky Blades!