

## **New Castle County Master Gardeners Will Train a New Class in Spring 2009!**

Why is that distinguished looking woman up to her elbows in...garbage? Why is she handing out wriggling worms to the circle of wide eyed children around her? The children may be saying, "eeuw", but veteran New Castle County Master Gardener Hetty Francke is teaching the class a basic gardening lesson about composting.

Organic waste like leaves and grass overflow our landfills but composting is a way to process all that stuff into a useful soil amendment. These kids will take the composting lesson home to their parents. "Reaching about 6,000 kids per school year may be a drop in the bucket but in the 10 years or so that I have worked in the field I have seen a ripple effect," says Francke.

There are eco-gardening ripples all over New Castle County, and many of them are originating from the New Castle County Master Gardener program, which is part of both the county Cooperative Extension office and the University of Delaware. "Our mission is teaching better gardening practices to local homeowners, showing them how green gardening is better gardening," says Carrie Murphy, coordinator of the New Castle County Master Gardener program.

The New Castle County Master Gardeners are looking for curious, enthusiastic gardeners who want to know more about plants and horticulture and then share that knowledge with New Castle County residents. Trainees entering the class of 2009 begin an intensive training program starting March 3, 2009. There is rigorous learning on topics ranging from botany to integrated pest management, but it's also much more. Bob Deming, President of the New Castle County Master Gardeners and a graduate of the class of 2004, says, "The friendships made in Master Gardeners become life long, special and not always about plants."

There are Master Gardener programs across the country, aimed at promoting better home gardening by sharing research-based knowledge and teaching better environmental practices. The trainees in the New Castle County 2009 class will get a good grounding in horticulture, soil chemistry and plant biology, among other topics. "For me, training was a chance to get the science and research-based background for my efforts at gardening, and teaching about gardening," says Cindy Huffman, class of 2007. Adds Letty Charlow, "Everything Master Gardeners do has merit. I love this group and marvel at how fortunate I am to be part of it."

There are many ways to contribute within the Master Gardener organization, and trainees will be able to choose where and how they would like to educate after they graduate from the 3 month program. They may choose to diagnose homeowner garden problems on the phone or in person. They may decide to teach workshops or work through the Speaker's Bureau to give talks to various organizations including local gardening clubs. They may want to present programs to elementary school children that coordinate with and enhance the science curriculum within the school. Or, they may wish to help with community gardens or build demonstration and teaching gardens.

"Nothing is more satisfying for me than taking the guesswork out of people's garden experience and making it more enjoyable for them by sharing your knowledge", says Karin Arentzen, 20 year Master Gardener and Philadelphia Flower Show champion. She adds, "Being a Master Gardener gave me a direction in life."

Most of the 85-plus New Castle County Master Gardeners would agree that they are looking forward to greeting a whole new class of trainees this spring.

*Author: Meg MacDonald, Class of 2007*