Hardin County Extension News Release
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Hardin Co. Master Gardeners Win State Awards

_Hardin County_ – The Hardin County OSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) brought back two state awards from the Ohio MGV Conference held September 28-29 at the Sharonville Convention Center in Cincinnati. ‘An Evening Garden Affair’ was recognized as the state winner for the Integrated Pest Management Outstanding MGV Project award category for medium sized groups at this annual conference. Also, the Hardin County group was recognized as a platinum ‘Standards of Excellence’ award winner.

Seeing a need to teach homeowners and Master Gardener Volunteers proper tree planting techniques and care, the Hardin County OSUE MGV’s held the 5th Annual “An Evening Garden Affair.” Arborist Joe Puperi from Advanced Tree Health, Ltd. of Findlay, Ohio presented an in-depth program on tree selection, care, and best management practices followed by a demonstration of proper tree planting. As homeowners add new trees to their landscapes, deal with trees that have been planted in the past 20 years, or even long established trees, they have questions about tree care. Whether it is mulching, pruning, injury care, insect and disease control, or wildlife concerns there was a need for education.

Arborist Puperi presented the variety of topics in depth with those in attendance. He started the teaching with the concept of the right plant in the right place. He stated that many times people will choose a small tree at the nursery and plant it in a location too close to their home not taking into account the mature size of the plant. He stressed planting trees with the root flair at the surface of the planting and not planting too deep, or mulching with a volcano shape, which causes advantageous roots to form, harming the tree. He continued with maintenance, including water for the first year after transplant, and proper pruning methods with tools to accomplish that task.

The program moved from the classroom to the display gardens where Puperi demonstrated techniques such as digging the hole, preparing the root ball of the container tree by removing any circling roots and exposing the root flair of the plant prior to installing in the hole. He also demonstrated several different
tree watering tools, each with the benefit of a slow and steady release of water to the plant. Proper mulch installation was used without a mound of mulch being applied. Finally, he did some judicious pruning to allow the tree to grow with proper form. The evening was ended with a question and answer period on the techniques demonstrated.

In addition to winning this state award, the Hardin County Master Gardener Volunteers were recognized with the platinum ‘Standards for Excellence’ distinction. This is the highest degree of accomplishment for a county Master Gardener Volunteer program, based on guidelines set up by the Ohio State University Extension. Local nominations for Outstanding Master Gardener Volunteer and Friend of MGVs were also submitted for statewide recognition.

Master Gardener Francine Craig was nominated by the local group as Hardin County’s Outstanding Master Gardener Volunteer for 2018. Craig has been quick to become involved in the Hardin County MGV program by volunteering to head the Grow Ohio outreach. This project, as an outreach of the Ohio State University MGV program, entails encouraging each county MGV program to grow, harvest and provide fresh food to those in underserved areas. She completed the Community Garden Specialization at the state level and brought the information back to the local group. By providing this leadership, the Hardin County Master Gardener Volunteers were able to develop some additional vegetable growing areas under her direction.

Craig identified possible outlets for the local group to connect with to share the harvest of their labors. The Hardin County program was able to provide over 1000 pounds of fresh produce throughout the county. The distribution of the food produced was shared with eight groups or organizations across Hardin County. These included a local soup kitchen, low income food distribution centers, and those serving the elderly. Both food pantries and faith based outreaches were recipients of the produce.

Hardin County’s nomination for this year’s Friend of MGV award was the Hardin County Community Foundation. The Hardin County Community Foundation has displayed continued support to the Hardin County Master Gardener Volunteer program through supplying grants in support of our demonstration gardens, The Friendship Gardens of Hardin County, and the award-winning ‘Children’s Day at the Friendship Gardens.’ Their support has allowed the local MGVs to have a continued educational outreach into the county, which enables them to fulfill the mission of The Ohio State University Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program.

Attached photo caption – Hardin County OSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator Dave McPherson accepts the state award for the Outstanding MGV Integrated Pest Management Project-medium division at the State Master Gardener Volunteer Conference.