

Gardening Questions? Ask The Expert

LOU ANN GOOD
Lancaster Farming Staff
NEWMANSTOWN (Lebanon Co.) — Pennsylvania's Master Gardener Deb Hartman knows the frustration gardeners feel when they weed, fertilize, prune, and do everything possible, but the plant does not perform as expected. She is also a walking manual of gardener information that she willingly shares with others. If she doesn't know the answer, she knows where to find it.

All this know-how came as a result of Deb's frustration with the fruit trees she and her husband George had planted.

"Every year, I would faithfully prune them, but after 10 years with no fruit, I knew something was wrong," Deb said.

She called her county Penn State Extension office for help. At that time, the couple lived in Berks County. It was through that office that Deb learned that she was pruning too much and that master gardener programs were available.

Deb applied to the program and was accepted. At that time, the Hartmans were in the process of building a home in Lebanon County. Because the purpose of the Master Gardener program is to donate time back to the community in which they live in exchange for the classes, Deb asked to transfer to Lebanon County for training.

The classes are almost like going to college. The program teaches extensive gardening from the core requirements of soil science and plant pathology to electives such as herb gardening. Mas-

ter Gardeners complete 30 hours of a series of instruction and hands on workshops. A \$40 fee is charged to cover the cost of a manual and other handouts. Gardeners who successfully complete the program receive a certificate and then fulfill 50 hours of volunteer service.

This service is up to the individual and what they feel most comfortable doing. Some built displays, plant flowers around the Extension office, and in Deb's, teach classes to other prospective Master Gardeners.

Deb describes herself as a vegetable edibles gardener. She enjoys experimenting with edible flowers and herbs, she said, because she loves to eat and the flowers are beautiful.

Deb, with another Master Gardener, Barb Binner, started a group meeting for amateur herbalists.

Deb has taught training classes in five different counties. She and Barb have participated in a radio talk show where the audience calls in and asks questions pertaining to gardening.

Diverse questions amaze the pair. Questions include "What do I do to keep earthworms from smelling in the basement?" and "Is it true that I should eat poison ivy to keep from getting it?"

"I certainly would not want to do a talk show alone," said Deb who believes Barb and she complement each other.

"I'm a worrier because I want to make sure the information is accurate. My partner keeps telling me to relax," she said.

If the pair does not know the

answer to a question, they promise to research it and let the person know the answer.

Answers are always based on Penn State's information.

"If Penn State has not done research on a subject, we do not give information based on hearsay," Deb said.

Graduates of the program can receive an additional eight hours of training annually with 20 hours of pay-back time. In addition to Penn State and a satellite dish hookup, classes can be taken from Longwood Gardens, Rodale Institute, and other places.

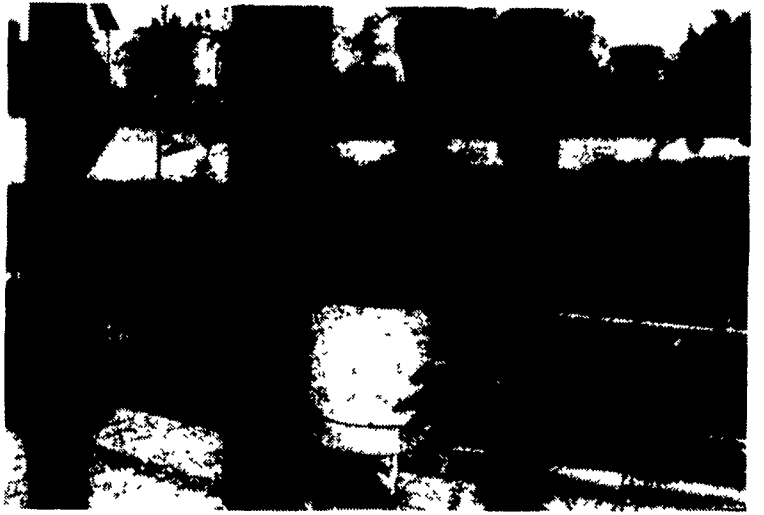
Deb also writes a column, Corner of the Garden, for the Lebanon Extension newsletter, and she is the secretary for the 1994 Pa. Northeast Master Gardener Conference.

The Amateur Herbalist Club meets monthly at the Lebanon County Extension Office. For details, call (717) 270-4391.

Recently Deb was chosen as Pennsylvania's Master Gardener from the more than 970 Master Gardeners across the state. This was based on her many services to the program in volunteering time and information.

"The award was a surprise," Deb said. "I'm not in the Master Gardener program for the recognition. I'm in it for the enjoyment."

If you are interested in participating in the Master Gardener program, call your county Penn State Cooperative Extension.



The Hartmans built their home with plenty of windows for Deb's plant projects.



Deb Hartman says that she became interested in gardening through her husband George. Now she keeps him busy trying out all her ideas at the couple's property near Schaefferstown.

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