

Learning the Best Dirt!

First, they learn that soil and dirt are two different things! They learn about the life of the soils and why soils are a good investment. They also learn about the important role in plant health played by the various minerals, such as potassium, sulfur, calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc. Who are these folks? Some of them are gardeners, some are Master Gardeners or future Master Gardeners, and some are farmers – all of them will enjoy the next slate of classes being sponsored by Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service.

Our Grow'n Growers class is for folks who want to learn to grow vegetables and sell at the farmer's market. This class begins on August 29th and runs every Wednesday morning from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. through mid-June, 2013. Classes are held at the Master Gardener Clubhouse, located in the North San Juan Park, on Nolana Loop, between Raul Longoria and Ceasar Chavez. This program includes hands-on workshops and farm tours with classes in vegetable production, marketing, finance, food safety and food preparation. Students have the opportunity to serve an internship with experienced growers. All class members participate in the weekly Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings at Fireman's Park in McAllen, November through mid June. Cost of the program is \$45.00 and class size is limited to 15 students.

The Texas Master Gardener program trains volunteers to represent Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service by sharing science-based horticultural information with their communities. These volunteers provide horticultural presentations for community clubs, participate in events and festivals with educational demonstrations, and work in our teaching gardens. This special group of community volunteers will have the opportunity, in October 2013, of hosting the State Master Gardener Conference in McAllen. This Hidalgo County Master Gardener training begins on September 13, Thursday, from 9:00 to 4:30 p.m., and will run through November 15, 2012, every Thursday. The cost of the program is \$185.00, which includes field trips and a text, and applicants are accepted through an application. After completion of the class and required 60 hours of volunteer time, students will receive a name badge and logo shirt. These classes are held at the Master Gardener Clubhouse in the North San Juan Park.

A special Soils Workshop webinar will be held at our office in Edinburg, 410 N. 13th Avenue, every Tuesday morning from September 4 through September 25 with Dr. Sam Feagley, Soil Scientist, Texas A & M University in College Station. Nitrogen is the subject of the September 4th program and Dr. Feagley will discuss the role of nitrogen, application and rates, and what happens when plants receive too much or too little. The second workshop, on September 11, will cover phosphorus and potassium. Calcium, Magnesium and Sulfur will be covered on September 18th and the Role of the Micronutrients will be the subject of the class on September 25th. This workshop is free; however, reservations are requested so that we can provide adequate handout materials.

For information on all of these workshops, including applications or agendas, contact Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service at (956) 383-1026, or check our web page <http://hidalgo.agrilife.org>. Also, watch my column for news on the opening of a new satellite Extension office to better serve you.

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