

2025 David Gibby International Master Gardener Search for Excellence Awards

About

The International Master Gardener Search for Excellence (SFE) Awards are named in honor of Dr. David Gibby, the visionary founder of the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) program. Dr. Gibby launched the program in 1973 while working as a horticulture agent with Washington State University Extension. He recognized the growing need to provide homeowners with accurate and reliable gardening advice. With demand increasing and resources limited, he devised a groundbreaking solution: training and utilizing volunteers to assist with public inquiries.

This innovative concept of enlisting and educating volunteers to serve as community gardening experts quickly gained traction and has since become an international movement, with over 96,000 certified Master Gardener volunteers worldwide. Dr. Gibby's vision has had a profound impact on fostering horticultural knowledge, sustainability, and community outreach across the globe.

The David Gibby International Master Gardener Search for Excellence Awards celebrate the outstanding volunteer work of EMG volunteers throughout the United States, Canada, and South Korea.

Application Timeline

- February 1, 2025: Open SFE
- May 1, 2025: SFE Closes
 - Deadline for: SFE Application Form
 - Deadline for: Supervisor Verification Form
- June 15, 2025: Inform winners and all applicants
- August 8, 2025:
 - Video requirement due from 1st place winners
 - Poster requirement due from 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners
- August 25-28, 2025: IMGC, virtual event, hosted by Texas Master Gardener Program

Award Criteria

Project submissions must meet the following guidelines to qualify for the David Gibby International Master Gardener Search for Excellence (SFE) Awards:

1. SFE is designed to recognize outstanding group projects and not an individual who does outstanding work.
2. Projects will be judged on their merit from work done between the years 2022-2024. Projects must have completed a full year to be entered.
3. Program projects that have previously won a Search for Excellence Award are not eligible in any category.
4. SFE includes seven categories in which EMGs can demonstrate meaningful contributions to their communities. Only one project may be submitted by a group per category. For each application, choose the single category that best fits the project:
 - Community Service
 - Demonstration Gardens
 - Innovative Projects
 - Research (Applied Scientific Methodology)
 - Specific Needs Audiences (examples include older adults, individuals with disabilities, horticultural therapy participants)
 - Workshop or Presentation
 - Youth Programs
5. *Simple to Replicate*. One of the goals of the SFE Awards is to share outstanding ideas and programs that can be replicated by other Master Gardener groups. While replicating something like a 20-acre botanical garden may not be feasible, the individual project ideas within the garden can often be adapted and implemented at other sites. Providing a step-by-step guide or a “how-to” for your project is an excellent way to make it accessible and useful for others to recreate.
6. *Practicality*. An award-winning SFE program is one that is practical, accessible, and effectively addresses a specific need in the community it serves. In other words, you’ve created a program that is both impactful and well-suited to its intended audience. For example, you might develop an outstanding program with a \$35.00 admission fee, but if the cost is beyond what people in your community can afford, they won’t be able to participate. Accessibility and usability are key to success.
7. *Original and Creative*. We are looking for unique and creative ideas that showcase your program’s individuality and reflect the personalities and passions of the Master Gardeners involved. There is no need to reinvent the wheel—just adapt and modify parts of it to fit the needs of your specific situation.

8. *Compatible with Extension and EMG Missions.* Be sure to clearly connect your project to the goals listed below. Do not assume the reader will automatically understand how your project aligns with the missions of Extension and the Master Gardener program. By directly addressing these goals in your submission, you ensure that your project clearly demonstrates its alignment with the core values and mission of the program.
 - Projects must include an educational component.
 - Projects must be inclusive and accessible to all individuals, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other status protected by law.
 - Projects should extend the resources of the University to the public, helping people use knowledge to solve problems in their workplaces, homes, and communities.
 - All information provided should be based on university research.
9. *Significant Learning and Impacts.* SFE projects must demonstrate specific and measurable positive differences in the lives of individuals or communities, whether by EMGs or the public. These impacts could take many forms, including educational, economic, environmental, health-related, or community-based improvements. Evaluation is a key step in quantifying the success of your project objectives and identifying areas for improvement. Extension evaluates the outcomes of its services and programs based on an increase in participants' knowledge levels, changes in attitudes, and changes in behaviors or practices. Depending on the project, evaluations may range from informal (e.g., casually asking questions) to formal (e.g., pre-test/post-test assessments).
10. *Number of People Reached.* SFE projects should aim to engage as many individuals as possible within the target audience. While impact numbers are important, they carry less significance if the target audience does not effectively learn or apply the information provided.

Application Instructions

Applications must be submitted online; hard copies or emailed submissions will not be accepted. Incomplete submissions will not be able to be scored and will not be considered.

The SFE application must be prepared by the Master Gardener volunteers directly involved in the project, and not by Extension staff.

Provide the following information using the online application for each project submission:

1. Contact details for:
 - the volunteer submitting the application
 - the program and local unit office

- the unit supervisor (Extension staff or EMG coordinator)

2. Category: must select only one category per submission
 - Community Service
 - Demonstration Gardens
 - Innovative Projects
 - Research (Applied Scientific Methodology)
 - Specific Needs Audiences (examples include older adults, individuals with disabilities, horticultural therapy participants)
 - Workshop or Presentation
 - Youth Programs
3. Name of project
4. Description of the project. Include target audience, goals, location and partnerships. Be sure to address *Simple to Replicate, Practicality, Original and Creative, and Compatible with Extension and EMG Missions* as described in the guidelines.
5. Methods. Discuss planning, implementation and evaluation (e.g. how results, learning, and impact were documented)
6. Results
7. Significant learning and impact
8. Budget narrative
9. Names ONLY of all active Master Gardeners who are involved in the project from start to finish and that should receive a certificate if awarded. Please do not include their role or any additional information. Please do not include any other individuals in this listing.
10. Up to six digital photos (in JPEG format) may be submitted with your application. Use the online form to submit your photos. The maximum file size for each photo is 100 MB. Photo releases (or equivalent, as required by the applicable laws of the local state or province) must be on file for all individuals in the photos submitted. **Any extra files, photos, or handouts will not be considered.**

Supervisor Verification Instructions

A separate Supervisor Verification Form is required for each application and must be submitted by your unit supervisor (Extension staff or EMG coordinator). Please ensure you provide an accurate email contact for your unit supervisor on your SFE application. The SFE committee will send your SFE Application along with the Supervisor Verification Form directly to your unit supervisor's email once your application is submitted.

The deadline for receipt of this verification is the same date as the application deadline: May 1, 2025. **Any project submitted without receiving the completed verification form by the deadline will not be considered.** Please let your unit supervisor know you are submitting a project and that they should expect an email from the SFE committee for verification.

The Supervisor Verification Form asks your unit supervisor to verify that:

- They have reviewed your SFE Application.
- The Extension Master Gardener volunteers involved in the project are currently in good standing.
- Photo releases (or equivalent, as required by the applicable laws of the local state or province) are on file for all individuals in the photos submitted.

If your unit supervisor has not received a verification request by email within two business days of submitting your application, they should contact the SFE committee at mastergardener@ksu.edu. Once the completed verification has been received from the unit supervisor, both the volunteer who submitted the SFE application and their unit supervisor will be notified by email as confirmation of receipt.

Criteria for Selection

1. Applications are judged independently by at least three Extension faculty/staff and/or Master Gardener volunteers. Judges will use the following criteria:
 - a. Simplicity of project (easy to replicate): 10 points
 - b. Practicality, usefulness or relevance of project: 10 points
 - c. Originality or creativity: 10 points
 - d. Consistent with Extension and Master Gardener missions: 20 points
 - e. Validation that significant learning occurred: 20 points
 - f. Number of people impacted: 10 points
 - g. Clarity and completeness of project application: 20 points

TOTAL: 100 points

2. All of the judge's scores will be totaled and divided by the number of judges.
3. While all EMG volunteer projects are significant to their communities, not all are SFE projects. **Projects that do not achieve a score of 80% or better are not eligible for an SFE Award.**
4. A judge will be excused from judging an application from the state in which they work or volunteer as an EMG.

5. An aggregate score sheet along with all the judges' comments will be returned to the applicant as soon as possible. We hope that the comments will help to strengthen your volunteer work and future award submissions.
6. All decisions and scoring by the judges will be considered final. In the case of a tie, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

Awardee Expectations

First, second, and third-place winners will be contacted by the SFE committee to coordinate award presentations during the IMGC conference and provide guidance on fulfilling the awardee expectations outlined below. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their SFE application by June 15, 2025.

1. *Video Requirement.* If selected as a first-place winner, you will need to create a short video (3-4 minutes maximum) showcasing your project for the 2025 International Master Gardener Conference, which will be held virtually from August 25-28, 2025. The prerecorded video must be submitted as a hyperlink, hosted on a streaming platform like YouTube, Vimeo, or similar. Please ensure your video is submitted by August 8, 2025 - three weeks before the conference.
2. *Poster Requirement.* First, second, and third-place winners will be required to prepare a poster highlighting their project for virtual display at the 2025 International Master Gardener Conference. Posters must be submitted in PDF format and received by August 8, 2025 - three weeks before the conference.
3. *Attendance Request.* While there is no reimbursement for your International Master Gardener Conference registration fees or travel expenses, members of the winning projects will receive the early bird registration rate for the conference.
4. *Award Memorabilia.* First-place winners in each SFE category will be awarded a plaque. Second and third-place winners in each category will receive a certificate.

In Closing

We commend the incredible volunteer efforts of Extension Master Gardeners worldwide and encourage these contributions to be celebrated at local, state, and regional levels. The David Gibby International Master Gardener Search for Excellence Award represents the highest honor within Master Gardener programs across the United States, Canada, and South Korea.

For more information, questions or concerns, please contact the SFE Committee at mastergardener@ksu.edu or visit <https://www.imgur2025.com/>.