

2021 Master Gardener of the Year:

Grace Emery

The Bexar County Master Gardener Board of Directors has chosen Grace Emery as the 2021 Master Gardener of the Winter Quarter.

At the time of this interview, Grace said, "I've been in the (Culinary Garden) for four days straight. We're doing the (newly approved) CHEF program!" Her enthusiasm for this project at San Antonio Botanical Garden (SABOT) is contagious and carries over into all other projects she touches.

Grace Emery grew up in Carmel, New York, on a working apple farm where she and her five brothers and sisters learned how to graft before they were six years old. They rode horses, worked the farm, showed fruits, vegetables and plants, and were members of the local 4-H Club.

Grace is a retired aeronautical engineer, married for 51 years to her husband, an environmental engineer, whom she met while at their respective schools, Colorado Women's College/University of Denver and United States Air Force Academy. It is said that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree; their three daughters have followed in the scientific footsteps of their parents, as a math and science educator, dentist, and statistician.

Upon moving to San Antonio in 1998, Grace worked at American Red Cross as an instructor, and at Sino Swearingen as an aeronautical engineer and certification specialist. Although she was drawn to the Bexar County Master Gardener program, she would have to wait until retirement before applying for membership.

That day came in April 2016 when she was accepted into BCMG Class 60. Grace says, "For my whole life, I have been a volunteer." She quickly put that into practice in 2017, when she finished out the year as Vice President. Grace was then elected as President from 2018-2020, while simultaneously serving as President of the San Antonio Herb Society. She has presented for Speakers Bureau, speaking on herbs, Texas Superstars®, vegetables and butterflies; served as Chair for Rodeo for three years; at



Master Gardener Grace Emery, teaching in the Culinary Gardens of the San Antonio Botanical Gardens.

SABOT as Chair of the Culinary Docent and CHEF (Culinary Heath Education for Families) Programs for three years; answered calls with the MG Hotline team; volunteered for the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival; and co-chaired the Poinsettia sale. As well, she has served on the Nominating Committee for two years; Texas Master Gardener Chair of Texas Search for Excellence Awards in 2018-2019; and the committee for the International Search for Excellence.

As for her favorite programs, she mentions two. Grace says the Culinary Garden Docent program at SABOT “has been my baby the whole time. A lot of our Master Gardeners are absolutely in love with the program and, like me, they'll talk to a stranger about any plant you name. They like to interface and educate. I like it because not only do they learn something, but every time I go, I learn something too.”

Second, “The Hotline is the most phenomenal thing we have. People call in and they want to know what to do. We give them the information they need, and they hang up happy. Hotline callers have said, ‘I can always depend on Master Gardeners to give me the correct information.’”

Grace says, “I'm still learning, and I can keep people up to date with the scientific, locally-based research that actually works in San Antonio.”

Master Gardener of the Quarter is a certified Master Gardener in good standing, selected by the Board of Directors. Selection criteria include breadth of volunteer hours in different programs and demonstrated leadership in furthering the BCMG mission. The Master Gardener of the Year is selected from the four Quarter candidates and will be the nominee for the State Master Gardener of the Year.

*By Kimberly Casillas,
Bexar County Master Gardener*