

Master Gardener of the Summer:

Ray Montez

Ray has been a BCMG for 4 years, having graduated with Class 63. He grew up in San Antonio on the South Side and learned to love gardening as a child with family role models. His grandfather helped him pick corn by hand and he even picked cotton. "Not ever again!" was his quote as he recalled the pricks to his fingers. Early on, he pulled weeds in the yard and learned to use a garden fork to till out weeds. His mother and grandmother loved florals as well as growing herbs. He recalled their abundant tomatoes and many varieties of chili peppers, some of which were put into a Molcajete, a small avocado shaped bowl where the peppers could be macerated with spices and oils to make a condiment.

The way Ray learned about the BCMG program is interesting. After retiring from public service he became an active AARP volunteer (He was formerly in the US Airforce Security Forces for 9 1/2 years; then became a certified Texas Peace Officer until retirement). At an AARP meeting, there was a presentation on gardening which included a lot of information on soils, seeds and native plants. Ray volunteered to help the senior citizen participants with a planting activity. The presenters noticed his ability to answer the senior's questions and encouraged him to learn about the BCMG program. Ray looked up the program, applied, was accepted. He really loves volunteering with the Children's Vegetable Garden at SABOT and working at the Greenies Urban Farm. He commented: "When I first volunteered with the Children's Vegetable Garden, I had my own group of kids and they just loved it. They learned to get their hands in the soil and learned about planting, insects, watering and care." He has also been very active at the Greenies Urban Farm because he saw the growing need for food during COVID. He commented: "We planted so late in the season that I was worried we would get not get much yield, but the irrigation system provided by Dr. Stein helped so much. I helped everywhere I was needed- repairing things, etc. It was amazing to see the vegetables and the three kinds of watermelons, etc. all growing so well! The whole thing about me doing Master Gardener is I want to find a way to feed people – I grow then give it away!"

Fellow BCMG Bill Swantner had this to say about Ray Montez: “Ray is a man of deep compassion, who has a heart for people. He uses his life experiences to reach out to military personnel who are struggling with their own life challenges. As a Master Gardener, Ray brings that openness to the gardening community.”

Ray shared his personal outreach: “I took on supervising a landscaping project at our local church with several islands that were built over old tarmac. I made the work crew jackhammer out the asphalt and dig it out so we could put in good soil. I’ve grown and donated trees for this project including a Post Oak, a Burr Oak, a Mexican Plum, three Crape Myrtles, and a Vitex. I’ve also provided the bedding plants for volunteers to plant. And, I’ve talked to the priest about doing a talk for the parishioners about gardening! My mantra is “Life is too short to sit on a couch” My oldest son says “Motion is the lotion!” Gardening is a great way to move around!” Aren’t we fortunate to have Ray as a fellow BCMG.