

For Immediate Release

## **Apply Now to Join the First Class of Platte County Master Gardeners**

Platte County Horticulture Educator Ray Bremer will be conducting the first class to certify individuals as Master Gardener that has been taught in Platte County in several years.

Many people believe that Master Gardeners must be walking gardening encyclopedias and that puts some level of fear in people who might otherwise be interested in learning better gardening practices and helping other people with gardening problems. Master Gardeners are local gardeners who have taken classes from University of Wyoming (UW) Cooperative Extension Service (CES) staff and are willing to volunteer time back to their communities. Many Master Gardeners have been long time gardeners before taking the training classes. Some Master Gardeners are young gardeners who don't know where to start but know they need some help when they wander into a local CES office. Still others have learned to garden in other parts of the country and need to adapt their gardening practices to a new climate, new soil condition or a different growing season. Whatever the reason each trainee decides to become a Master Gardener, they will gain basic gardening skills and learn how and where to research more difficult gardening problems in order to find solutions. The whole idea is to begin a lifelong learning process with an interest in volunteering to help others.

Wyoming Master Gardener programs offer between 40 and 60 hours of training, dependant upon the county. Topics from botany to water wise gardening are taught based upon a 2004 curriculum Sustainable Horticulture for Wyoming, A Master Gardener Handbook. Once the trainees receive their classroom experience they are required to volunteer a minimum of 40 hours in their community before they are given the title of Master Gardener. Many CES offices receive thousands of phone calls in a season and the assistance of many volunteers is needed to meet these horticultural demands. Trainees have the opportunity to go on yard calls and to work with other Master Gardeners answering gardening questions, all the while learning as they help others. This experience offers an abundance of opportunities for volunteers to help fellow citizens and expand their own gardening knowledge without having to "know all the answers" to start with.

The Master Gardener Course in Platte County will begin on Tuesday, March 18, with an introduction by Raina Spence, Research Scientist for the UW CES Plant Sciences Department. Classroom instructors will include Ray Bremer, Horticulture Specialist for Platte County Extension; Kellie Belden, Soils Specialist with the UW CES Plant Sciences Dept.; Karen Panter, Horticulturist with the UW CES Plant Sciences Dept.; and other specialists from the area and the state. The course will run Tuesdays and Thursdays, March 18 through April 29. Registration deadline is March 1. Please contact the Platte County Extension Office at 322-3667, Monday through Friday, 8:30—11:30 a.m. or 12:30—4:30 p.m., for an application and more information.