

ASK A MASTER GARDENER

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Joyce McArthur, Carroll County Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

My children's friends are members of Junior Master Gardeners. Are there any requirements to join? What kind of activities do they do, and how can we register our children?

The Carroll County Master Gardener Association (CCMGA) sponsors our local chapter of the Junior Master Gardeners (JMG). The JMG organization was created at Texas A & M University through the Texas Agrilife Extension Service. Twenty eight Universities nationally implement the program at the state level, including the University of Georgia. Texas A&M University serves as the headquarters for the National JMG Program Office.

The National JMG's Mission Statement tells us what this organization is all about: "To grow good kids by igniting a passion for learning, success and service through a unique gardening education. "

Carroll County's JMG group meets monthly throughout the school year, and culminates in a three day summer camp in June, known as Camp Dirty Knees. The activities are fun, creative, and geared to introduce the children to research based horticultural methods and practices, to expand their knowledge of the natural world around them, and to teach them about good environmental stewardship. To accomplish that mission, the curricula include (per the JMGKIDS website, jmgkids.us):

- independent and group learning experiences
- life/skill and career exploration
- service learning opportunities for youth

The only requirement to join JMG is that the child must be between the ages of 9 and 12. Previous experience with planting or gardening is not necessary: all we ask is that the children enjoy learning, playing in the dirt, making crafts and helping others. Our group has planted flowers while learning how to read a plant label. They've learned about composting while making their own personal kitchen compost container to take home. The children have made weather stations, shoe gardens, butterfly feeders and hanging planters. They've learned about bats and insects, the difference between perennials and annuals, and why native plants are good to have in your yard. Each meeting includes a snack for the children, and often the snack is part of the lesson for the day. A fun activity the children enjoyed was called "Hamburger Plant". Each child created his or her own hamburger with a variety of toppings, and drew a picture telling how each item, including the hamburger, the toppings, and the bun ultimately originated from plants.

Our first meeting this school year was in September, but children can join at any meeting. Each of the programs includes a new activity and learning opportunity. We meet on the second Monday of each month, September through May, at the Carroll County Ag Center, 900 Newnan Rd, Carrollton (770-836-8546). Our meetings are from 4:30 to 6:00 pm. Parents are more than welcome to stay and observe, or to help out if they'd like. When you bring your child for the first time, we will give you a short application form to fill out. There is no charge for any of the meetings or activities. If you'd like to know more about the JMG program, please email the JMG Co-Chairs, Katy Lazar at carrolljmg@gmail.com or call Joyce McArthur at 678-464-1821. Our next meeting will be November 10 at 4:30 pm at the Ag Center.