



NATIONAL GARDEN CLUBS, INC
By Marie Harrison (can2grow)

February 17, 2010

Garden clubs exist all over the world, and no wonder. Gardening is one of the most popular hobbies. Many garden clubs belong to organized federations, and many do not. My garden club is a member of National Garden Clubs, the Deep South Region of Garden Clubs, and the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs (the Federation). We choose to belong to these organizations because they offer many opportunities to our club and its members.

A friend approached me recently with this comment. "Members of my club have been questioning the wisdom of remaining in the Federation. 'Why,' they ask, 'should we send \$11 per member to a state federation when we could just as well spend the money at home?'" New clubs want answers, too. "We're just a neighborhood garden club," they say. "We want to learn about gardening in our neck of the woods and to work in our community. We can do those things without being members of the Federation."

These are good questions, and they deserve good answers. Usually when I start delving into problems like these, I have to bring it down to a personal level. I have to ask myself, "What does my eleven dollars pay for? What does membership in National Garden Clubs, the Deep South Region of Garden Clubs, and the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs (the Federation) bring to me, my club and district?" Put that way, I found answers aplenty. The key word is **opportunity**.

The opportunity for education was the thing that had the greatest impact on me. It all began when a [garden club](#) in my area offered Floral Design Studies. Following closely on its heels came Flower Show School. I became an Accredited Flower Show Judge and Floral Design Instructor. Then, I started writing outlines and becoming approved to teach Flower Show Schools and symposia. The learning curve has been stupendous. I cannot begin to tell all I have learned through these pursuits.



The learning continues as I attend symposia, judges' meetings, garden club meetings, short courses throughout the state, and take advantage of other opportunities offered by the Federation. Had I chosen, I could have gone to Landscape Design Studies, Gardening Studies, and Environmental Studies Schools. All of these are taught by leaders in the respective fields.

Add to these the opportunities we have for participation in special projects sponsored by our leaders. FFGC

President Carol Hall urges us to "Reach Out-Be a Mentor." National President Renee Blaschke urges us to be aware of "The World Around Us" and to "Love it - Beautify It, and Protect It." Deep South Region Director Mary Sue Colvin reminds us that "Together as One--Our Hands and Hearts are P.O.W.E.R." (Protecting Our World's Environment and Resources). Each of these leaders has devised programs for youth and adults that encourage us to support and undertake proactive initiatives for the protection, conservation, and restoration of the quality of our nation's natural resources.

All that's just a drop in the bucket. FFGC offers many opportunities for learning and making a difference in our world. Think about Fun with Flowers, Digging It, our work with birds and butterflies, reclamation and recycling, water and wetlands, Bartram Trail Markers, Blue Star Markers, roadside beautification, and many other programs aimed at making our world a cleaner and more beautiful place.

There's more. Because I belong to the Federation, I contribute to Nature Conservancy, Habitat for Humanity Landscape projects, and World Gardening and Natural Disasters. I am part of thousands of dollars' worth of scholarships awarded each year to deserving college students. I am a part of programs for youth, such as SEEK (Save the Earth's Environment through Knowledge) and Camp Wekiva, Florida's own summer environmental camp for children. All these activities give clubs focus and concrete reasons to work toward established goals.

I have the opportunity to influence legislation that will affect our environment and the welfare of our earth. Our own government agency liaison keeps us informed of legislative issues that affect the environment and formulates resolutions to help us make our voices heard. I can go to Legislative Day in Tallahassee and to the Florida Springs Rally that is being staged to call attention to the delicate state of natural springs throughout our state and to urge corrective measures.

Opportunities abound in the Federation for honoring members. We confer life memberships in the FFGC, Deep South and NGC, if we want to. Our members are eligible for the Hall of Fame, Guardians of Gardening, Pillar of Pride, and Awards of Honor. Leadership awards can be given to individual members in appreciation and recognition of the hard work they do to make our world better.

Our clubs, too, can win awards for the projects we do.



And members are kept well-informed. The *Book of Information* has it all. Add to that the President's packs with flyers from each chairman, the *Handbook for Flower Shows*, *The Florida Gardener*, *The National Gardener*, and regular communiqués from our national and state presidents, our district directors and our club presidents. These publications leave no doubt about what's going on at every level of our organization. And these "goings-on" are things that I want to be a part of.

Last, but perhaps most important of all, in the Federation I have met many wonderful people. I meet them at district meetings, conventions, seminars, and the like. I would not have met them in my neighborhood garden club.

If you were not a member of National Garden Clubs, you could not

- sponsor a Standard Flower Show or judge one.
- get insurance for a one or two-day event at a reasonable price.
- become "Garden Club of the Year" for Florida and the Deep South (or win any number of other great awards).
- meet people from all over the country who share your love of gardening and floral design.

I know that all who are members of the group know this. But it doesn't hurt to remember why the Federation is important to us. "Because," we remind ourselves, "We are members of the Federation because of the opportunities!"

What do you think opportunity is worth? I believe that it is priceless, but it's available to us for only \$11. Without a doubt, it's the best bargain this gardener ever made!

It should be noted that this article includes information about the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, the Deep South Region of Garden Clubs, and National Garden Clubs. This author is certain that members in other states and regions offer similar opportunities. I have focused on these because they are the ones to which I belong and with which I am most familiar. It is not an attempt to focus on one region and ignore the others. All states and regions add to the diversity and range of opportunities offered in the Federation.

Acronyms and Other Terms in this Article

FFGC -- Florida Federation of Garden Clubs - Headquartered in Winter Park, Florida. Membership IS approximately 14,000.

NGC - National Garden Clubs - Headquartered in St. Louis, MO. Comprised of New England, Central Atlantic, South Atlantic, Deep South, Central, South Central, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific Regions; 6,095 clubs; 198,345 members.

Deep South Region of Garden Clubs - Six states in this region of NGC; Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee.

About Marie Harrison



Serving as a board member for Valparaiso Garden Club, the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and the Deep South Region, and National Garden Clubs takes a chunk of my time and attention. Being a Master Flower Show Judge, a Floral Design Instructor, instructor of horticulture for National Garden Clubs, and a University of Florida Master Gardener crowds a bit more into my busy days. In addition to these activities, I contribute regularly to Florida Gardening magazine and other publications. I am author of four gardening books, all published by Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Florida. Read about them and visit me at www.mariesgarden.com