

## University of Maryland Master Gardener Program

# The Maryland Master Gardener Program Policies and Guidelines

## WHAT IS THE MARYLAND MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM?

The University of Maryland Cooperative Extension (UMCE) has conducted the Maryland Master Gardener Program continuously since 1978. The program's mission is to train volunteer educators to extend the services, programs, and expertise of the College of Agriculture and Natural resources to the general public. Master Gardeners are volunteer representatives of the University of Maryland. The mission is to "educate Maryland residents about safe, effective, and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes, and communities."

Master Gardeners play an important role in organizing and administering the program at the county/city level. In most cases a formal organizational structure with working committees is created and regular meetings are held to conduct business and plan volunteer activities. Newsletters and websites are used to link members.

Master Gardeners are supported and supervised by a Cooperative Extension staff professional in their home county/city and have access to Cooperative Extension office space, secretarial support, displays, audio-visual equipment, reference books, and printed materials.

Most local decisions regarding Master Gardener operations and activities are made jointly by Master Gardener volunteers and paid UMCE staff. However, paid staff is ultimately responsible for the program's operation. The policies and guidelines set forth represent minimum standards. Individual county and city programs may set more stringent standards. County/City coordinators consult with the State Coordinator when issues or questions arise over the interpretation of policies and guidelines. The coordinators have discretion to make judgements that best support their local program.

The Home and Garden Information Center (HGIC) faculty develops teaching materials, including the Master Gardener Handbook, and conducts basic and advanced training along with other campus and field faculty. The State Coordinator for the Master Gardener Program is housed at HGIC and provides the individual county/city programs with guidance, updates, and materials and supplies. The State Coordinator and the Advanced Training Coordinator produce annual reports based on data recorded by volunteers and work with Extension staff and volunteers to develop training programs, policies, and new initiatives.

## BECOMING A MASTER GARDENER

- Master Gardener Trainee- an individual who is screened, interviewed, and accepted into the training program. A fee is charged to cover the costs of the Master Gardener Handbook, publications, refreshments and other necessary supplies and materials and, in part, to support the state MG program. (Trainees can volunteer once they receive volunteer policy training and all of their required volunteer forms are completed and on file in the local Extension office.)
- Master Gardener Intern- an individual who has completed the basic training program (attending at least 75% of the classes), passed the final exam (75% or better), received volunteer policy training, and has all of their required volunteer forms completed and on file, in the local Extension office.
- Certified Master Gardener- an intern who has completed the initial 40 hours of volunteer service, by participating in an approved volunteer project in accordance with MG Policies and Guidelines. Master Gardeners receive a signed certificate, name badge, and membership card upon successful completion of the training and 40 hour volunteer requirement.

- Active Master Gardener- to remain an active, certified Master Gardener one must:
  1. Provide at least 20 hours of certified volunteer service each calendar year.
  2. Complete at least 10 hours of continuing education through classes, seminars and other educational activities offered by UMCE, plant societies, botanical gardens and arboreta, colleges, nature centers, etc. Subject matter presentations made at Master Gardener membership meetings are also included.
  3. Submit documentation (record log) of volunteer and continuing education hours.
  4. Have a current, signed "Volunteer Appointment Agreement" form on file at the Extension office.

(Note: Membership in an MG association is not a condition for maintaining active status.)

- Master Gardener Emeritus- a MG who can no longer be active but wishes to stay connected to the program (attend social events and meetings, receive communications). Upon mutual agreement, the local MG Coordinator may grant this status (and an MG Emeritus Certificate) to a volunteer.
- Hiatus- a MG who wishes to become inactive due to personal circumstances. This status can last up to 3 years. The MG makes the request to the local MG Coordinator. If approved, a letter confirming the "on hiatus" status is placed in the volunteer's file. Volunteers who have been inactive for 3 years or less may change their status to "active" by volunteering at least 20 hours per year and completing at least 10 hours of advanced training (see above).
- Terminated- a MG who no longer wishes to be part of the program.

## Transfers

Guidelines for Master Gardeners transferring from out of state:

- Must present proof of prior MG training and certification.
- Must purchase a Maryland MG Handbook.
- Will be assigned a mentor and meet with MG Coordinator to determine training needs.
- Take final exam as a take home test.
- Complete volunteer policy training and all necessary forms.
- A small fee may be charged at the discretion of the MG Coordinator.

Guidelines for Master Gardeners transferring between Maryland county/city program:

- Will be assigned a mentor and meet with MG Coordinator to determine training needs.
- Transfer and update paperwork.

## Benefits to Volunteers

The MCE has a vested interest in developing a corps of enthusiastic, knowledgeable and dedicated Master Gardener volunteers. Volunteers gain the following benefits from participation:

- Opportunity to attend basic and advanced training programs covering all aspects of environmental horticulture.
- Learn new skills and hone old ones.
- Meet and work with other people interested in horticulture.
- Gain personal satisfaction from "helping people to help themselves."
- Declare allowable, non-reimbursed, out-of-pocket expenses for income tax purposes.
- Protection, through the Maryland Tort Claims Act, from lawsuits while performing volunteer duties in accordance with position description.

## Responsibilities of Volunteers

- Follow the guidelines and procedures set forth by UMCE.
- Be considerate, respect others' competencies and work as a member of a team with all professional and volunteer staff.
- Accept assignments of your choice that you feel comfortable with and that are compatible with your interests and skills.
- For volunteer activities, fulfill your commitment or notify your mentor, volunteer activity leader or Extension professional early enough that a substitute can be found.
- Keep an accurate record of your continuing education and submit this log on a regular basis to the Extension professional in your county/city.
- University of Maryland employees and volunteers are required by federal and state law and institutional policy to ensure that all programs and services are available to all residents. Therefore, it is very important that you complete your volunteer log forms on a regular basis, including race and gender information for clientele with whom you have contact. When recording contact information, please transfer/summarize on the volunteer log form the notes you make concerning the number of client contacts made through plant clinics, phone calls, talks, workshops, information booths etc. Your work is important!
- Participant contact data is to be collected in a discrete manner. In activities with large attendance such as talks and seminars, make the best estimate you can. Identify participants as "unknown" (U) when you are in doubt as to race or ethnicity. When more than one Master Gardener is involved in an event, please take care that all contacts are accounted for, and that the contact numbers are not duplicated on the logs of individual Master Gardeners.

- Assist UMCE professionals in soliciting and collecting survey and evaluation data to measure program impact.
- Attend regularly scheduled meetings and actively participate whenever possible.
- Provide feedback and suggestions to your mentor and Extension professional to increase program effectiveness.
- Help new volunteers feel accepted.

**All volunteer hours should be recorded on your personal log sheet and totaled by activity. This includes planning meetings and events, committee and administrative work, and time spent preparing for activities. Volunteer service includes travel time for volunteer activities and MG Association meetings, but does not include continuing education (class room hours or travel time).**

## GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH THE PUBLIC

1. Identify yourself as a Master Gardener Volunteer or Master Gardener Intern when participating in events sanctioned by the University of Maryland. Always wear your name badge. Remember that the public has respect for you and confidence in your abilities because of your association with the University of Maryland. They expect impartial, objective information. **Your job is to help clients make informed decisions.**
2. Do not attempt to answer questions outside of the home horticulture area (e.g. food preservation, nutrition, commercial production). Be prepared to refer clients to appropriate UMCE professionals or other agencies and organizations.
3. If you're unsure of the answer to a client question you can take down the pertinent information, research the question, talk to other Master Gardeners or Extension professionals, and then call the client back with an answer, or refer the client to the appropriate Extension professional.
5. Do not endorse brand name products, recommend a particular company or criticize the work of a lawn care, pest management or other horticulture-related company. Do not become involved in disputes between individuals (e.g. "my neighbor sprayed my rose bushes with something") or between an individual and a company (e.g. "do you think I should sue my lawn care service"?)
7. Many volunteers make a big difference in people's lives when working in the therapeutic horticulture arena. Volunteers should always work under the supervision of a health care professional and closely adhere to the facility's institutional policies and guidelines.
8. Accepting invitations to conduct plant clinics, workshops, information booths, etc. at private businesses. On occasion, retail nurseries, greenhouses, and garden centers have asked MGs to make presentations, conduct plant clinics, distribute fact sheets, etc. for special events, fairs and festivals conducted by the individual business. In some cases, businesses have given honoraria to the MG programs for these services. This type of activity is permitted as long as the following criteria are met:
  - a) Limited to a single event, or well-defined series of special events.
  - b) Does not overwhelm MG volunteer resources or reduce effectiveness of other MG activities.
  - c) Will further the educational goals of the MG program and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXTENSION

- Provide you with the necessary training and materials to carry out your assignments.
- Familiarize you with UMCE programs and University of Maryland policies and procedures and help you become an integral part of the UMCE team.
- Provide adequate orientation, training, and supervision for the assignments you accept.
- Offer opportunity to advance to positions with increased responsibilities and higher levels of management/skill.
- Keep you informed about program activities and events through state and county newsletters and websites.
- Provide you with feedback to help improve your job performance.
- Recognize your contribution to the University of Maryland.

## WHAT CONSTITUTES A MASTER GARDENER ACTIVITY

Maryland Master Gardeners are involved in a wide range of activities such as education programs, therapeutic horticulture, plant clinics, and demonstration gardens. The following broad guidelines can be used to determine the suitability of a particular activity or project:

1. Consistent with the Master Gardener mission.
2. Accessible and open to the public.
3. Provides the general public with accurate and useful information regarding horticulture and integrated pest management.
4. Educational and does not result in financial gain for the Master Gardener.
5. Conducted by the Master Gardener as a representative of the University of Maryland.
6. Approved by an Extension professional.

**Education is the mission and principal goal of the Master Gardener program. Garden maintenance activities should be kept to a minimum.** Site visits to the private properties of individual clients are strongly discouraged unless they are part of an approved activity, like the Bay-Wise Landscaping program. Discuss your ideas for appropriate activities with other Master Gardeners and Extension professionals. The State Coordinator will be consulted where questions or issues arise over a proposed activity.

- d) Made available to other similar businesses to avoid the appearance of partiality.
- e) The MG presence is advertised and promoted prior to the event.
- f) Does not enrich or aggrandize individual MGs.
- g) The identity and affiliation of the MGs is clear and unmistakable. MGs given a separate designated area to educate customers to help maintain our reputation for impartiality and objectivity.

- 2. Classroom outlines, articles for local newspapers or electronic media, MG newsletters and other materials developed by volunteers must be reviewed and approved by an Extension professional prior to distribution or release.
- 3. Only distribute approved, updated Cooperative Extension fact sheets (those listed in UMCE leaflets).
- 4. All educational materials purchased with program funds or developed for training or projects, or use by Master Gardeners (e.g. slides, photography, Power Point presentations, tools, herbarium mounts, books) are the exclusive property of UMCE.

**USING MASTER GARDENER TITLE/  
ACCEPTING MONEY**

- 1. Only active, certified Master Gardeners can use the title “Maryland Master Gardener”.
- 2. A Master Gardener cannot lend her name and title to promote or advertise a private business (e.g. wearing a Master Gardener name tag while working for a business as a paid employee). An implied association with or endorsement of a commercial product or business is improper and grounds for dismissal from the program.
- 3. Master Gardeners can present their title and qualifications as Master Gardeners on job applications.
- 4. When asked to make horticultural presentations to groups, Master Gardeners may accept honorariums on behalf of the University of Maryland, which are used to support Master Gardener goals and activities. Under no circumstance should volunteers accept money or gifts for themselves for services provided while acting as a Master Gardener.

**EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS**

- 1. Ask for permission and give proper credit to information sources used in articles for Master Gardener newsletters and other print media.

**PESTICIDES AND PEST CONTROL  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. It is the client’s responsibility to use pesticides safely and legally. ALWAYS insist that clients READ and FOLLOW pesticide label directions and remind them that it is a federal offense to use any pesticide in contradiction to the label information.
- 2. When clients have questions about specific materials refer them to the manufacturers’ telephone number or the National Pesticide Telecommunication Network (1-800-858-7378). Do not speak for pesticide companies.
- 3. It is important to be up-to-date on the labeling information for commonly used pesticides and knowledgeable about alternative pest control methods.

**WORKING WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND  
ORGANIZATIONS**

Educational efforts are often furthered through cooperative programs with other groups. Formal partnerships or agreements must be approved by a UMCE faculty member.

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**[www.mastergardener.umd.edu](http://www.mastergardener.umd.edu)**