

Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County

Master Gardener Volunteer Program Guidelines



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CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION ONEIDA COUNTY VOLUNTEER POSITION

Title: Master Gardener Volunteer

The Master Gardener Volunteer provides home and community gardeners with unbiased gardening information based on research and proven experience, through a “neighbors-teaching- neighbors” educational program.

Responsibilities:

- Successfully complete the required Master Gardener Volunteer Program and remain current through participation in recommended training opportunities throughout the agreed term of volunteer service.
- Serve as a horticultural resource as outlined in the plan of work of Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County.
- Represent Cornell Cooperative Extension Oneida County within the community; encourage enrollment in and support for the organization.

Training and Support:

- Orientation to the Cornell Cooperative Extension, its mission and that of the Master Gardener Volunteer Program
- Attend a core qualifying course in gardening, as well as refresher classes, field trips and workshops to enhance expertise and ability to communicate information related to ecological gardening and related topics to the public.
- Orientation to the operational and risk management procedures
- Periodic opportunities for statewide, regional, and national conferences; participation is encouraged to expand knowledge and remain current.
- One on one consultation with Extension Educator

Reporting:

- Each Master Gardener Volunteer is expected to maintain records of program contacts, recommendations and time devoted to volunteer activities.

Time Commitment:

- An Oneida County Master Gardener Volunteer is expected to contribute a minimum of 50 hours annually.
- To reach Master Gardener status he/she must have successfully completed training and have given 200 hours of volunteer time.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Network

PROGRAM OVERVIEW: The Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program has continually evolved since its inception in 1975 in New York State. The development of new curriculum, statewide projects, and adult learning best practices, have changed some over 40 years. MGV participants display integrity and standards for excellence which are the foundation of this well-respected and well-recognized program. Volunteers understand what is expected, the county can

plan peer-learning programs; the public know the value of an MGV. Benefits are seen state-wide in community sustainability, food security and the use of science-based gardening practices.

OUR MISSION: To prepare volunteers to become peer educators who build relationships with community audiences to integrate local experience and research-based knowledge in planning for and initiating steps to manage; gardens, lawns, and landscapes with an emphasis on food security and environmental stewardship. The MGV program is an integral part of the outreach of Cornell Cooperative Extension and functions in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws of CCE Oneida County.

OUR VISION: To see adults, youth, and families engage in garden-based educational programs to expand their learning networks and ecological gardening skills as they increase resilience and connections. Resulting in, enhanced health and wellness, food security, ecological literacy, and environmental stewardship, as they embrace sustainable community practices.

Qualifications:

- A. A basic interest in and/or knowledge of gardening/horticulture. Enthusiasm for acquiring and sharing horticultural knowledge and skills.
- B. A flexible time schedule to allow participation in community educational programs and Parker F. Scripture Botanical Gardens activities/maintenance.
- C. Interest in helping others.
- D. Interest in making new friends.
- E. Ability to communicate.

***In addition, all Master Gardener Volunteers are required to submit an Authorization/Consent form for a background check every 3 years as of September 2005 in accordance with Cornell University. MGVs will also complete Sexual Harassment Prevention training and submit a reenrollment form every year.**

BENEFITS:

- A. Receive extensive horticultural training based on research carried out through Cornell University.
- B. Receive research-based literature, Home Grown fact sheets and publications, available free or at a nominal cost, on a wide variety of horticultural subjects.
- C. Have fun while learning and helping others. Trainees can concentrate their horticultural interests following core instruction in a variety of garden areas in the Parker F. Scripture Garden.
- D. Take field trips to area growers, greenhouses, and gardens. Network with others about new and unusual plants.

ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS (Definitions)

- A. Level 1 – Student Gardener Trainee (Year 1): Acceptance and engagement in the hybrid training made up of online and hands on learning segments at the Parker F. Scripture Botanical Gardens garden work sessions requirements. Successfully complete training, project, quizzes, and exams. Attend 6 monthly business meetings.
- B. Level 2 – Apprentice Gardener (Year 2 to 4): Completion of level 1 to continue to strive to reach 200+ volunteer hours in the program. Give 50 hours (annually) of volunteer time to the program while meeting program requirements; and attend 6 monthly business meetings.
- C. Level 3 – Master Gardener Volunteer: Completion of 200 hours and while striving to meet program volunteer 50 hours annually requirements.
- D. Alumni: An alumni gardener participates in program activities and monthly business meetings.
 - Complete annual re-enrollment forms.
 - Submit program volunteer hours bi-monthly.
 - Contribute at least 15 volunteer hours annually.
 - To attend at 6 monthly business meetings annually.
- E. Friend: Former Master Gardener Volunteer who is not an active program participant and who may have relocated.
 - Complete annual re-enrollment forms.
 - Remain on the mailing list for Master Gardener Volunteers.

EXAMPLES OF VOLUNTEER HOURS INCLUDE:

- Attendance at monthly MGV meetings (6 out of 11 annually).
- Assist with design, development and/or maintenance of Extension's Parker F. Scripture Botanical Demonstration Garden. (including: preparing garden beds, watering, deadheading, and weeding).
- Support one of the approved statewide priority projects like:
 - [Seed to Supper](#)
 - [Vegetable Varieties Trial Gardens \(at the Parker F. Scripture Botanical Gardens\)](#)
- Assist CCE staff to answer consumer/home gardener's telephone and email inquiries and assist Extension office visitors with plant and insect samples for identification or diagnosis, assist homeowners with reading pesticide labels correctly (Garden Hotline).

- Assist with Extension educational programming, such as talks for local organizations, Extension-sponsored workshops, exhibits, displays, etc.
- Write research-based gardening and horticultural information for fact sheets, newsletters, newspapers (print and digital), magazines, websites, blogs, etc.
- Assist/guide teachers, 4-H volunteers, and youth, and/or children with gardening education projects.
- Conduct/teach horticultural related clinics, pruning, or other demonstrations, at Extension offices, local libraries, farmers markets, government centers, fairs, expos, garden clubs, civic groups, community events, flower shows, etc.
- Teach Master Gardener training sessions.
- Create or prepare visuals/graphics, such as posters, flyers, program announcements, tabletop displays for horticultural programs and/or publications.
- Photograph or videotape Extension/MG events.
- Teach others through demonstration how to garden in raised beds/gardens, lead a tour to a garden club or outside group here at the Extension's Garden, etc.
- Provide assistance to horticultural therapy programs for emotionally/physically/mentally disabled persons, nursing homes, hospitals, state/county prisons, youth detention centers. Help guide special need youth and adult audiences at the Extension Parker F. Scripture Botanical Garden.
- Assist with data collection, testing, and evaluating new varieties of vegetable, turf, ornamentals, and/or flowers for research projects.
- Assist with or organize horticultural files in Extension office.
- Assist MGV staff coordinator with coordinating MGV activities in the county.
- Serve on Extension Board and/or on Extension Advisory committees.

HOURS NOT INCLUDED:

- Travel time to and from events.
- Visits to Botanical Gardens while on vacation (unless a special training is involved, and approval is received from the program director).
- Standard garden maintenance of community project areas (Need to be pre-approved – maintenance hours, planting hours do not count unless specific teaching is also happening). [Maintenance at the Parker F. Scripture Botanical Gardens counts.]
- Required Core Instruction Training for student MGVs.

Guidelines for Master Gardener Program Volunteers:

a) General Guidelines:

- Requires annual enrollment and DMV/Criminal Background check every 3 years.
- Volunteer service for outside organizations which satisfies the requirements for participation or membership in those organizations may **not** be counted as a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteer activity unless you are there representing Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners.
- Must submit a completed volunteer service record bi-monthly, as required by Program Leader.
- Master Gardener participation in non-Extension sponsored programs/activities/events without prior approval of supervising Program Leader may or may not count as volunteer service time, at the discretion of the supervising Program Leader.
- Volunteers should wear the official Cornell Extension Master Gardener Name Badge and dress appropriately while volunteering for Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Exceptions to the requirements to maintain Active Volunteer status may be granted for hardship or extenuating circumstances at the discretion of supervising Program Leader. See description of Special Project Volunteer and On-Leave status below.
- Only Master Gardener Volunteers can operate Master Gardener equipment (Computers/Projectors/Microscope/Mowers/Weed Eaters/Outdoor Power Equipment).

b) Use of Title: The title "Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener" is to be used only and exclusively by an individual trained to assist Cornell Cooperative Extension. The title is valid only when the volunteer is participating in the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program. The title "Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener" is to be used only when doing **unpaid** volunteer service in a program activity approved by the supervising Program Educator.

c) Endorsements: A Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener may not advertise his name or his place of business or be listed on the advertisements of business places as a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener. Because the Master Gardener program is a Cornell Cooperative Extension public service program providing unbiased, research-based information, appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or implying Cornell Cooperative Extension endorsement of any product or place of business is improper and not allowed.

The training and experience gained by participating in the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program are valuable and may rightfully be listed as qualifications when seeking employment. Once employed and while serving as a paid employee, or if self-employed, a Master Gardener must not display credentials or give the appearance of being a Master Gardener at the place of business or in any literature, brochures, advertising, or marketing materials associated with that business, unless the business is specifically designated by the supervising Program Educator as an approved location for a Master Gardener activity.

d) Educational Recommendations: When making recommendations, which include the use of fertilizers and pesticides, a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener must follow current Cooperative Extension recommendations. Horticultural problems which are not specifically covered by Extension recommendations should be referred to the program coordinator. Questions concerning commercial production of crops and pest control on such crops must be referred to the program coordinator.

Our recommendation resources include NYS Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices. IPM emphasizes exploring all options for pest management including: “practicing tolerance,” “practicing prevention,” “using mechanical controls,” and “using chemical controls.” Volunteers in the Master Gardener Program must be able to make suggestions based on Cooperative Extension or NYS IPM recommendations rather than making suggestions based on “home remedies” or personal preference.

Written materials (news releases, newsletters, fact sheets, presentations, etc.) prepared by a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener must be reviewed and approved by supervising Extension staff prior to release or publication.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

- A. As the MGVS program grows, the opportunity for the program to reach out and interact with other in-house programs and community-wide programs also increases. MGVSs will often come in direct contact with community leaders and media representatives.

MGVSs should follow the guidance of appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension staff members to ensure that the technical content of all information offered is based on unbiased, research-based findings.

Cornell University's horticulture standard is based upon ecologically sound principles. That usually means recommending environmentally friendly practices before any harsher method. When using Pest Management Around the Home, Part I and II, for instance, MGVSs should quote information in Part I (Cultural Methods) before quoting information in Part II (Pesticide Information). Other research-based information may be less environmentally sensitive.

- B. All media productions:

1. Must be based upon the research, educational and regulatory policy of the Cornell Cooperative Extension.
2. Must be reviewed and approved prior to mailing in the case of written communications with an Extension Educator.

3. Should be approached from a positive viewpoint. The most successful programs approach both problems and opportunities with enthusiasm and optimism.

Changes in Master Gardener Volunteer Status

To retain the integrity of the MGVS program in New York State, all applicants must agree to the following before beginning the training: "At a time when I am no longer active as an MGVS, I agree to refer to myself only as a graduate of the MGVS program or a former MGVS."

Inactive and/or MGVS on leave of absence is one who wishes to take time off from their volunteer commitment for personal or other reasons. The individual must petition the MGVS coordinator in order to take a leave of absence from the program. MGVS on leave will remain on the roster and continue to receive mailings for a period of one year. An annual enrollment form is required to retain an active status.

A released MGVS is one who wishes to be released from the program with no plans of returning in the future, or one who does not renew their volunteer commitment (MGVS Reenrollment form) by **February 1st**. A MGVS who has moved out of county, cannot be reached, or has not contacted the Program Leader nor has submitted a Volunteer Hour Report within the past year, will be considered released from the program. Released MGVS who are taken off the MGVS roster will no longer be sent mailings.

IX. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I Take a Leave of Absence? Yes. If you need to take time off from your volunteer commitment, contact the Program Leader and request to be placed on leave. For a period of one year, you will still receive electronic monthly newsletters and your status on the MGVS roster will state that you are on leave. When you're ready to return, submit a letter of intent to the Program Leader and your active status will be reinstated.

Can I be released from the Master Gardener Volunteer Program? What happens if I have to relocate?

If you are relocating out of the region, or wish to be released from the program with no plans of returning in the future, contact the Program Leader. You will be taken off the roster and no monthly newsletter or mailings will be sent to you.

Similarly, if you have not submitted monthly hours nor contacted the Program Leader within one year, you will be taken off the roster and no monthly newsletter or mailings will be sent to you.

Can I transfer into the Oneida County program from another County or out of state?

Prospective volunteers who wish to transfer in from another county in NYS must go through the application process and provide references from the county in which they previously volunteered. In addition to completing the volunteer application and signing a Volunteer

Agreement and Code of Conduct form, the applicant will write an essay of their past experiences as a MGVS and what they wish to bring to the CCE Oneida County as a MGVS. A background check will be done, as for all MGVS.

I took the training in Oneida County in the past, but never completed my initial 200 hours. Can I rejoin the program?

To be reinstated into the program, you must go through the application process again. In addition to completing the volunteer application and signing a Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct form, the applicant will write an essay of their past experiences as a program participant and what they wish to bring the CCE Oneida County as a MGVS. A background check will be required.

If you have any further questions regarding Volunteer Guidelines, please contact the Program Leader,

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