



Master Gardener Policy Handbook

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go.illinois.edu/MGHandbook

This document supersedes all previous University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener policy documents. This document will be reviewed and updated periodically as needed.



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

extension.illinois.edu/mg

Introduction to the Master Gardener Program

The University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program is an educational volunteer training program offered by Illinois Extension. The program is designed to increase the availability of university-based horticultural research to local non-profit, non-commercial community groups and private individuals through trained volunteers known as Master Gardeners.

Master Gardener Mission

The mission of the Master Gardener program is: *“Helping Others Learn to Grow.”* The program’s purpose is to provide horticultural information specific to local climates, soils, and plants and training to individuals and the general gardening public, based on University of Illinois research, when available.

As part of the outreach efforts of University of Illinois Extension, Master Gardeners use horticultural education, applied research, and university resources to enhance the economy and environment.

Master Gardener Program Objectives:

- Expand the capacity of University of Illinois Extension to distribute horticultural information to private individuals and public/community groups in local areas.
- Develop and enhance community programs related to horticulture. These educational programs may involve environmental improvements, therapy gardening projects, community and school gardening projects, or other programs determined by local needs.
- Develop the leadership potential of Master Gardeners through a volunteer network designed to assist Extension staff in managing local activities and programs.

To become a Master Gardener, an individual must apply online to the local Extension office offering the program. After the local coordinator reviews the application, applicants may be invited for an interview. Not all applicants are accepted into the program. There may be more applicants than space allows for an in-person classroom or more applicants than the local office can accommodate. There may also be a waiting period before the

local office is ready to take new applications. If an individual is not accepted into the current training group, their name may be kept on file, and they may be encouraged to reapply.

What is a Master Gardener?

Master Gardeners must be adults, 18 years and older. They are members of the local community interested in lawns, trees, shrubs, flowers, gardens, and the environment.

Master Gardener Participation Status

Training Participant:

A program participant from the time they begin the training program through completion of training – this individual has not yet been accepted into the program.

Master Gardener Trainee:

A program participant from the time they are accepted into the program through completion of training.

Master Gardener Intern:

A program participant from the time they graduate from training with an average score of at least 80% on quizzes and exams through completing the initial 40 hours of volunteer service. This internship is usually completed within 12 months of the end of training. However, interns may take two years to complete their internship upon agreement of the local Master Gardener program coordinator. Anyone who fails to complete the volunteer service requirement will not become a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener.

Certified (Active) Master Gardener:

This is a Master Gardener Intern who has completed their initial 40-hour volunteer service requirement or a returning previously certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener. Maintaining certified Master Gardener status requires a minimum of **20 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of continuing education annually**, valid for one year. Active Master Gardeners are encouraged to pair with Trainees and Interns to help guide newcomers through a successful volunteer experience.

Leave of Absence:

A sabbatical-like status for a former certified Master Gardener or Intern who is temporarily unable to fulfill active Master Gardener requirements for health, family, or other personal reasons. The

volunteer may request Leave of Absence status at any time of the year. The request should be communicated in writing to the program coordinator.

Participants may remain on a leave of absence for one year at a time upon the approval of their local coordinator. It is the volunteer's responsibility to stay in contact with their local program coordinator regarding their intentions to return to active status.

Returning to active status after more than two years as an inactive Master Gardener will require an additional 10 hours of continuing education to be recorded, in addition to the 10 hours that are required annually.

A volunteer who adopts a Leave of Absence status:

- Remains a Master Gardener volunteer or a member of the Extension Master Gardener volunteer program
- May report volunteer service or continuing education hours
- May attend monthly meetings, continuing education classes, and conferences at the local coordinator's discretion
- Is required to stay current on all background checks and sign the annual Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct and Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement forms
- May not serve in a local county leadership capacity
- May not apply or serve on the State Advisory Board
- Time (years) in Leave of Absence status will not count toward years of service awards

Temporary Inactive:

Active volunteers who do not fulfill or record the minimum requirements (20 volunteer service hours and 10 continuing education hours) automatically receive an Inactive status before December 31 of the previous year.

To return to active status, the volunteer must fulfill and report the minimum 20 volunteer service and 10 continuing education hours within the following calendar year. Otherwise, they will become permanently inactive and lose their Master Gardener certification. Time (years) in inactive status does not count toward years of service awards.

Volunteers with temporary inactive status:

- Are eligible for all volunteer activities in the local county program and offered by the state program
- Are encouraged to attend monthly meetings, continuing education classes, and conferences
- Are required to stay current on all background checks and sign the annual Extension Code of Conduct and Master Gardener Volunteer agreement forms
- May not serve in a local county leadership capacity
- May not apply or serve on the State Advisory Board

Permanent Inactive:

Permanent inactive status defines an individual who has voluntarily or involuntarily left the Master Gardener volunteer program. They no longer volunteer for the program and may not present themselves as a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener.

Permanently inactive volunteers:

- Do not remain an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer or a member of the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program
- Do not have access to program and Extension resources, staff, websites, etc.
- Are not eligible for any volunteer activities in the local county program and offered by the state program
- Are not required to complete a background check or sign the annual Code of Conduct or Master Gardener Agreement forms
- Does not report volunteer service or continuing education hours
- Are not eligible to serve in a local county leadership capacity
- Are not eligible to serve on the State Advisory Board
- Do not attend monthly meetings, continuing education classes, and conferences
- Do not attend local social gatherings, including awards banquets and holiday parties

Individuals on permanent inactive status may return and become reinstated as active volunteers in the Extension Master Gardener volunteer program if approved by the local program coordinator. To rejoin the program, the volunteer should complete a volunteer application and contact the local program coordinator, who will confirm that the returning volunteer completed a background check and is in good standing. Returning to active status after more than two years as inactive will require additional training and a new background screening.

Emeritus:

Emeritus Status is an honorary title bestowed to an active Master Gardener who has served with distinction and plans to retire from the program. Emeritus members are exempt from the annual service, education, and attendance requirements. They may be allowed to attend monthly meetings, scheduled events, and tours based on the local county staff's discretion. They may not vote, serve on committees, hold elected offices, or provide volunteer service. An emeritus member cannot be returned to active status. Emeritus status may be bestowed posthumously.

The criteria for being awarded Emeritus status are as follows:

- At least 10 years of active membership
- Has demonstrated leadership, superior involvement, and outstanding participation in one or more aspects of the program
- Has completed at least 1,000 volunteer hours during their service
- The Selection Committee may make exceptions to the above in the case of unique circumstances.

Master Gardeners may be nominated for Emeritus status by themselves, a fellow Master Gardener, or a staff member using the emeritus nomination form. Contact the local coordinator for access to the nomination form. The selection committee reserves the right to select additional candidates for Emeritus status other than those nominated.

The selection and approval committee shall consist of a combination of local Extension staff, comprised of the program coordinator, educator, and county director.

Use of the Master Gardener Title

The title "University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener" is to be used only and exclusively in the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program in which the trained and certified Master Gardeners conduct educational programming and answer gardening questions to the public in assistance to University of Illinois Extension. Master Gardeners are expected to identify themselves as such only when doing unpaid public service work in this University of Illinois Extension-sponsored program. The titles are valid only when the volunteer participates in Illinois Extension's Master Gardener program.

When an individual ceases to actively participate, their designation as a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener becomes void. They then become known as a former Master Gardener volunteer.

Certification as a Master Gardener is valid only when the individual is participating in a University of Illinois Extension-sponsored or endorsed program for the upcoming year. Individuals not continuing in the program will not be re-certified. Representing oneself as a Master Gardener upon losing certification violates the original commitment.

Conflicts of Interest

A Master Gardener should not display credentials or give the appearance of being a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener at a place of business unless that place is conducting an authorized University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener activity. It is improper to imply that University of Illinois Extension endorses any product or place of business. Master Gardeners must not use their title in any form of commercial advertisement.

The Master Gardener program is a public service program established to provide unbiased information, and the title "Master Gardener" is to be used only when conducting unpaid volunteer work in the program. When Master Gardeners make public presentations on horticultural subjects, accepting unsolicited gifts or being reimbursed for legitimate expenses incurred in conducting the class is permissible. However, it is inappropriate to seek pay for personal gain for speaking engagements conducted as a Master Gardener. Such speaker's fees or honoraria are acceptable when the fee is turned over to the local Extension Office.

Master Gardener Identification

Name badges indicative of the level of the Master Gardener participant may be used. Temporary name badges are appropriate for Trainees and Interns.

Active Master Gardeners should use official University of Illinois Extension name badges to identify themselves as representatives of Illinois Extension while conducting programs as Master Gardeners unless anonymity for the volunteer's safety is essential.

Master Gardener Apparel

Official Master Gardener apparel may be ordered through the Illinois Extension Merchandise Storefront, go.illinois.edu/ExtensionMerch. Master Gardeners apparel must follow University of Illinois Extension branding and logo guidelines.

Application, Screening, and Training

Application Procedures

Recruitment of trainees will be based on pre-planning and an established need for local Master Gardener volunteer activities. Coordinators or the planning committee will develop and implement a plan to achieve full representation of the community. University of Illinois Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and program compliance policies must be followed.

Screening of Applicants

Screening techniques, such as in-depth applications, in-person interviews, and other sources, will determine if candidates are appropriate for the program.

All Master Gardener trainees accepted into the program must complete the Illinois Extension volunteer screening process.

Steps to Become an Illinois Extension Volunteer

- Application submission and review
- References should be sought from three persons who know the applicant, including a family member, a work relationship, and a personal character reference.
- Interview with Illinois Extension staff
- Criminal history check and registered sex offender check through Sterling Volunteers

- Illinois Department of Children and Family Services – Child Abuse and Neglect System (CANTS) check
- Illinois Extension Child Protection Training
- Volunteer Orientation/Training

Regular Background Checks

Illinois Extension is dedicated to regularly screening current volunteers to ensure the safety and security of those we serve.

Annual

- National Registered Sex Offender Registry check

Every Three Years

- Criminal History check through Sterling Volunteers
- CANTS check
- National Registered Sex Offender Registry Check

Required Forms*

Once

- Extension Risk Waiver, signature required
- Talent Release Form, signature required
- Child Protection Training Certificate

Annually

- Illinois Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct
- Master Gardener Program Volunteer Agreement

As Needed

- Emergency Medical Form

**Individual programs may require additional steps or forms.*

Applicants should receive explanations of volunteer opportunities, particularly those that the individual will commit to for the internship. If these opportunities are not suitable to the candidate because of conflicts with the schedule, no interest in offered program areas, etc., then advise that the candidate reapply to the program in the future.

Protection of Minors Training

All Master Gardener volunteers must complete online Child Protection Training developed by University of Illinois Extension as a requirement of becoming and continuing to volunteer. A certificate is given at the end of training acknowledging they are aware of University of Illinois policies regarding the protection of minors and understand their responsibility for mandated reporting incidences of abuse and/or neglect. All volunteers are required to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. Suspected cases of child abuse or neglect need to be reported immediately to an Extension employee within the office in which they are volunteering (i.e., County Director). Calls to the University of Illinois Police Department (217-333-1216) and Illinois Department of Children and Family Services will be made jointly with a staff member or County Director. It is the responsibility of Illinois DCFS to investigate and determine whether or not the child has been abused or neglected.

Trainee/Intern Agreement

All University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener trainees and interns must sign the annual Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement as part of their commitment to the program. A digitally signed copy of the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement will be on file in the Illinois Extension Volunteer Gateway, extension.illinois.edu/my.

Core Course Training

Course Format:

Master Gardener training may occur in various formats depending on the local office's needs. Online Illinois Gardener Training is an online, self-guided training course that is available for those interested in becoming a certified Master Gardener volunteer. This online course is currently offered three times a year in winter, summer, and fall. Both participants who intend to volunteer and those who are not interested in volunteering can take this online course.

Hybrid Master Gardener training is a flipped classroom style training where trainees have at least four hours of independent study to complete online before each weekly live session. During the weekly in-person meeting, trainees participate in a live

webinar presented by Extension educators. Trainees then work in small groups within the unit to discuss case studies and hands-on activities. Attendance is required at these weekly sessions. This hybrid course is currently offered twice a year in winter and fall.

Some units may still offer full in-person training, but most are held online or in a hybrid format. The local unit determines the type of training provided.

Course Topics:

Illinois Extension Master Gardener Core Course training consists of a minimum of 60 hours of instruction based on the Illinois Master Gardener Manual. The exact topics presented may vary due to local needs.

However, all programs will include sessions on the following topics:

- Introduction to the Master Gardener program and Extension
- Botany
- Soils
- Plant Diseases/Diagnosis
- Horticultural Insects
- Integrated Pest Management
- Small Fruits and Tree Fruits
- Vegetable Gardening
- Annuals/Perennials/Groundcovers
- Lawns
- Trees/Shrubs/Vines

Additional topics covered in the Illinois Master Gardener Manual, which may be part of the core course, are:

- Propagation
- Weeds
- Herbs
- Nuts
- Bulbs
- Ornamental Grasses
- Houseplants
- Roses

- Landscaping
- Wildlife Management

Topics not covered in the Illinois Master Gardener Manual may also be part of core course training, provided the topic's approval and instructor are obtained from the State Master Gardener Office.

Attendance:

Master Gardener Trainees are expected to attend all in-person training sessions if they are being offered. If a live training session must be missed, it is the trainee's responsibility to make arrangements to make up for the missed session.

Quizzes and Exams:

A comprehensive open book exam on all subject matter in the course will be given. In addition to the comprehensive final exam, a quiz on the topic(s) will be given. Exams and quizzes will be submitted to the local Master Gardener coordinator or designated Master Gardener team for grading if training is in person or automatically scored in the case of online/hybrid training.

Trainees with an 80% or higher cumulative average at the end of the training will receive a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener intern certificate and will continue to the internship portion of the program.

Course Fees:

Master Gardener course fees for in-person and hybrid training are set by local offices offering the training and are based on suggested state pricing guidelines. The Illinois gardener online training course fees are \$300 or \$320, depending on the manual selection.

In instances where an applicant would prefer not to complete the volunteer internship portion of the course or if a non-volunteer option for training is available, they will not become certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners. This option may be attractive to commercial horticulturists who would like the information from the course but do not have the time to volunteer in the program. The non-volunteer option training may have an additional fee to be determined by the local county office.

Volunteering in the Master Gardener Program

Screening for Active Volunteers

Yearly, all active Master Gardeners must sign a copy of the Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement and Extension Code of Conduct and have their name checked against the National Sex Offender Website. A volunteer background, DCFS CANTS, check and criminal history check with Sterling Volunteers must be renewed no less than every three years of volunteer service.

A volunteer charged with a criminal offense but not yet convicted may be suspended as determined by consultation between the local staff, the regional director, and state program leadership. The volunteer will be notified (with a receipt requested) that they are on suspension as a Master Gardener volunteer pending resolution of the matter. Upon resolution of the matter, the individual may request that their volunteer appointment be restored to active status. The county director, in consultation with the administration and the Master Gardener program leadership, will determine whether the volunteer's appointment should be restored based on the facts and circumstances.

Annual Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement and Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct Documents

All University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners must sign an Annual Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement and Illinois Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct as part of their commitment to the program. A digitally signed copy of these agreements will be on file in the Illinois Extension Volunteer Gateway.

Eligible Volunteer Activities

Volunteers must discuss all planned activities with their local Master Gardener coordinator before conducting the program. This information is essential for liability coverage. Generally, volunteer work is completed in the local community but need not be limited to local programming efforts. While the Extension office is the center of Master Gardener programming, some volunteer work may be done outside the office. Many projects may involve interaction with parks and recreation departments, nursing homes, schools, county or city agencies, and other civic organizations.

All work undertaken by Master Gardeners is directed toward individual home gardeners and non-profit, noncommercial community groups. Extension educators directly manage all other entities. If in doubt, check with your local county coordinator and the appropriate educator or specialist. Master Gardeners will only provide non-biased, research-based horticultural information endorsed and sanctioned by University of Illinois Extension. Furthermore, Master Gardeners must abide by the Illinois Department of Agriculture licensing requirements for applying pesticides when acting as a Master Gardener volunteer. Pesticide Use in Demonstration Gardens document at go.illinois.edu/PesticideUse.

For liability reasons, University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners are not permitted to conduct home visits as part of their volunteer role.

Questions and Topics Not Covered by Master Gardeners

In general, if a topic is not covered in the Illinois Master Gardener Manual or Illinois Extension does not have supplemental advanced training on the topic, Master Gardeners should not present or respond to questions about that topic. Some specific examples include:

- 1. Hemp, CBD, and Medical Marijuana Questions:** For the immediate future, Master Gardener volunteers will not answer questions involving hemp, CBD, medical marijuana, or similarly related topics. Illinois Extension does not have research on these topics, and no training is available for volunteers. When responding to questions, let a client know that Illinois Extension Master Gardeners do not have any information to share at this time. If they are calling to inquire about commercial hemp production on a large or small scale, please refer that question to your coordinator or educator, as you would any commercial question.
- 2. Glyphosate and Cancer Questions:** Extension does not have a policy or opinion on glyphosate. If clients want to use the product, they should read and follow all label instructions. If a client is not interested in chemical weed control, volunteers may recommend other weed management strategies using Pest Management for the Home Landscape book at go.illinois.edu/

[C1391PestManagement](#). Offer all the options to the client, leaving out personal bias towards a particular management solution.

- 3. Mushroom Identification and Edibility Questions:** Do not comment on the edibility of a mushroom or any other garden item or if it can be safely ingested. This is due to the hazards associated with wild mushrooms and how improper diagnosis can be made based on similarities in species. Official identification of a mushroom involves lab analysis. Let the client know that Extension Master Gardeners do not comment on edibility. This policy protects the client and Illinois Extension.
- 4. Herbs for Medicinal Purposes and other Related Medicinal Plant Questions:** Like hemp, CBD, and medical marijuana, Extension does not have the scientific, university research-based information or training to support any medical claims for using plants for medicinal purposes. Therefore, Illinois Extension Master Gardeners do not answer questions about these uses or present programs on the topic.
- 5. Herbicide Damage Identification:** Volunteers should not confirm or deny whether herbicide damage may have occurred to a client's plant. These inquiries should be shared with local Illinois Extension staff member, who can contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture if necessary. How to Handle Pesticide Drift Complaints guide at go.illinois.edu/DriftComplaints.

Educational Efforts

Educational efforts are activities or programs in which the Master Gardeners educate the public. This includes presentations at demonstration sites, fairs, booths, and plant clinics, as well as educational presentations to audiences such as garden clubs, school groups, homeowner associations, and church groups. This also includes training other volunteers, such as Master Gardeners, Scouts, civic groups, or other identified volunteers, to assist them in delivering a program.

Work to construct or develop a site used for educational programming, such as a landscape

demonstration garden, qualifies as an educational effort. Educational efforts include planning, implementing, and reporting on educational efforts. A good practice in determining which activities are appropriate educational programming, are to ask: “Is the program educational?” and “Does this activity contribute to the goals and mission of the local Extension unit?”

Administrative Efforts

Administrative volunteer efforts that count toward volunteer time include conducting general Master Gardener business meetings, working on a Master Gardener newsletter, communication efforts such as telephone trees, and other activities that maintain the Master Gardener program.

Non-Educational Programming

Design, installation, upkeep, and maintenance of public or demonstration gardens without including educational activities (e.g., active demonstrations and hands-on workshops, etc.) must be approved and documented by an Extension educator or county director as contributing to the goals and mission of the local Extension program. Non-educational programming may also include travel time and other non-work time necessary to volunteer.

Continuing Education

Active Master Gardeners must remain current in annual continuing education and volunteer service requirements set by the local Master Gardener program or, in the absence of local requirements, follow the state minimum requirements of **20 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of approved educational updates.**

Approved continuing education includes the State Master Gardener Conference, local Master Gardener update sessions, University of Illinois Extension-sponsored webinars, and short courses. Credit horticulture or plant science classes, or other horticultural classes, must be pre-approved by the local Master Gardener coordinator.

Time spent in training, educational conferences, or other settings that qualify as continuing education should not be counted as volunteer time. Instances where the Master Gardener receives information or training, rather than the presenter of information, count as continuing education or re-certification time.

State Master Gardener Conference

Each year, a State Master Gardener Conference will take place at a different location around the state, with local Master Gardener groups acting as hosts.

The State Master Gardener Office coordinates program content for the conference. Attending classes and workshops at the State Master Gardener Conference can help fulfill the minimum continuing education requirement.

International Master Gardener Conference

In odd-numbered years, an International Master Gardener Conference is held in the U.S. or Canada. Attending classes and workshops at the International Master Gardener Conference will count toward continuing education requirements.

Local and Regional Updates

Many local Master Gardener groups plan periodic informational meetings and education updates for active Master Gardeners and Interns. These also apply toward continuing education credits.

Reporting Volunteer Activities

Master Gardeners will report their volunteer and continuing education hours using the online platform Givepulse, go.illinois.edu/Givepulse. Volunteers should also record the number of people impacted by the activity if their local coordinator assigns them as the demographic reporter.

Travel time to a volunteer activity is reported as volunteer hours. Travel to attend a continuing education event does not count toward the required continuing education hours and should not be reported. The information from the reporting system is needed to re-certify the Master Gardener for the following year. Master Gardeners for whom annual report summaries, Annual Master Gardener Volunteer Agreements, and Illinois Extension Volunteer Code of Conduct are not received will be removed from the Active Master Gardener rolls.

Master Gardener Transfers

Master Gardeners who have completed their core training and internship in Illinois and received a positive recommendation from their local Master Gardener coordinator before moving to another part of the state are eligible to become volunteers in the locale of their new residency.

However, they may be required to take additional coursework, which is also required of all local Master

Gardeners in the new locality and will be subject to the guidelines of the new locale. Master Gardeners who have not completed their internship before moving will be required to complete their internship with their new unit before becoming Certified Master Gardeners.

Master Gardeners moving from out-of-state as well as returning Master Gardeners (i.e., someone who trained in Illinois, moved away, and is returning to Illinois) may be required to complete the entire Master Gardener training before volunteering in Illinois, depending on their demonstrated knowledge and skills in this geographic area. Generally, active Master Gardeners from neighboring states, upon recommendation from their previous local Master Gardener coordinator, can be accepted without the need for further demonstration of horticultural knowledge. For those Master Gardener transfers or inactive former Master Gardeners away from the program for two years or more, retraining is required.

Volunteer Performance and Renewal of Active Status Procedure

Volunteer performance will be a continuous assessment process to ensure the goals, objectives, and mission of the Master Gardener program are being met to best serve the needs of the University of Illinois and the Master Gardener program. The review process may include oral and written feedback on volunteer performance and can be used to invite the Master Gardener back for the following year.

Project Performance

The performance of local Master Gardener projects may also be assessed annually to ensure that projects continue to meet the educational mission of the Master Gardener program, fulfill the needs of the local community, and are an appropriate use of time and resources.

Grounds for Dismissal of a Master Gardener Volunteer

A University of Illinois Extension volunteer can be relieved of the title and privileges at any time, at the discretion of the local Extension staff coordinating the Extension program. Possible reasons for dismissal may include a volunteer who demonstrates actions that conflict with the mission, purpose, and objectives of Illinois Extension. Examples of conflict include but are not limited to,

failure to comply with volunteer policies and code of conduct and misuse of the Extension program title. At the time of dismissal, the volunteer will be required to turn in their name badge and other Extension property to the local Extension staff coordinating the program.

Procedure for Dismissal

The Unit, Region, and Workforce Development offices will make all dismissal decisions. All dismissals must be pre-approved by University Legal Counsel. A dismissal letter will be created with the guidance of the Volunteer Relations Associate and Extension Workforce Development. Extension staff will hold a copy of the letter in the volunteer's file. This file will be kept indefinitely.

Incident/Accident Reporting

Whenever an incident or accident causes harm or injury to a youth, volunteer, or staff member, an Incident/Accident Investigation form must be completed and shared with the county director, associate director for region, program specialist, and associate director of workforce development.

Bus Coverage

Extension units and Master Gardeners must follow university policies for bus charters with approved insurance. University guidelines for making charter bus arrangements can be found in section 6, 6.1.3 'Select Bus Charters with Approved Insurance' of the Business and Finance policies and procedures website, busfin.uillinois.edu/bfpp.

Agreements and Contracts

State statutes prohibit volunteers of the University of Illinois Master Gardener program from signing agreements that contain harmless or similar clauses. If the lessor will not waive the hold harmless or similar clauses, the event must be changed to another location.

Recognition and Awards Certificates

Active Master Gardener Certification

A completion certificate is awarded to the participant upon satisfactory completion of training. After completing the 40-hour internship, the Master Gardener Intern becomes a certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener and is awarded a Master Gardener certificate. Certificates may be presented at an annual graduation or volunteer recognition ceremony. In succeeding years, the Master Gardeners who remain active by keeping their continuing education and volunteer service requirements current may be awarded a “Years of Service” certificate and pin.

State Awards

State-level Master Gardener awards are given annually at the State Master Gardener Conference. Awards are based on nominations submitted by local Master Gardener coordinators, Extension educators, and or county directors. The State Outstanding Master Gardener Award is based on the following criteria:

- Nominee must be a currently active University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener
- Nominee must have completed at least 120 hours of Master Gardener volunteer service beyond the required 40-hour internship (160 total hours)
- A maximum of 2% of statewide active Master Gardeners will be recognized with this award annually

Nominees for the Sustained Excellence Award must:

- Be a currently active University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener
- Have been active in the Illinois Master Gardener program for at least three years beyond the internship (a minimum of four years total)
- Be a previous State Outstanding Master Gardener Award recipient
- Have completed at least 300 hours of Master Gardener volunteer service since receiving the State Outstanding Master Gardener Award (a minimum of 480 hours total)

The State Teamwork Award is based on the following criteria:

- At least three team members must have been active Illinois Master Gardeners or Master Gardener Interns during the award year and have contributed substantially to the project.
- The project was active during the award year
- Only one teamwork award nomination per extension unit will be accepted.

Program Compliance

See the University of Illinois Extension Volunteer Handbook at go.illinois.edu/OnlineVolunteerHandbook.

- Equal Opportunity Statement
- Affirmative Action
- Americans with Disabilities Act

Information Management

Keeping accurate and updated records is vital to a successful volunteer program. This includes record retention as well as adequately maintaining filing systems. It is important to remember that the University of Illinois sets forth policies and guidelines for these areas. Please review the Campus Administration Manual or CAM at cam.illinois.edu.

Policies On Volunteer Record Retention & Filing Systems

Volunteer Mailing Lists and Directories

Email/ mailing lists and volunteer directories are for the sole use of Extension personnel. They shall not be furnished directly or indirectly to any other person, firm, association, or federal government agency. Volunteers may choose to share their personal contact information with fellow volunteers, but Extension personnel will not share or organize that information.

Email/ mailing lists and volunteer directories are not federal records and are not subject to the provisions of the Federal Freedom of Information Act.

Registration Materials

Volunteer records including health forms, photo releases, and risk waivers, should be maintained for 20 years for youth and 10 years for adults. These files can be kept digitally by Extension personnel.

Givepulse and Gateway Privacy Policy

Volunteer data in Givepulse and the Volunteer Gateway is for the sole use of Extension personnel and shall not be furnished directly or indirectly to any other person, firm, association, or federal government agency. Volunteer data is compiled for official use only and is confidential. Volunteer data is not a federal record and is not subject to the provisions of the Federal Freedom of Information Act.

Web Privacy Policy Information

Extension volunteer programs follow all web privacy policies outlined by the University of Illinois Privacy Statement at go.illinois.edu/PrivacyStatement.

Setting and Amending Master Gardener Policies

The State Master Gardener office has final authority in setting and amending statewide Master Gardener policies.

Recommendations for policy changes are directed through the State Master Gardener Advisory Committee, which has the following purposes:

- Serve as an advisory council to state-level Master Gardener administration
- Encourage equitable distribution of state Master Gardener resources
- Recommend minimum standards for University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener core course training
- Strengthen state Master Gardener education and training
- Increase awareness of University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener programs
- Support an annual University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Conference
- Recommend policies and guidelines for University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener programs while recognizing

local needs

The University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Advisory Committee consists of:

- Two certified Master Gardeners from the five University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener regions
- If no certified Master Gardener applicants are available from a region, a Master Gardener intern may represent that region.
- Two Extension staff members from the five University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener regions
- The State Master Gardener Coordinator

Ex-officio members may include:

- One representative from the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program at Chicago Botanic Garden
- One representative from the University of Illinois Extension administration
- This ex-officio committee member may be chosen by the state Master Gardener Coordinator or at the discretion of the extension administration.

Guest Master Gardeners and University of Illinois Extension staff are welcome to attend State Advisory Committee meetings as non-voting observers. Official notification of state Master Gardener policy changes will be communicated through the local Master Gardener coordinators. Additionally, all county directors and Extension educators will be notified directly via email or direct mailing of any policy changes.

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