



This document supersedes any and all previous University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Policies.

I. Introduction

The University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program is an educational volunteer training program offered by University of Illinois Extension. The program is designed to increase the availability of University-based horticultural information 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 University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program is: "Helping Others Learn to Grow". The purpose of the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program is to provide horticultural information specific to local climates, soils and plants, and training to the private, 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 the resources of the University of Illinois 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 programs are educational in nature and may involve environmental improvements, therapy gardening projects, community and school gardening projects, or other programs determined by local need.
- Develop leadership potential of Master Gardener volunteers through a volunteer network designed to assist Extension staff in managing local Master Gardener activities and programs.

To become a Master Gardener, you must fill out and submit an application to the local Extension Unit offering the program. After the local coordinator reviews the application, you may be invited for a short interview. Not all applicants are accepted into the program. There may be more applicants than space allows in the classroom or

than the local office can involve. If you are not accepted into the current training class, your name is kept on file and you may be encouraged to apply for a future class.

II. What is a Master Gardener?

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

Levels of Master Gardeners

Master Gardener Trainee – a program participant from the time he/she is accepted into the program through completion of classroom training.

Master Gardener Intern – a program participant from the time he/she graduates from classroom training with an average score of at least 80% on quizzes and exams, through the completion of 60 hours of volunteer service. This internship is normally completed within 12 months of the end of classroom training. However, interns may take 2 years to complete their internship upon agreement of the local Extension unit Master Gardener coordinator. Anyone who fails to complete the volunteer service requirement does not become a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener.

Certified (Active) Master Gardener – a Master Gardener Intern who has completed his/her initial 60-hour volunteer service requirement or a returning previously certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener. To maintain Certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener status requires a minimum of 30 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of update education annually and is valid for one year. Active Master Gardeners are encouraged to pair with Master Gardener Trainees and Interns to help guide newcomers through a successful volunteer experience.

Master Gardener Alumnus – a former University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener who successfully completed the 60-hour classroom training and the 60-hour internship, but who no longer maintains his/her annual active volunteer service and/or education update requirements. Return to active status after more than two years as a Master Gardener Alumnus will require additional training.

Inactive Status/Leave of Absence – a former University of Illinois Extension Certified Master Gardener or Intern who is temporarily unable to fulfill Active Master Gardener requirements for health, family or other

personal reasons. Participants may remain on leave of absence for one or two years at a time upon the approval of his or her local coordinator. Return to active status after more than two years as an inactive Master Gardener may require additional training.

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 general 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 is participating in the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program. When an individual ceases to actively participate, his or her designation as a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener becomes void. Instead he or she becomes a Master Gardener Alumnus. Certification as a Master Gardener is restrictive in that it is valid only when the individual is participating in a University of Illinois Extension-sponsored or endorsed program for the coming year. Those not continuing in the program will not be re-certified and should be aware that if they represent themselves as Master Gardeners, they are violating their 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 general 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, it is permissible for them to accept unsolicited gifts or be reimbursed for legitimate expenses incurred in conducting the class. 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 permissible when the fee is turned over to the local Extension Unit Office.

Master Gardener Identification – Name badges indicative of the level of the Master Gardener participant may be used. Temporary name badges are appropriate for Master Gardener Trainees and Master Gardener Interns. Active Master Gardeners should use official University of Illinois Extension name badges to identify themselves as representatives of University of Illinois Extension while conducting programs as Master Gardeners unless

anonymity for safety of the volunteer is important. Upon submitting their annual volunteer agreement, they will also be issued a University of Illinois Extension wallet I.D. card indicating their active status for the current year.

Master Gardener Apparel – Official University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener apparel may be ordered through the MG apparel website. Master Gardener apparel must be in compliance with University of Illinois Extension logo guidelines.

III. 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 be used as needed to determine if candidates are appropriate for the program.

All Master Gardener trainees who have been accepted into the program are required to complete full background checks as part of the volunteer selection process. This includes completion of the Volunteer Application; an interview; a DCFS CANTS check; Illinois State Police Conviction Name Check Request for Volunteers and a name check against the National Sex Offender Website (<http://www.nsopw.gov/en-US>). The University will treat this information as confidential.

Currently active Master Gardeners may be invited to assist with interviewing new potential trainees. Training should be provided to these volunteers in proper interview skills as well as appropriate and inappropriate questions to ask in the interviews. Volunteers may not be involved in the background screening procedure for other trainees or volunteers.

Applicants should receive explanation of volunteer opportunities, particularly those that the individual will commit to for the internship. If these opportunities are not suitable to the candidate (i.e., conflicts with schedule, no interest in offered program areas, etc.), then the candidate should be advised to reapply to the program again in the future.

Protection of Minors Training – All Master Gardener volunteers must complete online training developed by University of Illinois Extension on “Protection of Minors” as a requirement of becoming and continuing to be a volunteer. As part of that training, there is an online form to complete acknowledging they are aware of University of Illinois policies regarding protection of minors and understand their responsibility for mandated reporting incidences of abuse and/or neglect of minors to the University of Illinois Police Department (217-333-1216) AND to a U of I Extension employee within the unit in which they are volunteering (e.g., County Director). Calls to the UI Police Department for mandated reporting should be made together with the County Director or other Extension employee, such as an Extension Educator.

Trainee Agreement – All University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener trainees must sign a Trainee Agreement as part of their commitment to the program. A signed copy of the University of Illinois Extension Trainee Agreement will be on file in the respective University of Illinois Extension Unit Office. A sample agreement is provided in the Appendix to these policies.

Core Course Classroom Training

Course Topics - University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Core Course training consists of a minimum of 60 hours of classroom instruction based on the Illinois Master Gardener Manual. 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	Small Fruits and Tree Fruits
Soils	Vegetable Gardening
Plant Diseases/Diagnosis	Annuals/Perennials/Groundcovers
Horticultural Insects	Lawns
Integrated Pest Management	Trees/Shrubs/Vines

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

Propagation	Ornamental Grasses
Weeds	Houseplants
Herbs	Roses
Nuts	Landscaping
Bulbs	Wildlife Management

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

Attendance – Master Gardener Trainees are expected to attend all training sessions. In the event a training session must be missed, it is the responsibility of the trainee to make arrangements for making up 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 weekly quiz on the topic(s) for that week will be given. Exams and quizzes will be submitted to the local Master Gardener coordinator or designated Master Gardener team for grading. Tests with corrected answers should be returned to the individuals and a period of class time scheduled to review the exam and the answers. Trainees that achieve 80 percent or high cumulative average at the end of the classroom instruction will receive a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Intern certificate and will continue on to the internship portion of the program.

Course Fees – Master Gardener course fees are set by local units offering the training and are based upon suggested state pricing guidelines. The fee should include the cost of the Illinois Master Gardener Manual, which is required for each participant in the program. The course fee should also account for additional training costs, such as meeting room rental fees, educator expenses and photocopying costs. In instances where a course applicant indicates he or she prefers not to complete the volunteer internship portion of the course or if, through the interview process, the selection team questions the volunteer commitment of the applicant, a non-volunteer option for training is available. Those selecting this option 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 don't 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.

IV. Volunteering in the Master Gardener Program

Screening for Active Volunteers-

Yearly, all active Master Gardeners must sign a copy of the volunteer agreement and have their name checked against the National Sex Offender Website. A volunteer background (DCFS CANTS) check, completion or

update of the Volunteer Application and the Illinois State Police Conviction information checks must be renewed no less than every five years of volunteer service.

A volunteer charged with a criminal offense but not yet convicted may be suspended as determined by consultation between the Unit/county staff, Regional Director, and state program leadership. The volunteer will be notified (with a receipt requested) that he or she is on suspension as a Master Gardener volunteer pending resolution of the matter. Upon resolution of the matter, the individual may request his/her volunteer appointment be restored to “active” status. The County Director, in consultation with administration and the Master Gardener program leadership, will determine whether the volunteer’s appointment should be restored based on the facts and circumstances.

Annual Volunteer Agreement – All University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener must sign an Annual Volunteer Agreement as part of their commitment to the program. This agreement serves as the code of conduct for all Master Gardener volunteers. A signed copy of the University of Illinois Extension Annual Volunteer Agreement will be on file in the respective University of Illinois Extension Unit Office. A copy of the agreement is provided in the Appendix to these policies.

Retention of Volunteer records-

Applications, verification of clearance from DCFS, Illinois State Police and Sex Offender databases will be retained for five years past the time in which the volunteer leaves the program. Exception: For active volunteers or cases where a volunteer has filed a grievance or was terminated the files should be retained indefinitely. The University will treat this information as confidential.

Volunteer data files such as hours logged, projects participated in and demographic information such as address, phone number should be retained for ten years after the volunteer becomes inactive. Incident or accident report files including accident report forms, acknowledgement of risk forms or other documentation related to an incident or potential incident/accident should be maintained for four years after the volunteer becomes inactive.

Types of Volunteer Work Eligible – Volunteers are required to discuss with their local Master Gardener coordinator all planned activities prior to conducting the program. This information is essential for liability coverage. Generally, volunteer work is done in your local community, but need not be limited to local

programming efforts. While the Extension unit office is the center of Master Gardener programming, some volunteer work may be done outside the Extension office. Many projects may involve interaction with parks and recreation departments, nursing homes, schools, county or city agencies, and other civic organizations.

Staff should prepare role descriptions for the volunteer assignments within their unit. These should be made available for the Master Gardeners prior to accepting a volunteer assignment.

All work undertaken by Master Gardeners is directed toward individual home gardeners and non-profit, non-commercial community groups. All other entities are directly handled by Extension educators. If in doubt, check with your local county coordinator and the appropriate educator specialist. Master Gardeners will only provide non-biased research-based horticultural information endorsed and sanctioned by the University of Illinois Extension. Furthermore, Master Gardeners must abide by the Illinois Department of Agriculture licensing requirements for the application of pesticides when acting as a Master Gardener volunteer.

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

Educational Efforts – Educational efforts are those activities or programs in which the Master Gardener educates the public. This includes presentations at demonstration sites; presentations at fairs, booths, plant clinics; and educational presentations to identified audiences, such as garden clubs, school groups, homeowner associations and church groups. This also includes training of other volunteers, such as other Master Gardeners, Boy Scouts, civic groups, or other identified groups of 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 educational efforts. Educational efforts include the time spent planning, implementing and reporting on educational efforts. As a good rule-of-thumb in determining which activities are appropriate educational programmings, use the questions: “Is the program educational in nature?” 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 any other activities that maintain the Master Gardener program.

Non-Educational Programming – Design, installation, upkeep and maintenance of public or demonstration gardens without the inclusion of educational activities (such as active demonstrations, 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 do the job of volunteering.

Continuing Education –Active Master Gardeners must remain current in annual educational update and volunteer service requirements set by the local Master Gardener program or, in the absence of local requirements, follow the state minimum requirements of 30 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of approved educational updates. Approved educational updates are such things as the State Master Gardener Conference, local Master Gardener update sessions, and University of Illinois Extension-sponsored seminars and short courses. Credit horticulture or plant science classes, or other horticultural classes, must be pre-approved by the local Master Gardener coordinator.

State Master Gardener Conference - Each year a State Master Gardener Conference will be held. The conference is held at different locations around the state, with local Master Gardener groups acting as hosts. Program content for the conference is coordinated by the State Master Gardener Office. Attending classes and workshops at the State Master Gardener Conference can help fulfill the minimum continuing education requirement.

Multi-State and International Master Gardener Conferences – 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 towards 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.

Training Time – 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 is the recipient of information or training, rather than the presenter of information, count as continuing education or re-certification time.

Reporting Volunteer Activities – Master Gardeners will report their volunteer and continuing education hours using the University of Illinois Volunteer Time Tracking System. Volunteers should also record the number of people impacted by the particular activity if they are assigned by their local coordinator 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 towards 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 and Annual Volunteer Agreements are not received will be removed from the Active Master Gardener rolls.

Master Gardener Transfers – Master Gardeners who have completed their classroom training and internship in Illinois, and received a positive recommendation from their local Master Gardener coordinator prior to 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 course work 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 prior to 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 prior to 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 need for further demonstration of horticultural knowledge. For those Master Gardener transfers or inactive former Master Gardeners away from the program for 2 years or more, retraining is required.

Volunteer Performance and Renewal of Active Status Procedure - Volunteer performance will be a continuous assessment process in order to ensure the goals, objectives and missions of the Master Gardener program are being met in a manner that best serves 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 as a basis to invite the Master Gardener back for the following year.

Grounds for Dismissal of a 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 are in conflict with the mission, purpose and objectives of University of Illinois Extension. Examples of conflict include, but are not limited to, failure to comply with University of Illinois volunteer policies and misuse of the Extension program title. At the time of dismissal, the volunteer will be required to turn in his or her name badge and other Extension property to the local Extension staff coordinating the program.

Procedure for Dismissal – The local Extension staff coordinating the volunteer program will notify the volunteer in writing that he/she is being dismissed from the program and the general reasons for dismissal. Units will first consult with the State Master Gardener Coordinator and the Associate Director, Extension Field Operations. The letter will be written with input from the Extension Program Coordinator, the County Director, the Regional Director and signed by all three, with copies to the State Master Gardener Coordinator and the Associate Director, Extension Field Operations. The decision of the letter is final and effective immediately. A copy of the letter should be placed in the volunteer's file and the file should not be purged even after the volunteer is inactive for three years. A copy of the termination letter should be sent to the Associate Director, Extension Field Operations. This individual will maintain a confidential file of all letters and will serve as a consultant to discuss other current or future volunteer roles by this individual.

Risk Management-

Accident insurance coverage is strongly encouraged for all Master Gardeners and trainees.

Incident/Accident Reporting:

Each time there is an incident or accident that causes harm or injury to a youth, volunteer, or staff member, an incident/accident report form must be completed and shared with the County Director, Regional Director, and the University Office of Risk Management.

Registration materials including health forms, photo releases and acknowledgement of risk forms should be maintained for a minimum of three years by the local Extension office. If there is an incident/accident, the forms for youth participants involved should be kept until the youth turns 19.

Bus Coverage:

Extension units and Master Gardeners must follow the University policies for charter bus company business.

Employees of the University of Illinois are prohibited by state statutes from signing agreements that contain hold harmless or similar clauses. In event that the lessor will not waive the hold harmless or similar clauses, the event must be changed to another location. This also pertains to **volunteers** that are providing leadership for University of Illinois Extension programs.

V. Recognition and Awards Certificates

Upon satisfactory completion of the classroom portion of Master Gardener training, a University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Intern certificate is awarded to the participant. After completion of the 60-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, University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners who remain active by keeping their continuing education and volunteer service requirements current may be awarded a “Years of Service” certificate.

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 60-hour internship (180 total).
- 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 Illinois Master Gardener program at least 3 years beyond internship (a minimum of 4 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 3 or more members of the team must have been active Illinois Master Gardeners or Master Gardener Interns during the award year and have substantially contributed to the project.
- The project was active during the award year.
- Only 1 teamwork award nomination per extension unit will be accepted.

VI. Program Compliance

Equal Opportunity Statement - It is the policy of the University of Illinois not to engage in discrimination or harassment against any person because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy, citizenship status, order of protection status, genetic information, unfavorable discharge from the military, or status as a disabled veteran or a veteran of the Vietnam era and to comply with all federal and state nondiscrimination policy applies to admissions employment, access to and treatment in the University programs and activities. This policy means that the Master Gardener program is open to all regardless of status or affiliation. Similarly, all Master Gardener program offerings must be open to all who wish to participate regardless of status or affiliation. Reasonable accommodations for those with special needs must be made to ensure equal access to programs. Instances of discrimination or harassment are grounds for dismissal and de-certification from the Master Gardener program.

Affirmative Action - University of Illinois Extension is an affirmative action organization and actively recruits minorities and women in employment and programs and all participants are encouraged to help create an open, multicultural environment.

Americans with Disabilities Act – All reasonable efforts must be made to include persons with disabilities in the Master Gardener program. Extension personnel will take the needs of such persons into account in determining

the services to be provided under the program or activity. When feasible, all efforts to encourage and accommodate those with disabilities in Master Gardener program activities should be made by providing physical access (for example, ramps) and serving other specialized needs (for example, sign language interpreters).

VII. 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 that has the following purposes:

- Serve as advisory counsel 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 (2) certified University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners from each of the five (5) University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener regions. If no certified Master Gardener applicants are available from a given region, a Master Gardener Intern may represent that region.
- Two (2) Extension staff members from each of the five (5) University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener regions.
- The State Master Gardener Coordinator.

Ex-officio members may include:

One (1) representative from the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener program at Chicago Botanic Garden.

One (1) representative from the University of Illinois Extension administration. This ex-officio member of the committee may be chosen by the state Master Gardener Coordinator or at the discretion of 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 horticulture extension educators will be notified directly via email or direct mailing of any policy changes.

Appendices

- University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Annual Volunteer Agreement
- University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Application

Adopted November 15, 2000

Revised September 2002, November 2005, February 2006, November 2008,

February 2009, October 2013, September 2015, June 2020