Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who build and enhance their community through gardening.

2020 was an unprecedented year for the Illinois Master Gardener program, like it was for the rest of the world. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to keep our volunteers safe, the volunteer hours requirement was waived for the year and we pivoted to volunteer opportunities that could still be completed safely at home.

Master Gardeners answered thousands of gardening questions online and donated produce that they grew in their own gardens to local food pantries and other organizations, for example. All to benefit their communities and continue to help others learn to grow.

Many of our volunteers focused on continuing education in 2020 as well, participating in the numerous virtual horticulture webinars that were offered.

Of the 102 counties in Illinois 83 have MG programs. Cook County has three programs plus a very active program at Chicago Botanic Gardens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteer Hour Categories</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gardens</td>
<td>43,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Services</td>
<td>5,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>7,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic Gardening</td>
<td>1,351</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Gardening</td>
<td>1,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers Bureau</td>
<td>1,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Program Support</td>
<td>8,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Information/ Admin/ Tech Support</td>
<td>1,161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

154 Garden Sites in Illinois were Master Gardener Supported

68 Food Donation Gardens were Master Gardener Supported

* $2,755,135 according to Independent Sector study
Online Master Gardener Trainees Increased in 2020

In 2020, 439 people participated in the approximately 60 hours of required training throughout Illinois, including 324 in the self-paced online Master Gardener training course, a 281% increase of those trained online compared to 2019.

While it was unsafe to host training in person, this online option was a great alternative for counties to be able to still welcome new volunteers.

Master Gardeners Donate Produce for the Give Back Gardening Project

Food donation gardens are an important and much needed volunteer opportunity for Illinois Master Gardeners. In 2020, COVID-19 restrictions limited Master Gardener volunteer work outside their homes on community food donation gardens in the spring and early summer.

As a result, Master Gardeners were given the opportunity to use their home vegetable gardens as a way to support food-insecure people in Illinois with fresh produce. A new opportunity for 2020. See this summary of the information on these donations reported by participating Master Gardeners:

- 61 Master Gardeners in 26 counties donated produce
- 9,925 pounds donated
- 44 different types of vegetables, fruits, and herbs reported
- 66 different recipient organizations, including food banks, food pantries, and social service agencies

Award Winning People and Projects

During the 2020 Virtual Awards Ceremony, Master Gardeners and staff gathered via Zoom to recognize Master Gardener achievements.

Attendees also learned about Pollinators with May Berenbaum, Professor & Head of the University of Illinois Entomology Department.

MG Honorees

- 29 State Outstanding Awards
- 11 Sustained Excellence Awards
- 9 Teamwork Awards

McHenry County Department of Health partners with the University of Illinois Master Gardeners for the Garden Connect Program

Garden Connect provides food pantry clients the opportunity to improve their health by learning to grow vegetables, increase physical activity and improve health literacy.

McHenry County Nunda Garden Project

Macon County Monarch Madness Project

How the Master Gardener Program Addresses Illinois Issues

- Therapeutic gardens
- Demonstration gardens
- Teaching gardens
- Building relationships between volunteers and their communities

Developing Healthy Lifestyles

- Horticulture hotlines
- Pollinator programs
- Integrated pest management programs and training
- Urban forestry

Protecting and Appreciating the Environment

- Food donation gardens
- Home vegetable gardening programs

Growing and Accessing Food to Prevent Hunger

- School Gardens
- 4-H Special Interest Clubs
- Library Gardens

Positive Youth Development

The Illinois Master Gardener Team

- Master Gardeners: 2,640 active members
- College of ACES: Dean Kim Kidwell and state specialists
- Office of Extension and Outreach: Associate Dean & Director, Dr. Shelly Nickols-Richardson
- Interim Program Leader – Dennis Bowman
  ndbowman@illinois.edu

- State MG Specialist– Candice Hart
  mille116@illinois.edu
- Horticulture and Local Foods Small Farms Educators throughout the state: 27
- County Directors, Extension program coordinators and support staff: ≥ 60
- State MG advisory committee: 16 members including MGs and Extension staff