

# Extension Master Gardener Program Policies & Procedures

## Qualifications

An individual interested in becoming an EMG must possess the following qualifications:

- A strong interest in horticulture and home gardening. Gardening experience is desirable but not required.
- Willingness and availability to undertake extensive training in consumer horticulture practices.
- Willingness and ability to provide 40 hours of horticulture-related volunteer community service.
- Ability to communicate and share knowledge effectively and diplomatically with others.
- Willingness to support MSU Extension staff members in providing citizens with up-to-date, science-based consumer horticulture information.

## Extension Master Gardener Program Code of Conduct

Every EMG trainee is required to read and accept the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program Code of Conduct. This document is a contractual agreement that is accepted by volunteers who commit to the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program. These standards guide the volunteers' behavior during their involvement with the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program. The primary purpose of this Code of Conduct is to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants.

Just as it is a privilege for MSU

Extension to work with those who volunteer their time and talents to the Extension Master Gardener Program, a volunteer's involvement in the program is a privilege and a responsibility, not a right. Failure to follow the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Code of Conduct may lead to dismissal as an EMG.

The MSU Extension Master Gardener will:

- Provide unbiased, research-based information consistent with MSU or other land-grant university recommendations.
- Accept responsibility to represent MSU Extension programs and its community partners, with dignity and pride by being a positive role model.
- Respect, adhere to and enforce the rules, policies and guidelines established by MSU Extension and community partners, and be courteous and respectful in dealing with other program participants and MSU staff members.
- Abstain from, and not tolerate, physical or verbal abuse.
- Comply with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws.
- Avoid criminal activities.
- Refrain from using alcohol and other drugs in an illegal or inappropriate manner.
- Refrain from possessing and using marijuana or advising on the

cultivation of marijuana while serving as an MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer.

- Operate machinery, vehicles and other equipment responsibly and safely.
- Report any violation of the Code of Conduct of which they are aware.
- Agree to abide by the Pesticide Recommendation Policy.

### Educational Core Training Course

**Attendance:** Each EMG trainee must commit to attending all the training classes. If schedule conflicts occur, the participant may only miss two classes in total. However, these must be made up. Classes may be made up by attending a lecture on the same topic offered in other EMG training course locations. Upon coordinator approval, viewing approved recorded sessions, if available, is another make-up option but is less engaging for course participants.

**Examination and quizzes:** To become an EMG, a trainee must score 80 % or better on each weekly quiz and final exam. The final examination – a take-home test – emphasizes an individual’s ability to gather accurate information from class notes and other research-based reference material. This emphasis on problem-solving techniques and resources will help EMGs as they give horticultural assistance to others.

### Volunteer Commitment

The purpose of the volunteer requirement is to extend MSU Extension’s educational programs in horticulture, gardening and small-scale food production. To be certified as an Extension Master Gardener, trainees must complete a minimum of

40 volunteer hours educating others through pre-approved volunteer projects related to horticulture and gardening.

The trainee will have 12 months following the last class in which to complete and report in the Volunteer Management System (VMS) the required 40 volunteer hours. Activities that count toward Extension Master Gardener certification must have educational value for others and be nonpaying for the EMG. Volunteer hours need to focus on educating others about:

- Environmental stewardship.
- Improving community.
- Growing food.
- Youth gardening.

MSU Extension will work with community partners to identify local volunteer opportunities meaningful to individual EMG trainees and to certified EMGs wishing to remain active.

Students should contribute their time to community activities related to horticulture education, such as going into an elementary school and exploring the fascinating world of plants with children; gardening with victims of domestic violence who are living in shelters; using horticulture therapy with elderly people or building community raised beds for people who use wheelchairs.

Approval by the local Extension Master Gardener coordinator must be obtained before trainees engage in any volunteer activity that will be counted toward the 40-hour requirement.

**Protecting volunteers and community members:** Extension

Master Gardener trainees must undergo the Volunteer Selection Process (VSP) to be accepted into the training program. This process includes national and state background checks, check against the Sex Offenders Registry (SOR), submission of references, and an interview. To remain active in the program, EMGs will need to have their background checked every year and name checked against the SOR every six months.

**Documentation:** It is the responsibility of the Extension Master Gardener trainee to document his or her volunteer time and report that time by entering it in the MGP web-based Volunteer Management System.

**Time limits:** An individual has one year from the end of the MSU Extension Master Gardener training course to complete and report the required 40 volunteer hours in the web-based Volunteer Management System (VMS).

### Certification

Participants receive MSU Extension Master Gardener certification after successfully completing the educational training course and the volunteer requirement. Certificates and name badges are awarded.

### Annual Recertification

An Extension Master Gardener may recertify for participation in the program for another year by completing the online recertification process each January. This online process includes:

- Verifying that a minimum of 20 volunteer hours and 10 additional

hours of horticulture training were completed the proceeding calendar year, i.e. January 1 - December 31.

- Selecting the desired recertification status and annually signing the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program Code of Conduct agreement.
- Submitting an annual recertification fee.

### Advanced Extension Master Gardener Status

Extension Master Gardeners who participate in 25 additional hours of training in horticulture subjects and volunteer an additional 50 hours of educating others during community horticulture volunteer service will achieve the status of Advanced Extension Master Gardener. The total hours required for this status are 90 volunteer and 25 education hours. Achievement of Advanced Extension Master Gardener status is recognized by a certificate and a special Advanced Extension Master Gardener identification badge.

### Transferring to Another County

Extension Master Gardener records are maintained in the Volunteer Management System (VMS) by geographic rosters. Initial trainee records are housed within the roster for the training location the EMG trainee participated in. Once the trainee is certified, the trainee may request the transfer of their record to another roster by contact the current roster VMS Ambassador.

## Out-of-State Transfers

Extension Master Gardeners who are certified in another state may be admitted to the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program by meeting the following criteria:

- Active Extension Master Gardeners from USDA plant hardiness zones 7 and lower:
  - Provide written verification and approval from the State Extension Master Gardener coordinator of the previous state of residence.
  - Successfully complete the Volunteer Selection Process.
  - Purchase the MSU Extension Master Gardener Manual.
  - Take the final, open-book exam and pass with a score of at least 80 percent or higher.
  - Sign the MSU Extension Volunteer

Code-of-Conduct and volunteer agreements.

- Comply with the annual recertification process.
- Active Extension Master Gardeners from a growing zone warmer than hardiness 7:
  - Successfully complete the Volunteer Selection Process.
  - Take the MSU Extension Master Gardener Training Course

Active Extension Master Gardeners wishing to transfer from Michigan to another state will need to contact the local educator or coordinator in the county of their new residence for specific transfer requirements of that state. The MSU Extension Master Gardener Program staff office will provide documentation to assist with a successful transfer.

## Guidelines

### The Volunteer Management System

Trainees and certified EMGs are expected to enter their volunteer and education hours into the web-based Volunteer Management System (VMS) each calendar year. Each individual is required to have a unique email address in order to access the secure system.

The VMS is also a resource and communications tool for program participants to learn about volunteer and educational opportunities. VMS training is provided during the 14-week training course. A user guide is also available.

Each VMS roster has designated staff members and/or volunteers who serve

as VMS Ambassadors. The individuals assist trainees and certified EMGs as needed, approve projects, monitor hours completion and communicate volunteer and educational opportunities.

### Use of the Extension Master Gardener Title

The correct title for a volunteer from this program is “Michigan State University Extension Master Gardener.” This title is to be used only by volunteers who are annually certified in the MSU Extension Master Gardener program and are performing unpaid educational and public service as active Extension Master Gardeners.

Training and experience gained by participating in the MSU Extension

Master Gardener Program are valuable, and may rightfully be listed as qualifications when seeking employment. However, Extension Master Gardeners may not give the appearance of being MSU Extension Master Gardeners at their place of employment. Extension Master Gardeners who work in the horticulture or green industry may display their certificates at their place of business, but may not use the Extension Master Gardener or MSU Extension logo or name on any commercial materials including vehicles, signs, advertisements and business cards.

### **Answering Questions**

MSU Extension Master Gardeners are limited to providing gardening advice to non-commercial growers or managers of plants. Questions pertaining to commercial growing or management of plants, legal issues, food preservation and any other non-gardening related questions must be referred to the appropriate MSU Extension educator.

Extension Master Gardeners should not answer questions outside of their areas of expertise or training. This includes not answering questions concerning human health concerns (such as about lice, crabs and other pests), commercial horticulture, hazardous tree evaluation, medical or legal questions, and whether a questionable plant or mushroom is edible.

As stated in the code of conduct, Extension Master Gardeners provide unbiased, research-based information consistent with MSU recommendations. No recommendations or endorsements should be made of specific products or

places of business.

### **Pest Management Recommendations**

When providing pest management strategies, MSU Extension Master Gardeners are required to provide an integrated pest management approach (using cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical methods). Chemical pesticide recommendations are restricted to only those made in recent Extension publications, or pesticide labeling. Remember that it is illegal to use or to recommend the use of a pesticide that is inconsistent with the pesticide labeling (label on the product, attached material and any additional printed material provided by the chemical company). EMGs should encourage clients to read the pesticide labeling instead of providing them with application or dilution rates.

### **Affirmative Action**

Like every Michigan State University program, the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program is open to all individuals without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Every organization that partners with the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program or uses Extension Master Gardeners must comply with MSU antidiscrimination policies.

### **Liability**

MSU liability insurance coverage is extended to re-certified MSU Extension Master Gardeners and trainees who

have successfully completed the Volunteer Selection Process (VSP) and are volunteering in good faith for the University on MSU Extension staff-approved volunteer projects (via the Volunteer Project Proposal Form). This coverage applies only to efforts while engaged in MSU Extension staff-approved volunteer projects and does not attach to the title “Extension Master Gardener”.

The coverage does not extend to other organizations or groups with which an Extension Master Gardener volunteer is working. Note that EMGs may also be covered by the liability insurance provided by the non-profit

organization(s) for which the EMG is completing volunteer service hours.

An EMG volunteer must not sign contracts or leases assuming liability responsibility on behalf of MSU Extension or between MSUE and other organizations or groups. Staff-approved projects which require contracts or “Facilities Use” agreements must have the document approved by appropriate MSU Risk Management personnel, with confirmation of approval, prior to project commencement. The additional document(s) should be routed to mg@msu.edu and the State Coordinator a minimum of 2 to 3 weeks prior to onset.