

Become a Master Gardener, It's Fun and Satisfying

History of the Program

The Master Gardener Program was started by Dr. David Gibby in Snohomish County, Washington, in 1972. Dr. Gibby, the Extension Agent for horticulture, was inundated by the number of requests that came into his office. He tried to answer questions more efficiently by using the media, but this only served to increase the volume of calls from people wanting individual attention. He thought about using specially trained volunteers to do outreach work in the area of home gardening. He reasoned that well-trained volunteers could respond to many of the everyday homeowner questions, freeing him and his colleagues for more technical and difficult problems. Volunteers such as Extension Homemakers and 4-H Leaders, had always been a part of the Extension Service but never in the area of homeowner horticulture. With this in mind, he selected, trained and certified 120 volunteers as Master Gardeners. These first Master Gardener volunteers served more than 7,000 clients at plant clinics during their first year.

This concept has now spread throughout the U.S, Puerto Rico, Guam and Canada. Today, thousands of volunteers have received Master Gardener training and contributed hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours to their communities. In addition to plant clinics and telephone hotlines, still a basic activity of most Master Gardener programs, these volunteers conduct research; maintain demonstration plots; and carry out gardening projects with school groups, 4-H clubs, youth at risk, senior citizens, and other special groups. Master Gardeners are involved with community beautification, composting, and similar planting and environmental projects.

The Maryland Master Gardener Program was started in 1978 as a means of extending the horticultural and pest management expertise of Maryland Cooperative Extension to the general public. Today, this popular program can be found in 16 Maryland counties, and Baltimore City.

The Montgomery County Master Gardener Program was started in 1981 with 72 volunteers who manned a telephone hotline and two plant clinics. It now has 251 volunteers who work in 13 committees.

General Information and Requirements

Master Gardener volunteers are members of the local community who take an active interest in their lawns and gardens. They are enthusiastic, willing to learn and help others. They receive special training in horticulture. In exchange for their training, Master Gardeners contribute time as volunteers, working through the Cooperative Extension to provide horticulture-related information to the public.

A person considering applying to become a Master Gardener should ask himself these questions:

- Do I want to learn more about the culture of many types of plants?
- Am I eager to participate in a practical and intense training program?
- Do I look forward to sharing my knowledge with people in my community?
- Do I have enough time to attend training sessions and to serve as a volunteer?

Volunteer Position Description

Name of Program: Montgomery County Master Gardener

Title of Job: Master Gardener Volunteer Educator

Purpose: Provide accurate information to home gardeners via telephone contact, fairs, festivals, plant clinics, mailed in or hand delivered samples, classes, workshops and demonstrations.

Major Responsibilities:

1. Keep accurate written record of volunteer hours and activities.
2. Answer questions from home gardeners through telephone, plant clinics, and information booths at fairs and festivals.
3. Diagnose plant sample problems and identify insect specimens and make verbal or written reply.
4. Judging at state and county fairs.
5. Conduct classes and workshops for various audiences and clientele groups, including youth and adults.
6. Participate in garden research and demonstration projects and community gardening and beautification projects (includes the use of gardening supplies and hand and edged tools).
7. Mentoring Master Gardener interns.
8. Transport fellow Master Gardeners and supplies, equipment and display information to activity sites.
9. Attend meetings, organize field trips and new programs.
10. Write articles, create displays, and develop written and audiovisual materials for teaching and presentations.

11. Office/secretarial/data entry work.
12. Administer the program by serving on committees, assisting with basic training, soliciting speakers, raising funds, etc.
13. Other duties and responsibilities as deemed appropriate by city/county Extension staff.

Job Site: Locations mostly within, but not limited to, county of training.

Qualifications: Completion of the Master Gardener Training Course, a passing grade on the Master Gardener Final Exam, and 45 hrs of required volunteer service.

Interim Designation: The title Master Gardener Intern will be used upon the successful completion of the training class, a passing grade on the exam, and until the completion of 45 hours of service by the end of the calendar year.

Estimated Time Requirements: Varies with the type of volunteer activity.

Tenure: One year, renewable option. To remain an active Master Gardener, a mandatory 25 hours of volunteer time per calendar year is necessary. Also, required are 10 hours of advanced training per year as per State guidelines.

Supervision: Extension faculty and/or staff members.

Affirmative Action: To provide assistance to all county/city residents regardless of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin or handicap.

Training: Master Gardener Training course
Volunteer Policy Orientation

Benefits: Eligibility to attend Advanced Training for Master Gardeners.
Satisfaction of working collaboratively to extend horticultural knowledge.
Opportunity to increase personal knowledge and skill base.

MCE Contact Person:

Name: Steve Dubik

Address: 18410 Muncaster Road, Derwood, MD 20855

Telephone: 301-590-2838

E-mail: sdubik@umd.edu

Master Gardener Program Policies and Guidelines

Master Gardeners must follow specific policies and guidelines. The Maryland Cooperative Extension is ultimately responsible for all Master Gardener Programs operating within the state of Maryland. It sets the minimum standards, which can be found in Home & Garden Mimeo # MG10, The Maryland Master Gardener Program Policies and Guidelines. This document is available at www.mastergardener.umd.edu. More stringent requirements specific to Montgomery County Master Gardener Requirements are—

- Interns must provide 45 hours (instead of 40 hours) of volunteer service to the program by end of calendar year (instead of within 12 months from the first day of training.)
- To remain an active Master Gardener one must provide at least 25 hours (not 20 hours) of certified volunteer service each calendar year.
- Volunteers who have been inactive for 2 years or less (not 3 years or less) may change their status to “active” by volunteering at least 25 hours (not 20 hours) per year and completing at least 10 hours of advanced training.
- Volunteer service does not include travel time for volunteer activities and MG Association meetings.

Program Activities

A Montgomery County Master Gardener may volunteer in any number of the following activities—

- Demonstration Gardens
- Landscape Design
- Therapeutic Horticulture
- Newsletter
- Program/Education
- Plant Clinics
- Public Relations
- Speakers
- Internal Special Events
- External Special Events
- County Fair
- Telephone Hotline
- Computer

For more information on the activities of these committees, refer to the Annual Report of the Montgomery County Master Gardener Program.

Master Gardener Training

Master Gardeners are trained in the following topics:

- Botany
- Composting
- Diagnosing plant problems/Integrated Pest Management
- Entomology
- Flower gardening
- Lawn care
- Organic gardening
- Pesticide use and safety
- Soils and fertilizers
- Tree and shrub care
- Vegetable gardening

Other subjects of interest may be included