

The Western Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a member-managed nonprofit organization dedicated to the educational mission of promoting good and sustainable gardening practices. Each Master Gardener has completed an in-depth training program, including hands-on activities in gardening and public education, and has made a commitment to participate in WMMGA-sponsored public programs each year. WMMGA is an Affiliate of the national Master Gardener program of the American Horticultural Society.

What are the geographic boundaries of WMMGA?

Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties are served by WMMGA. The organization is divided into three regions (Berkshires, Lower Valley, and Upper Valley), each of which sponsors regional meetings and symposia.

Does serving as a Master Gardener require certain skills and abilities?

The WMMGA training program requires about three hours/week of assigned reading and the ability to use an online weekly quiz, using the University of Massachusetts' OWL instructional program. Access to the internet will be important, as well as some facility with using online search engines for research purposes. There are no explicit requirements in terms of previous education, degrees, or professional training. Classes are conducted in English.

WMMGA's volunteer opportunities vary widely in terms of the requirements for physical labor (transporting garden tools and plants, weeding, etc.) and public interaction (staffing booths at fairs and farmers markets, speaking on gardening-related topics, etc.) The organization welcomes volunteers with a variety of skills and physical abilities and does its best to describe the requirements for each volunteer opportunity clearly, so that members may choose opportunities for which they are best suited.

When is the WMMGA training program offered?

The training program is offered every other year. The next series of classes will be held in January through April 2019.

What should I do to become a Master Gardener in Western Massachusetts?

The WMMGA application process has two parts:

- First, completion of a brief application form. The 2019 application form is now available and must be submitted by September 21, 2018.
- Second, an interview with two Master Gardeners, which will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time shortly after the application deadline.

Decisions about admission to the program will be made in November 2018, and all applicants will be informed of the results of their applications at that time.

How is the training program structured?

Each training class typically includes about 50 students. The weekly sessions will be held from January 9 through April 24, usually on Wednesday, with a few exceptions. The classes are scheduled from approximately 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Most will take place at a location between Springfield and Northampton, although a few sessions may take place at the Berkshire Botanical Gardens or elsewhere in western Massachusetts. There will be an orientation meeting on Thursday, January 3.

Although it may be possible to take public transportation to the WMMGA classes, depending on PVTA bus schedules, most students have access to private vehicles, and many join car-pooling groups.

Who are the teachers?

Instructors are experienced botanists, farmers, horticulturists and landscapers, representing the University of Massachusetts School of Agriculture, New England Wild Flower Society, and other reputable programs. Much of the program will focus on sustainable gardening practice, including no-till/low-till gardening, integrated pest management (minimal use of toxic herbicides and pesticides), and permaculture. The instructional program includes a mix of lecture and hands-on activities.

How much does it cost to enroll in the WMMGA training program?

Although the instructional program is managed entirely by volunteer Master Gardeners, there are outright costs associated with space rental, instructors' stipends, and curricular materials. Tuition for the 2019 program will be \$375.

How much volunteer service is required to be certified as a Master Gardener?

Students are required to complete 60 or more volunteer hours by December 31 of the year in which they enroll in the training program. The program requires that students participate in a variety of volunteer opportunities, including some programs outside their home regions.

Volunteer opportunities fall into four major categories:

- Public Education (such as staffing tables and booths at farmers' markets, fairs, and the Big E).
- Community Service (such as helping to maintain the herb garden at Berkshire Botanical Garden, the grounds at Wisteriahurst in Holyoke, the pollinator gardens at Northampton Community Garden, and other community resources).
- Administration (such as helping to organize WMMGA-sponsored gardening symposia and serving on WMMGA committees).
- Continuing Education (enrolling in classes about horticulture, soils, climate and related topics at approved locations such as the New England Wild Flower Society, the Hitchcock Center for the Environment and others).

WMMGA manages over 40 volunteer sites and programs, and students will have a range of opportunities on weekdays and weekends to meet the 60-hour service requirement for certification.

After I complete the program and become a certified Master Gardener, what's next?

You will join a group of energetic and enthusiastic advocates for sustainable gardening across western Massachusetts! As a member-managed organization, WMMGA encourages all Master Gardeners to participate in public education, community service, and administration of the organization.

- The basic requirement for volunteer service is set at 15 hours/year, but many Master Gardeners exceed that target, often choosing to concentrate on one or two programs of particular personal interest.
- In addition, each Master Gardener must participate in a minimum of three hours/year of continuing education; WMMGA identifies specific training opportunities throughout the year that allow Master Gardeners to fulfill this requirement.
- Annual dues are currently set at a modest \$20. Additional contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law, as WMMGA is a 501(c)(3) organization as determined by the IRS.