



Cornell University
Cooperative Extension of
Onondaga County

Master Gardener Volunteer Expectations
Guidelines



Revised July 2020

Onondaga County Master Gardener Volunteer Expectations

I PURPOSE: The Master Gardener Volunteer Program is designed to increase the levels of horticultural knowledge and improve horticultural skills among program participants. As a result of training, a pool of Master Gardener volunteers becomes available to share horticultural knowledge with others in the Onondaga County community (e.g. home landscaping, vegetable gardening, ornamental plant selection, composting, and pest management in the garden). The Master Gardener Volunteer Program is an integral part of the Outreach Program of Cornell Cooperative Extension and functions in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws of the organization.

II QUALIFICATIONS:

- A. A basic interest in and/or knowledge of gardening/horticulture.
- B. Enthusiasm for acquiring and sharing horticultural knowledge and skills.
- C. A flexible time schedule to allow participation in community educational programs and an interest in helping others.
- D. Interest in making new friends.
- E. Ability to communicate.

***In addition, all Master Gardener Volunteers are required to submit an Authorization/Consent form for a background check as of September 2005.**

III BENEFITS:

- A. Receive extensive horticulture training, based on research carried out through Cornell University.
- B. Receive continuing education, through monthly speakers, seminars and other Cornell/CCE activities.
- C. Have fun while learning and helping others. You can concentrate your horticultural interests following core instruction in a variety of garden areas.
- D. Meet and make new friends with similar interests in gardening. Exchange information and learn gardening ideas.
- E. Provide the opportunity to develop new skills such as public speaking, teaching skills, team leadership, creating pamphlets, etc.

IV ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS (Definitions)

- A. Level 1- Student Gardener: From acceptance into the program, through successful completion of the initial training and final exam.
- B. Level 2 - Apprentice Gardener: From successful completion of the initial training and final exam to the completion of 200 volunteer hours.
- C. Level 3 - Master Gardener: From completion of both levels 1 & 2 and through the continued participation in the program.

V REQUIREMENTS

○ **Applicant**

To be considered for the Program, potential candidates must:

1. Fill out a Volunteer Application;
2. Submit three work/character references;
3. Complete the Criminal Background Authorization/Consent forms and sign the Association's Volunteer agreement and accompanying Code of Conduct.

○ **Level 1- Student Gardener**

1. Participate in training sessions
2. Attend at least 3 Master Gardener Business Meetings
3. Attend at least one Master Gardener presentation
4. Table at one event with a senior Master Gardener.
5. Successfully complete final examination
6. **Fulfill core requirements***

○ **Level 2-Apprentice Gardener**

1. Work towards the completion of 200 hours of Master Gardener activities (Minimum of 50 hours annually)
2. **Fulfill core requirements***

○ **Level 3- Master Gardener**

1. Completed 200 hours of Master Gardener activities
2. **Fulfill Core requirements***

***CORE REQUIREMENTS**

- a. Volunteer a minimum of 50 hours per year
- b. Attend at least 6 Master Gardener meetings per year
- c. Actively participate in public education (both in and outside the gardens).
- d. Submit volunteer hours quarterly
- e. Abide by Master Gardener Code of Conduct

To remain active in the program the Master Gardener must complete core requirements annually.

VI VOLUNTEER HOURS INCLUDE:

1. Attendance at monthly Master Gardener Business Meetings.
2. Answering inquiries on the Horticultural Hotline, both phone calls and e-mails.
3. Hours spent answering gardening questions at local events, such as the regional market and the NY State Fair.
4. Time spent on approved forms of community horticultural teaching, including news articles, school programs, programs at community centers, etc.
5. Other specific horticultural activities, which are discussed and approved in advance by the Extension Program Coordinator. Example: Guidance on what to grow in a flowerbed at a community agency site.
6. Coordinating and/or instructing public workshops and presentations and tabling at events.
7. Helping to increase our educational efforts on TV, radio and with the print media.
8. Hours spent doing administrative work inside or outside the Extension office.

NOT INCLUDED:

1. Travel time to and from meetings/trainings/seminars and travel time to/from maintaining gardens. Travel time can only be counted if it is to/from a volunteer activity that involves sharing information with the public.
2. Visits to Botanical Gardens while on vacation (unless a special training is involved and approval is received from the program director).
3. Standard garden maintenance of community project areas (Needs to be pre-approved – maintenance hours, planting hours do not count unless specific teaching is also happening).
4. Required Core Instruction Training for student Master Gardeners.

VII PUBLIC RELATIONS

- A.** As the Master Gardener Program grows, the opportunity for the program to reach out and interact with other in-house programs and community-wide programs also increases. Master Gardeners will often come in direct contact with community leaders and media representatives.

Master Gardeners should follow the guidance of appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension staff members to ensure that the technical content of all information offered shall be based on unbiased, research-based findings will be implemented.

Cornell's horticulture standard is based upon ecologically sound principles. That usually means recommending environmentally friendly practices before any harsher method. When using Pest Management Around the Home, Part I and II, for instance, Master Gardeners should quote information in Part I (Cultural Methods) before quoting information in Part II (Pesticide Information). Other research-based information may be less environmentally sensitive.

B. All media productions:

1. Must be based upon the research, educational and regulatory policy of the Cornell Cooperative Extension.
2. Must be reviewed and approved prior to mailing in the case of written communications with an Extension Educator.
3. Should be approached from a positive viewpoint. The most successful programs approach both problems and opportunities with enthusiasm and optimism.

VIII Changes in Master Gardener Volunteer Status

To retain the integrity of the Master Gardener Program in New York State, all applicants must agree to the following before beginning the training: "At a time when I am no longer active as a Master Gardener Volunteer, I agree to refer to myself only as a graduate of the Master Gardener Program or a former Master Gardener."

Inactive and/or Master Gardener on Leave of Absence is one who wishes to take time off from their volunteer commitment for personal or other reasons. The individual must petition the Master Gardener coordinator in order to take a leave of absence from the program. Master Gardeners on leave will remain on the roster and continue to receive mailings for a period of one year.

Released Master Gardener is one who wishes to be released from the program with no plans of returning in the future, or one who does not renew their volunteer commitment (Master Gardener Reenrollment form). A Master Gardener who has moved out of county, cannot be reached, or has not contacted us nor has submitted a Volunteer Hour Report within the past year, will be considered released from the program. Released Master Gardeners who are taken off the MG Roster will no longer be sent mailings or emails.

IX FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I Take a Leave of Absence?

Yes. If you need to take time off from your volunteer commitment, contact the Master Gardener Coordinator and request to be placed “on leave”. For a period of one year, you will still receive electronic monthly newsletters and your status on the MG roster will state that you are “on leave.” When you’re ready to come back, let the Master Gardener Coordinator know, and your active status will be reinstated.

Can I be released from the Master Gardener Program? What happens if I have to relocate?

If you are relocating out of the region, or wish to be released from the program with no plans of returning in the future, contact the Master Gardener Coordinator. You will be taken off the roster and no monthly newsletter or mailings will be sent to you.

Similarly, if you have not submitted quarterly volunteer hours nor contacted the Master Gardener Coordinator within one year, you will be taken off the roster and no monthly newsletter or mailings will be sent to you.

Can I transfer into the Onondaga County program from another County or out of state?

Prospective volunteers who wish to transfer in from another county in NYS must go through the application process and provide references from the county in which they previously volunteered. In addition to completing the volunteer application and signing a Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct form, the applicant will write an essay of their past experiences as a Master Gardener, and what they wish to bring to the CCE Onondaga County as a MG. A background check will be done, as for all Master Gardeners.

I took the training in Onondaga County in the past, but never completed my initial 200 hours. Can I rejoin the program?

To be reinstated into the program, you must go through the application process again. In addition to completing the volunteer application and signing a Volunteer Agreement and Code of Conduct form, the applicant will write an essay of their past experiences as a program participant, and what they wish to bring the CCE Onondaga County as a MG. A background check will be required.

If you have any further questions regarding Volunteer Expectations, please contact the
Consumer Horticulture Educator,
Kathleen A. Burns Copeletti
315-424-9485 ext 236

Master Gardener Volunteer Training Agreement

The Master Gardener Core Qualifying Course is pre-requisite to becoming a Master Gardener Volunteer with the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County (hereinafter referred to as the “CCE of Onondaga County”).

During the time that you are enrolled in the qualifying course, you will be a Master Gardener Student.

Please affirm your acceptance of the terms of this agreement, stated below, with your signature. Also please accept our sincere thanks for your valuable contribution to Cornell Cooperative Extension.

1. I agree that as a CCE Master Gardener Student, I must attend every class in order to gain a broad education on the many aspects of the horticultural sciences. I will talk with my county’s Master Gardener Coordinator about the feasibility of what is an acceptable solution, if I miss any class due to illness or emergencies.
2. I understand that I am committing my volunteer time in exchange for education. At the successful completion of the qualifying course, I agree to provide **50** hours of volunteer time to the Master Gardener Program in Onondaga County during a 1-year period upon completion of core training.
3. I understand that a the fee for participating in the Master Gardener Qualifying Course is \$225 for Onondaga County Residents and \$375 for out of County, to cover costs associated with running this program. This cost does not reflect staff time involved in planning, teaching or evaluating the course effectiveness.
4. I agree to study the required reading materials, be an active participant in lectures and other training sessions, successfully complete exams and any other special requirements during the qualifying course.
5. I will wear an identifying badge as a Master Gardener Student at the appropriate times, and as a Master Gardener Volunteer at public events.
6. I will disseminate research-based information and refrain from giving out information from personal gardening experience that could be construed by the public to be an official statement from Cornell.
7. I will become a certified Master Gardener Volunteer when I receive a certificate from CCE of Onondaga County. At a time when I am no longer active as a Master Gardener Volunteer, I agree to refer to myself only as a graduate of the Master Gardener Program or former Master Gardener.
8. I agree that as a CCE volunteer my participation in the activities outlined in the attached volunteered position description is without monetary or other compensation.
9. I understand that CCE shall have the right to suspend or release me as a volunteer at any time and for any reason, within the discretion of CCE. I also understand that I have the right to terminate this agreement, recognizing that if I receive significant training for the volunteer position that there is an expectation of volunteer service.

10. I understand that CCE does not provide volunteers with medical insurance; therefore CCE is not responsible for any medical expenses incurred by me. Further, I understand that I am neither covered by Worker's Compensation nor entitled to employee benefits as a result of my CCE volunteer affiliation.
11. CCE will cover me as a volunteer under the CCE commercial general liability to protect me against any covered claims for injury to persons or damage to property arising out of my activities as a volunteer. In exchange for volunteer liability insurance protection I, On behalf of myself, my heirs and my representatives, do hereby release Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Association, its officers, directors, employees and other volunteers from any liability whatsoever for any injury to myself, including death, or damage to my property that arises out of or is in any way related to my volunteer activities unless my injury is the result of the sole negligence of Cornell Cooperative Extension or the Association. I understand that the liability insurance coverage only applies when I am on duty, acting in accordance with CCE guidelines for my volunteer assignments, and all other applicable pre-conditions for coverage under the CCE insurance policy are met.
12. I am aware of the terms and conditions of this agreement and agree that the provisions of this agreement do not constitute a contract, either expressed or implied, for employment between CCE and myself.
13. This agreement is valid until it is terminated by CCE or by me.

Signatures:

CCE Volunteer _____ Date _____

CCE Representative _____ Date _____
Name Title

