



Kentucky Extension Master Gardener

Guidelines for the Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program

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Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) are trained volunteers that assist County Extension Agents (CEA) with educational programming. EMG are active throughout the U.S. and Canada and many Kentucky counties have active programs. This publication is meant to provide current guidelines for the Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program to County Extension Agents affiliated with the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service (CES). For more details about setting up a Master Gardener Program, please contact the State Coordinator of the Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program. More information about the roles and responsibilities of Kentucky EMG volunteers can be found in the introductory chapter of the Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program Training Manual.

Administering the Program

The EMG Program is a volunteer management and outreach program of the Cooperative Extension Service. In Kentucky, a County Extension Agent (CEA) must be willing to oversee the program, or in the case of multi-county programs, cooperate with CEA in neighboring counties to administer the program. In the case of multi-county programs, the County Agent where the Master Gardener resides shall be responsible for overseeing volunteer activities and maintaining certification status, unless that CEA has chosen to transfer these responsibilities to another CEA in charge of the Master Gardener Program.

Master Gardeners must be involved in volunteer activities related to Extension education and outreach programs. Materials and resources developed for the EMG Program may be used for general horticulture training and educational programs in the absence of volunteer activities; however, such a program (without a volunteer component) should not be called an EMG Program.

Screening, Training and Certifying Volunteers

Client Protection Standards: As volunteers, EMG may often interact unsupervised with members of vulnerable, at risk, or special needs audiences. Therefore, trainees must be screened using the standards set forth in the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Client Protection Policy. Each county has procedures in place for screening volunteers and these should be used for EMG volunteers as well. It is best if the screening takes place prior to or at the very early stages of the volunteer training class.

Course Content: Subject matter for required training is listed in Table 1. Optional training may include topics such as turf, annual & perennial flowers, woody plants, fruits, vegetables, landscape design, interior plants, water gardens, and others as identified by the CEA. The optional topics may integrate information from required

sessions and thus help fulfill the required amount of class time for those sessions. The CEA in charge of the training should provide homework assignments to ensure that the class is mastering the material. Attendance at all training sessions is required; however, occasional absences may be excused at the discretion of the CEA in charge of the training. Any missed material should be reviewed from the Master Gardener Manual (or other source materials) and homework completed. When training is complete, a comprehensive exam will be given by the CEA in charge of the program.

Requirement for Volunteer Hours: The EMGs in training must complete 40 hours of volunteer service prior to obtaining their certification, their volunteer activities may commence once training begins, and the initial volunteer commitment must be completed within one year. Certified EMGs must complete 20 hours of volunteer service annually to maintain their certification. Volunteer activities must be approved by the CEA administering the program, who will also report volunteer activity on a regular basis in the appropriate PAC code of the Statistical Report in the Kentucky Extension Reporting System (KERS). Where possible, most volunteer hours should encompass some type of public education or outreach component. See Table 2 for some examples of activities that count for volunteer hours.

Initial and Continuing Certification: EMGs are certified when they have completed the training sessions and homework, passed the comprehensive exam with a minimum score of 75%, and completed 40 hours of volunteer service. A class list of those who have met the criteria for certification should be sent to the State Master Gardener Coordinator who will prepare certificates for those receiving certification. The class list should include email or physical addresses of Master Gardeners completing certification. Master Gardeners will maintain their certification by completing 20 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours of continuing education (CE) credits (see Table 3) per year (no CE credits are required for the initial certification). When a Master Gardener fails to perform either the allotted volunteer hours or continuing education credits, their status will become “inactive” but their certification may be reinstated once their volunteer service and CE credits have been fulfilled. No certificates are issued by the State Coordinator for recertification; however, the CEA in charge may choose to recognize milestones in years of service or volunteer hours contributed by members of their county’s EMG Program.

Transfer of Certification from other Kentucky Counties or States: Extension Master Gardener certification from other programs will be honored at the discretion of the CEA in charge of the program. The CEA may accept the transfer of certification outright, or may require the Master Gardener to participate in one or more of the Master Gardener training sessions that may contain information of a state-specific, or county-specific nature. At the CEA discretion, this training may count toward CE. Certification in the new program will be granted once the EMG has completed any needed training or continuing education hours and performed 20 hours of volunteer service.

Master Gardener Associations

Although not required, many county EMG Programs choose to form a Master Gardener Association. Associations provide a social network for certified Master Gardeners and may provide an organizational framework that will assist the CEA to administer the Master Gardener Program including sponsoring projects that may provide opportunities for volunteer service and continuing education. Associations may also choose to establish tax-exempt status by completing the necessary paperwork to become a 501(c)(3) or similar organization. Associations usually



secure the services of a tax attorney or CPA to assist with this process. Incorporating as a tax-exempt organization will allow the association to independently manage their finances and apply for grants that are limited to non-profit organizations. While the Association may assist the CEA in managing the Master Gardener Program, the CEA must not relinquish control of the Program. The University of Kentucky requires that volunteer activities (such as those performed by Master Gardeners) should remain under the control and direct supervision of the CEA in order for the University to provide liability coverage for such activities. Furthermore, county Master Gardener Associations should establish a Memorandum of Understanding through the County Extension Office with the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service that confirms their adherence to CES policies and procedures.

Other Activities

Master Gardeners and coordinators are encouraged to attend local, state, regional and national/international Master Gardener conferences. The International Master Gardener Committee also identifies exceptional projects in their Search for Excellence program which occur every two years in conjunction with the International Master Gardener Conference. Kentucky County programs are encouraged to participate in Search for Excellence—details regarding this program can be obtained from the State Master Gardener coordinator.

Table 1. Training requirements to become a Kentucky Extension Master Gardener.	
Subject Area	Minimum Number of Instructional Hours¹
Cooperative Extension/Volunteerism	2
Basic Botany (including optional lab)	6
Soils and Fertility (including optional lab)	4
Plant Pathology (including optional lab)	4
Entomology (including optional lab)	4
Pesticide and pesticide Safety (including environmental issues)	4
Total Required Training	24²
<p>¹Information pertaining to required subject hours may be obtained from optional sessions. For example, an optional session on plant propagation will contain much basic botany information.</p> <p>²While the required subject content totals 24 hours, most Kentucky Master Gardener training courses span 12-15 weeks and involve 40 or more hours of classroom instruction with homework assignments and optional field trips. The CEA coordinating the program has flexibility in scheduling the training sessions.</p>	



Table 2. A few examples regarding volunteer hours for Extension Master Gardeners. The CEA in charge must approve all Master Gardener Projects and volunteer activities.

Community beautification projects. Master Gardener activities involving community beautification projects may count toward volunteer hours if the project involves an educational component (signage, brochure, future Extension-led demonstration opportunities) and is approved by the CEA in charge of the program. Projects that simply install ornamentals for beautification should not count toward volunteer hours. A volunteer's involvement in a beautification project at their church or child's school would not count for volunteer hours if there were no education component.

Master Gardeners being invited to speak at schools, public events, garden clubs, etc. These activities count toward volunteer hours if the activity is approved by the CEA in charge of the program.

A Master Gardener spends part of the year in a different state and volunteers in the Master Gardener program there. These volunteer hours would not count toward requirements for the Kentucky Extension Master Gardener Program. However, some Kentucky programs that border other states do collaborative projects with those states and volunteer activities in those projects would count so long as they had an educational component and were approved by the Kentucky County Agent in charge.

A Master Gardener volunteer leads tours at a local public garden or nature center not affiliated with UK or KSU. As long as this activity was approved by the CEA in charge, it is clear that the person is represented the Kentucky Master Gardener Program, and the volunteer is not paid for their services, this could count for volunteer hours.

A Master Gardener volunteer helps judge horticultural exhibits at the state fair and accepts a fee for their services. A volunteer cannot accept a fee for their volunteer time, however, they may accept travel expenses.

A Master Gardener volunteer is asked to pull weeds around the county Extension office in preparation for an open house. This depends. Is the landscape being weeded used for public education and/or demonstration purposes? If so, the time may be credited as volunteer hours. However, Master Gardener volunteers should not get credit for pulling weeds, planting flowers, watering plantings, if there is no educational component to the project.

A Master Gardener reports 5 volunteer hours for researching a topic, developing a presentation, and delivering the presentation to a local garden club. As long as this activity was approved by the CEA, these hours would be allowed. It is the discretion of the CEA as to how many hours would be reasonable to assign to the development of the presentation.

A Master Gardener reports 3 volunteer hours: 2 hours working an informational booth at the local farmers' market, and 1 hour for time spent driving to/from the site. Providing information at a farmers' market is certainly worthwhile and that time would be accepted if the project were approved by the CEA. Many coordinators provide volunteer hours for travel time, this would be at the discretion of the CEA.



A Master Gardener works part-time during the week at a local garden center. On the weekend she is an unpaid volunteer at the center and gives presentations about proper planting techniques. Caution should be exercised when Master Gardeners work for pay in green industry retail settings. Master Gardeners should not identify themselves as such in the work environment. The CEA in charge must consider whether the Master Gardener’s weekend activities are truly volunteer or are an extension of her job. Would the volunteer be allowed or willing to provide presentations to other retail establishments? Granting volunteer hours in this situation may be problematic.

A Master Gardener volunteer reports an excessive number of hours for a project that was not approved by the local agent in charge. CEA should publicize what projects they consider valid for Master Gardener volunteer activity. The number of hours available for volunteering is also at the discretion of the CEA.

Table 3. Examples of activities that count toward CE Credits. The CEA in charge makes the final determination regarding what activities county toward continuing education.

Attending an education session at state, regional, and international Master Gardener conferences.
Attending horticultural conferences, field days, or other presentations associated with the University of Kentucky.
Attending lectures sponsored by other universities and organizations with prior approval by the CEA.
Attending educational programs as part of Master Gardener Association meetings.
Participating in organized Master Gardener field trips.
Sitting in on future Master Gardener Classes.
Completing approved on-line courses or participating in online webinars and discussion.
Completing advanced Master Gardener training.

