

Guide to Being a Master Gardener Volunteer



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This guide is for current OSU Extension Master Gardener volunteers. It explains Oregon State University policies and OSU Master Gardener program guidelines related to volunteering. Your county program coordinator will have more information on how these guidelines are used in your county program.

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We are connected to Oregon State University

All Master Gardeners in Oregon are Oregon State University volunteers. The Master Gardener program is administered by the Oregon State University Extension. OSU Extension Service is a partnership involving Oregon State University, local agencies (typically county governments), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These partners extend research-based information beyond university walls and into the community so all Oregonians can benefit from the knowledge and discoveries developed by faculty at OSU and other land-grant universities.

OSU Extension is made up of several program areas:

- 4-H Youth Development
- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Family and Community Health
- Forestry and Natural Resources
- Sea Grant
- Open Campus and Juntos
- OSU Kidspirit
- Outdoor School

The Master Gardener program is part of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension program area.

OSU Extension can be found in each of Oregon's 36 counties, where over 20,000 OSU volunteers annually donate countless hours to support more than 2.3 million educational interactions.

[Learn more about all of OSU Extension's volunteer programs.](#)

[The OSU Extension website offers a huge knowledge base of information.](#) This resource is accessed by the public and is a go-to reference for Master Gardener volunteers.

The guiding statements of the Master Gardener program

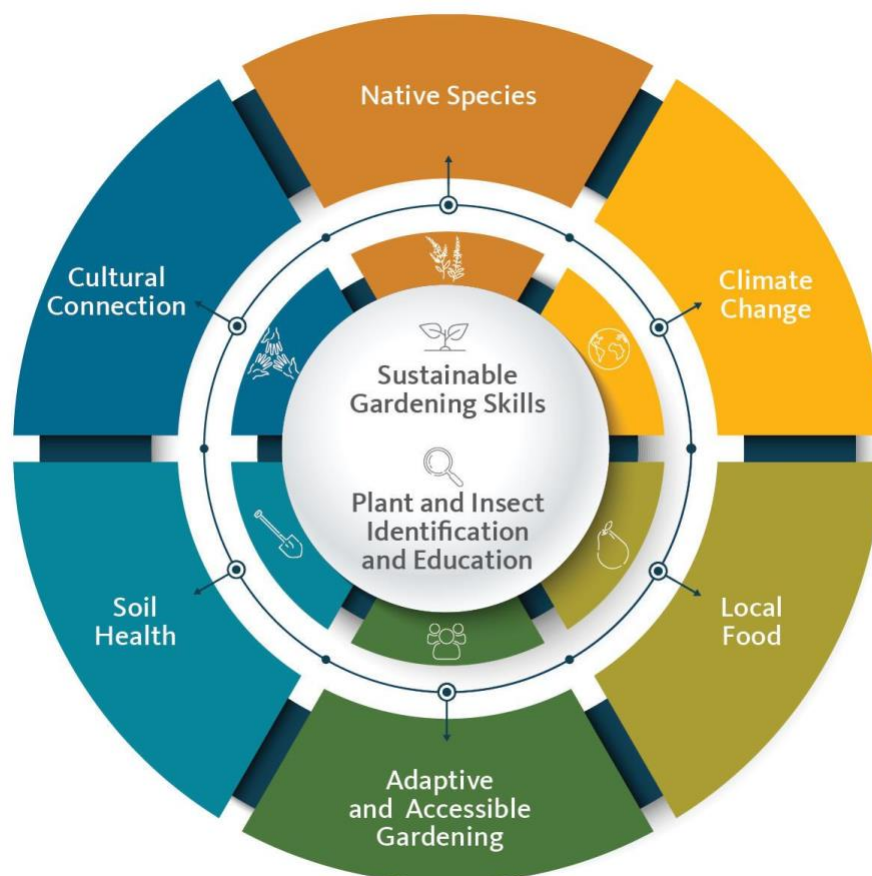
Mission

Cultivating resilient and healthy communities throughout Oregon through sustainable horticulture education and gardening projects that are rooted in science and that are supported by OSU Extension volunteers.

Vision

We provide accessible and equitable education programs that nurture life-long learners and volunteers who can expand the reach and impact of science-based sustainable gardening practices to benefit all Oregonians.

Program priorities



Sustainable gardening skills

Teaching horticulture principles and practices that are grounded by research or recognized as best practices.

Plant and insect identification and education

Serving as a public resource for diagnosing plant and insect problems of our region.

Local food

Encouraging the use of sustainable techniques for successfully growing local food, food access and food security.

Native species

Promoting native species conservation and addressing concerns regarding invasive species and invasive species management, promoting ways to help native bees and other pollinators thrive in home and community landscapes.

Adaptive and accessible gardening

Promoting and educating ways to ensure access to gardening for all ages, abilities and communities.

Climate change

Teaching ways to create resilient landscapes that are adapted to our changing climate, promoting water-wise gardening practices to conserve water and minimize polluted runoff.

Cultural connection

Partnering with local community groups to create access to plants for physical, mental and spiritual health and wellbeing, and honoring and uplifting cultural practices and beliefs.

Soil health

Growing knowledge, care and protection of the amazing ecosystem of soil health and its value to our personal health.

Guiding values

We are connected to Oregon State University, and use both science and local knowledge to inform our community engagement, educational outreach, and horticultural expertise. We strive to make the resources of Oregon State University accessible to all and inspire and encourage lifelong curiosity and learning through continued scientific exploration and discovery.

We are connected to our local communities, and their needs drive the work of our program. We are inclusive, where everyone is welcome, respected, valued and supported. We know that collaboration and partnership with our communities, community organizations, and neighbors make us stronger and that together, we create positive change.

We are connected to our earth, and strive for stewardship and sustainability through horticultural best practices and a conscientious approach to volunteer work in alignment with our program priorities. We aim to improve not only the lives of the people within our communities, but also the land which sustains us, and future generations.

We are driven by a sense of fun, wonder and curiosity for the natural world and a commitment of service to our local communities.

Our faculty and staff

The statewide Master Gardener program manager is an OSU Extension faculty member who oversees the program. They are responsible for setting the program direction and providing leadership.

An OSU Extension faculty or staff member manages each county Master Gardener program. In this role, they are called the county program coordinator. Their jobs are varied and challenging and require in-depth knowledge across a broad range of horticultural topics. These staff also need the people skills required to work with a diverse array of volunteers and members of the general public. Some days, program coordinators are in the office fielding questions and serving as local experts. Other days, they're teaching a class in a garden, in a school, or at another Extension office. Or they could be on the OSU campus attending a meeting or conference. They make sure that decision-makers in their community and on the OSU campus know about the great work that Master Gardeners do in local counties by submitting annual reports, nominating volunteers for awards, and simply extolling the benefits of the Master Gardener program to anyone and everyone who will listen.

Program policies and guidelines

Master Gardener volunteers are representatives of Oregon State University who give time and expertise without receiving or expecting payment. When you volunteer as a Master Gardener, you are representing Oregon State University and must adhere to OSU policies and guidelines.

All OSU volunteers are checked against the National Sex Offenders Database per OSU policy.

Required OSU forms for all volunteers

All Master Gardener volunteers—trainees and returning volunteers—are required to have current OSU volunteer forms on file. Your county program coordinator will distribute these forms either electronically or on paper. Returning volunteers will receive these forms at the start of the program year. New Master Gardeners will receive them early in their training class. The forms help all volunteers understand the guidelines under which we operate. Individuals who are not willing or able to fill out and file these forms are ineligible to participate in the OSU Master Gardener program.

The following forms are required to be completed and filed annually:

Annual Conditions of Volunteer Service

All OSU volunteers not just Master Gardeners must complete this form to be a registered university volunteer. Doing so not only recognizes the volunteer as an official agent of OSU, it allows the university to extend coverage for tort liability (civil liability for injuries or damages to the person or property of others), subject to the following general conditions:

- You are working on an OSU task assigned by an authorized OSU supervisor (your county program coordinator);
- You limit your actions to the duties assigned (defined in the Position Description form); and
- You perform your assigned duties in good faith, and do not act in a manner that is reckless or with the intent to unlawfully inflict harm to others.

Position Description

This form describes the duties, responsibilities, position requirements, and supervision of Master Gardener volunteers.

Code of Conduct

The Master Gardener Code of Conduct describes the expectations of Master Gardener Extension volunteers. As an OSU Extension Service Master Gardener volunteer, you are expected to follow the same personnel rules that all Extension employees follow.

Additional OSU forms

Additional forms may be required before you can volunteer for specific projects. Check with your county program coordinator to see if these apply to you and your projects.

Criminal History Check Disclosure Notice and Release Authorization

This form (and associated training) is mandatory for all volunteers who work with unsupervised youth (youth who are not participating with their parent or guardian). Examples include school gardens, drop-off day camps, etc. The form must be resubmitted according to OSU's policies to maintain a volunteer's eligibility to work with youth on behalf of OSU as part of his or her volunteer duties. Master Gardeners who do not work with unsupervised youth or who do not perform other security-sensitive duties on behalf of OSU (e.g., handling money, accessing restricted chemicals, etc.) do not have to fill out this form.

Motor Vehicle Check

Master Gardener volunteers who drive a motor vehicle on behalf of OSU are required to submit a copy of their driving history to the OSU Office of Risk Management. (This is uncommon.)

Your first year in the Master Gardener training program

All new Master Gardener volunteers must complete a first-year experience designed to provide (a.) a foundational level of knowledge about horticulture through classroom education and hands-on learning, (b.) instructions on how to volunteer; and (c.) opportunities to apply their horticultural knowledge and skills, and to share them with the public. Depending on your county you may be referred to as a "trainee," "student," or "intern" until you meet the graduation requirements. The cost to participate varies from county to county and depends on the county program's budget needs. This fee covers room rental, class and workshop supplies, instructor fees, etc. Scholarships are usually available.

Application processes and dates vary by county. Space in the training class may be limited. Volunteers who are accepted into the program must be available to participate in the training classes and required volunteer service; effective communicators who are willing to provide non-biased, research-based gardening information; and at least 18 years old.

Master Gardener training classes

Master Gardener trainees must complete at least 40 hours of coursework in community horticulture as part of the certification process. Some county Master Gardener programs require additional time to cover all the topics. Training schedules vary by county. Counties meet for in-person for classes during either the day, evening, or weekend. Others take a hybrid approach and use a combination of online modules and in-person instruction. Most Master Gardener training classes occur during the spring, although some counties may hold fall or winter classes. Check with your county program for the class format and details.

The Master Gardener training is developed and organized by the county Master Gardener program coordinator. All Master Gardeners in Oregon receive training in core classes such as botany, understanding pesticides, Growing & Belonging, plant problem diagnostics, sustainable gardening and landscaping, and backyard and community food production. Regionally specific gardening classes vary depending on your location and available instructors. Instructors may include OSU faculty; experienced Master Gardeners; professionals in the fields of nursery production, landscaping, or general horticulture; and knowledgeable volunteers. You will also receive onboarding on how to volunteer in the county and be given opportunities to get to know other volunteers.

You are expected to participate in every session. If you must miss a class, please arrange to make up the class you missed. If you miss two or more classes, your local Master Gardener coordinator will work with you to determine how to handle the missed classes. You may need to retake the training another year.

Final examination

Each trainee must pass a final examination (or equivalent designated by your county coordinator) with a grade of 70% or higher. Some counties may use a take-home exam and/or weekly quizzes, and some counties may include a hands-on component. All exams and quizzes are open-book and are designed to test trainees' ability to retrieve information from class notes, the Master Gardener textbook *Sustainable Gardening*, and other horticultural resources.

First-year volunteer hour requirements

A minimum of 40 volunteer hours is required for first-year volunteers to complete their certification. In most counties these volunteer hours and course completion are expected to be completed by October 31 to become a certified OSU Master Gardener volunteer. Exceptions to this timeline may be made and are at the discretion of county coordinators. Some counties may require additional hours. The volunteer hours are

usually divided among specific volunteer projects. The goal is to have first-year volunteers try many projects to determine which interest them. First-year Master Gardeners are provided with a temporary badge.

Note: If you are unable to complete the volunteer hours in the first year, please reach out to your county program coordinator to discuss your options for an extension.

First-year continuing education requirements

There are no continuing education requirements in the initial training year (because you took the intensive coursework). Attending classes for continuing education will become important when you continue to year two and beyond.

Graduation and next steps

Upon completion of the required training and volunteer hours, first-year trainees become certified as Master Gardeners, often at a graduation ceremony. At graduation, you will be awarded your permanent Master Gardener badge with your name and graduation year. Your Master Gardener badge should be worn whenever you are representing the OSU Extension Master Gardener program. If you lose your badge or need an extra one, please contact your county program coordinator for a replacement. There will likely be a small fee required to cover this cost. Your certification is valid for one year and needs to be renewed through a process called recertification.

Returning as a volunteer, recertification, badges

The certification earned from completing the Master Gardener training class is only good for one year. Volunteers must complete the recertification requirements annually to keep their certification current. Annual recertification includes completing at least 20 hours of volunteer service and at least 10 hours of continuing education (at least 1 hour of which should be focused on a Growing & Belonging topic) and signing OSU volunteer paperwork. Your county coordinator will provide information on eligible volunteer and continuing education opportunities.

What happens if I am unable to meet the volunteer and continuing education requirements?

Recertification means that you are engaged with the program, current on horticulture knowledge, and have current OSU volunteer paperwork on file. Please reach out to your county coordinator if you are unable to complete the 20 hours of volunteering and 10 hours of continuing education. You may be able to continue limited participation by signing the annual OSU volunteer paperwork. You would not be able to teach the public, mentor trainees, serve as the certified Master Gardener at the plant clinic/help desk or

other venues, etc. Please work to meet the certification requirements for the following year.

If you are no longer active in the Master Gardener program, you should not wear the Master Gardener Badge nor should you represent yourself as a Master Gardener volunteer. Once your certification expires, you may no longer list your Master Gardener certification as a professional credential.

Volunteer projects

Your county program coordinator will help you determine which projects are eligible for volunteer hours. Each county offers different kinds of volunteer projects that respond to community needs and that are in alignment with the program priorities. The goal is for each Master Gardener's talents to be used effectively to benefit the gardening community. All volunteer programs need to be aligned with the OSU Extension Master Gardener program Priorities (see above). The county program coordinator makes the final decision on eligible projects.

Each county offers different volunteer projects. These projects have developed over time in response to local needs. Contact your county program coordinator for a list of projects available in your county. The following are a few examples:

- Answering gardening questions at the Extension office plant clinic/help desk or at community events. This essential activity is a cornerstone outreach project of the Master Gardener program. (Answering questions also challenges you to apply what you have learned in your Master Gardener training and is a great learning experience!);
- Teaching a class at a public venue (school, library, community center, etc.);
- Helping to plan a public gardening fair or conference;
- Appearing as a guest gardening resource on a local radio or television show;
- Serving as a mentor to the next group of Master Gardener trainees;
- Providing educational advice or consultation for school or community gardens;
- Managing the social media efforts of your local Master Gardener program;
- Updating an online calendar or website for the Master Gardener Association;
- Publicizing Master Gardener activities;
- Serving in a leadership role in the Master Gardener Association.

Examples of projects that are NOT eligible for Master Gardener volunteer hours:

- Any project that is part of your paid job or you are reimbursed for;
- Garden or landscape maintenance for a private organization, school, or community garden;
- Home visits to provide gardening advice.

If you are unsure as to whether an activity would qualify for volunteer hours, please reach out to your county program coordinator prior to volunteering.

Volunteering with youth

OSU takes youth safety very seriously. All volunteer projects with unaccompanied minors (under 18 and not supervised by their parent or guardian) need to take additional steps. Some examples include:

- Day camps or classes where parents/guardians do not remain on-site
- School gardens when parents/guardians are not present

Work with your county program coordinator for project approval and to complete the following steps before volunteering:

- Provide details to your county program coordinator so they can register the project with the OSU Office of Youth Safety and Compliance;
- Complete an online training and pass OSU's criminal history check.

*These requirements are subject to change.

Collaboration with your county Association on volunteer projects

The Oregon Master Gardener Association ("OMGA") is an independent non-profit organization that partners with OSU to support the Master Gardener Program. Most counties have a county chapter of the OMGA that partners with OSU to organize, develop and fundraise for volunteer projects in the county. The Association and county program coordinator work closely on projects that are approved for Master Gardener volunteer hours. Each county Association will have its own guidelines for approval of funding to support projects. Contact the board of your county Association for current guidelines. All promotional materials developed by the Association (like flyers) need to follow the Association style guide and be approved by the county program coordinator before distribution.

[Brand guidelines for Associations](#)

Approval of new volunteer projects

Master Gardener volunteers may have ideas for new volunteer activities. These ideas have resulted in new and innovative Master Gardener partnerships and projects. However, it is important to realize that not every project idea can be accommodated, and especially not on a short time frame. When considering a new project idea, discuss it with your county program coordinator. You may be asked to provide more details in writing, including:

- How the project supports the Master Gardener mission and aligns with the program priorities;
- The benefits of the project to the local community and to the diversity of the community it serves;
- The benefits of the project to the Master Gardener program;
- Partners in the project (if any) and their roles;
- Funds required (if any);
- Master Gardener volunteer hours needed;
- The time frame of the project.

Sometimes projects are not approved because they don't meet the mission and priorities of the Master Gardener program. An example of an inappropriate project would be a landscaping request from a private condominium community. This project is inappropriate in two ways: First, the project requires Master Gardener participation as labor and does not have an educational outreach component. Second, the beneficiary of the project is a private company, rather than the public good.

Other times, projects are put "on hold" until time and resources are more readily available. Do not be discouraged! It's nothing personal. It's simply difficult to allocate limited time, volunteers, and resources toward all worthy project requests that are received.

Commitment to growing and belonging

Growing and belonging is essential to achieving the mission and vision of the OSU Master Gardener program. Just as a healthy garden is biodiverse, so too is a healthy gardening program. This means the Master Gardener program strives to attract Oregon gardeners from all counties, backgrounds, ages, races, ethnicities, nationalities, genders, abilities, income levels, renters/homeowners, gardening experience levels, and more. To attract gardeners of all backgrounds, Master Gardener programs and practices must create an experience of belonging for all participants and potential participants.

And the same goes for the diversity of the clients Master Gardeners serve.

This focus has been a part of OSU and federal work for some time. A demonstrated “commitment to diversity and to ensuring equal opportunity for those wishing to benefit from OSU Extension programs and services” is included in every OSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer’s Position Description. A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is also written into the Position Description of every OSU Extension faculty and staff member. This is also an expectation of any program that receives assistance from the federal government.

Providing gardening recommendations to the general public

Master Gardener volunteers provide a valuable public service by sharing sustainable gardening information with their communities through a variety of education and outreach programs.

Teaching gardening classes

As a Master Gardener, you may have the opportunity to offer a class or a workshop for a local garden club, school, or other group, including your local association. Please work with your county program coordinator before proceeding. The coordinator may ask to review your presentation. This is done to ensure that the information is accurate, that current OSU branding is being used, and that the most current resources are being shared.

Answering gardening questions at the Extension office or community events

Your county may have different names for this activity, such as “help desk” or “plant clinic” but fielding questions from the public, and researching and providing recommendations for their plant or pest problems is one of the most important services provided by Master Gardener volunteers. Every county has an orientation and training process as well as a system for tracking questions. If you have any questions about a landscape issue, plant problem, or recommendation that you are researching, please talk to your county program coordinator.

Master Gardeners CAN provide recommendations and education to:

- Home gardeners
- Community gardeners
- School gardens
- Youth groups, such as 4-H
- Noncommercial gardening questions (e.g. garden clubs)

Master Gardeners CANNOT provide recommendations and education to:

- Commercial growers
- Farmers

- Professional landscapers
- Nurseries
- Public facilities groundskeepers
- Public rights-of-way groundskeepers
- Commercial or professional operations

Refer these questions to your county program coordinator

Master Gardeners CAN:

- Identify plants and their pests (with the exception of mushrooms);
- Identify beneficial garden organisms (with the exception of mushrooms);
- Identify insects, spiders, lice, bedbugs, or other insects/mites of importance to personal and public health;
- Provide a summary of research-based recommendations, including notes on the pros and cons associated with each approach;
- Provide referrals to poison control centers;
- Provide referrals to the National Pesticide Information Center.

In addition, Master Gardeners CANNOT answer questions or provide education or recommendations on:

- Identifying and cultivating wild mushrooms;
- Medical issue or advice of any kind (insect/spider bite, pesticide exposure, toxic plant ingestion, etc.);
- Honeybees, backyard chickens and poultry, and other animal care;
- Cultivation and care of marijuana, medical marijuana, or hemp (note: while marijuana is legal in Oregon, it is not legal federally, and OSU Extension is funded in part with federal dollars.)

Refer these questions to your county program coordinator

Answering pest management and pesticide use questions

OSU Extension advocates a least-toxic approach to pest control that will result in safe, effective management. Master Gardeners should not prescribe a specific solution to a particular problem, but instead should provide clients with a summary of those actions that are legal, safe, and effective. As a Master Gardener, you should provide references to research-based materials that support your recommendations so clients can make the best decision for their situation. Master Gardeners may also note the pros and cons of using various approaches, so long as they do so in a way that is objective and doesn't expose a personal bias toward one approach or against another approach.

If you include a pesticide (i.e. insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides) in your summary of management options, make sure the pesticide is registered and can be legally used by the public in Oregon for the specific purpose being considered. Any recommendations that include the use of pesticides must follow the directions on the pesticide label, as

well as published OSU recommendations. Clients who are considering pesticides as a management option should be strongly encouraged to read product labels carefully before purchase and use. Master Gardeners can help educate clients about safe and effective pesticide use by pointing out directions for use, precautionary statements, information on storage and disposal, the signal word, and first-aid instructions. Do not calculate application rates for clients. Instead, direct them to sources of information so that they can calculate the rates on their own.

Using research-based, objective resources when making recommendations

Master Gardeners provide high-quality solutions to home gardening and plant problems using research-based resources, which include OSU Extension publications, the PNW Handbooks, Extension publications from other areas of the Pacific Northwest, Extension publications from other states, and articles from scientific journals. Your county program coordinator will provide information on resources that are most relevant to gardening questions in your county.

Avoiding personal biases

Master Gardeners provide science-based, objective advice to clients. Master Gardeners cannot introduce their personal bias into recommendations. For example, a Master Gardener who does not use any pesticides in their home cannot allow their personal preference to bias their recommendation to clients. Even if you don't use pesticides in your own home or garden, you cannot exclude a pesticide from your summary of recommendations to clients if a pesticide (used according to label directions and current regulatory guidance) is a legal management option. Likewise, a Master Gardener who has not had success using a research-based, nontoxic pest management method cannot exclude this option from their recommendations. Our job is to be descriptive, rather than prescriptive. Master Gardeners educate others about their sustainable gardening options, rather than legislating what others should do.

Are clients always right? Of course not, but they always have rights. As a Master Gardener, your clients, i.e., the public citizens seeking your assistance, have the right to courteous treatment, a response based on respect, and an honest answer, even if the answer is "I don't know." It is reasonable for them to expect you to research the question and formulate the best research-based, objective answer in a timely manner. Clients do not have a right to abuse Master Gardener volunteers or to be discourteous. If you feel uncomfortable handling a question, refer the client to your county program coordinator.

Handling complaints and concerns

If a member of the public complains to you about the Master Gardener program, please contact your county program coordinator to resolve the situation.

If you have a concern or issue with another volunteer, try to resolve the issue through direct communication. If that is not possible or it is a sensitive situation, please contact your county program coordinator for assistance.

If a serious problem arises with a volunteer, the OSU Extension Master Gardener program owes it to its clients, other volunteers, faculty, and staff to remind the volunteer of the Master Gardener Code of Conduct and program policies and guidelines. The OSU Extension Master Gardener program does all it can to provide volunteers with an enjoyable volunteer experience, but in some occasions volunteers who cannot follow the basic rules of Oregon State University or who do not conduct themselves appropriately when working as a Master Gardener volunteer may need to be dismissed. County Master Gardener program coordinators, in conjunction with their regional administrator and the statewide Master Gardener program manager, make such decisions.

If you have concerns about your county program coordinator, please [reach out to the Extension regional administrator for your county](#).

Use of the title “Master Gardener”

The Oregon State University Extension Master Gardener title is to be used exclusively in the Extension Master Gardener program and not for commercial purposes. The training, experience, and certification gained in the Master Gardener program may be listed as a qualification (together with any other educational degrees and certifications) on a résumé, application, or website. However, you cannot represent yourself as a Master Gardener unless you are performing approved volunteer work in conjunction with the OSU Extension Master Gardener program. For example, if you work as a garden consultant or have a career in landscape design, you cannot say, “A certified Master Gardener can help you in your garden”, because the work you do as a Master Gardener is unpaid, volunteer service. But you could display your Master Gardener certificate at your place of business, and you can list your Master Gardener certification with your other professional credentials. Once your certification expires or you leave the program, you may no longer list your Master Gardener certification as a professional credential.

Can you be paid for your volunteer service?

By definition, a Master Gardener is a volunteer, unpaid agent of Oregon State University. Thus, Master Gardeners cannot receive payment for their services. However, volunteers may accept a per diem or honorarium to cover travel and other expenses, if offered. Reach out to your county program coordinator if you are unsure.

Here are some examples:

- An organization may offer to pay mileage, hotel, photocopy, or other associated expenses to travel to present a talk or class in the capacity of a Master Gardener volunteer. However, the work they perform for the OSU Extension Service is free and voluntary so they cannot accept personal payment;
- If a Master Gardener writes a column for the local newspaper and gets paid for it, they cannot identify themselves in the column as a Master Gardener. They can, however, donate a column to the local newspaper and identify themselves as a Master Gardener;
- Resort hotels or restaurants cannot hire a Master Gardener to manage an on-site vegetable garden. These businesses can hire a Master Gardener as an individual, who has a Master Gardener credential. However, when working at a commercial business, they are not acting as a Master Gardener volunteer, and the employment should not be billed or advertised as that of a Master Gardener.

Transferring your Master Gardener certification

If you move to a new county or state, you can transfer your Master Gardener certification. Once you are settled and ready to volunteer reach out to your new county program coordinator. Provide the name and email address of your previous county program coordinator. This will be used to verify your Master Gardener volunteer status. You may be asked to sign paperwork and/or complete coursework (or a certification exam,) depending on the geographic area you are moving from/to and how long you have been away from the program. You may also be asked to cover the costs of a replacement badge, coursework fees, and other program supplies. Your volunteer hours will transfer with you, but you may have to provide that information (different counties and states use different reporting systems).

Returning to the Master Gardener program after an absence

If you've taken a break from the Master Program and not been recertified for one or more years but wish to rejoin the program, contact your county program coordinator for specifics on how to qualify for reinstatement. Depending on how long you have been away, you may be asked to retake all or parts of the training course and/or pass a

certification exam. You are usually able to rejoin at no cost, but it depends on the county.

OSU's relationship with the Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA) and its county chapters

The Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA) is a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that was formed in 1982 to enhance and support the activities of Oregon's Extension Master Gardener program. Today, most counties that have an active Master Gardener program also have a local Master Gardener Association that is a chapter of the OMGA. Each local association has a governing board and officers, including an elected representative who works with the OMGA at the state level. You can [learn more about the OMGA](#) by visiting their website.

OMGA and its chapters enhance and support the OSU Extension Master Gardener program by assisting in the continuing education of Master Gardeners, providing educational programs to members at monthly meetings, and organizing other education events such as educational symposia, garden tours, and nursery visits. OMGA sponsors an annual multi-day event each summer, the Joy of Gardening Conference, that offers classes, workshops, and seminars on horticulture topics for both Master Gardeners and members of the public. OMGA chapters also serve as a social center for Master Gardeners, and as a clearinghouse for projects and planning of OSU-sanctioned educational outreach programs.

During your first year as a Master Gardener trainee, you are given free membership into OMGA and your local chapter. After that, you must pay dues to remain a member. Joining OMGA and your local chapter is not required to be an OSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer. However, joining OMGA and your local OMGA chapter is one way to support the efforts of your local Master Gardener program and to stay better connected to the Master Gardener events and activities in your area. It is important to note that paying your dues to OMGA and your local OMGA chapter does not certify you as a Master Gardener volunteer. The requirements for Master Gardener certification and recertification are detailed in a previous section.

The different roles of the OSU Extension Master Gardener program, OMGA, and your local OMGA chapter can be difficult to categorize and distinctly define. This is because OMGA and your local OMGA chapter work closely with the OSU Extension Master Gardener program to develop and deliver gardening information. Yet, even if an OMGA chapter is hosting an educational gardening conference, OSU is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the information delivered is up-to-date and valid. The following table provides a list of the key roles and responsibilities of each organization.

The roles and responsibilities of the OSU Extension Master Gardener program, the Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA), and OMGA chapters.

| OSU Extension Master Gardener program | OMGA [statewide 501(c)(3)] | Chapter (local OMGA affiliate) |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Develops and disseminates research-based and objective information/programs/curricula on sustainable gardening and community food production, via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extension publications ▪ Plant clinics at Extension offices, fairs, farmers markets, etc. ▪ School/demonstration/community gardens ▪ Youth garden programs ▪ Annual Master Gardener training and recertification ▪ Other means | <p>Supports the OSU Home Horticulture (Master Gardener) program at the statewide and county level by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making endowment gifts ▪ Awarding McNeilan Scholarship and other scholarships to OSU students ▪ Organizing annual education event ▪ Purchasing PNW handbooks for Oregon counties with an MG program ▪ Awarding Extension Educator Grant, Karl Carlson Grant, and Search for Excellence Award ▪ Providing political support for the statewide and county Master Gardener programs | <p>Supports the OSU Home Horticulture (Master Gardener) program at the statewide and county level by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making endowment gifts ▪ Providing political support for the statewide and county Master Gardener programs |
| <p>Administers the training and supervision of Master Gardener volunteers, providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curriculum ▪ Faculty ▪ Insurance ▪ Background checks ▪ Reporting | <p>Raises funds through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Membership dues ▪ Silent auction at annual education event | <p>Raises funds through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Membership dues ▪ Silent auctions/raffles ▪ Plant sales ▪ Garden tours ▪ Educational events ▪ Donations and grants |
| | <p>Supports OMGA members and chapters by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing skills development ▪ Fostering dialogue/idea exchange at OMGA meetings ▪ Filing IRS paperwork and financial reporting ▪ Satisfying regulatory requirements for corporate documents and records, such as bylaws and Articles of Incorporation | <p>Organizes educational and social events locally, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Speakers at monthly chapter meetings ▪ Tours and outings ▪ Potlucks ▪ Collect dues |
| <p>Awards Master Gardener certification through satisfactory completion of the training course and volunteer internship during the first year, and recertification upon completion of continuing education and volunteer service in subsequent years.</p> | <p>An individual becomes an OMGA member by paying dues to the OMGA and to the local chapter.</p> | <p>An individual becomes a member of an OMGA chapter by paying dues to the OMGA and to the local chapter.</p> |

Stay connected

Social media

Your statewide Master Gardener program is active and engaged on social media. Please follow, like, and share our information on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). Your local county Master Gardener program may also be on social media; find, follow, like, and share their information as well.

Statewide program news

The [OSU Extension Master Gardener Program News blog](#) provides updates and information from the Master Gardener program office. You can subscribe to the blog by entering your email address under the Subscribe area on the site, after which you'll be emailed every time there is an update posted. This is a great place to stay in touch with statewide projects, updates to training procedures, and opportunities to be engaged with the OSU campus.

Glossary of Master Gardener program terms

Advanced training: Classes conducted by community horticulture teachers and others who are considered experts in a particular field. These classes are offered to Master Gardeners to maintain and update their knowledge of horticulture and to learn about recent advances in the field. Advanced training classes often count as continuing education toward recertification.

County Master Gardener chapter: Most counties with a Master Gardener program also have a Master Gardener chapter (also called a local association). The chapter is affiliated with, and in most cases is a subsidiary of, the Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA). County Master Gardener chapters support their local Master Gardener program by promoting educational programs for the local gardening public in the form of seminars, community classes, spring fairs, harvest fairs, and other special events. The chapter also raises funds via plant sales and other fundraising activities and serves as a social hub for Master Gardeners in the county. See also "OMGA."

County program coordinator: OSU Extension faculty or staff who oversees the county Master Gardener program. The coordinator's responsibilities include organizing the annual training, approving volunteer projects, offering continuing education, ensuring that OSU guidelines are being followed, and serving as a liaison with the county chapter of the Oregon Master Gardener Association.

Extension office: Each county or group of counties has an Extension office staffed by agents, support staff, and volunteers. In most county Extension offices, the funding for staff comes from a combination of funds from Oregon State University and the local county. The partnership between the county and OSU makes the Extension Service possible. In most counties, a portion of Master Gardener volunteer time is spent in the local Extension office answering gardening questions.

Growing & Belonging: The Statewide Growing & Belonging Committee of the OSU Master Gardener program is a group of Master Gardener volunteers and faculty from across the state, who are dedicated to growing who we are and who we serve, and to cultivating an experience of belonging in our programs for all Oregonians. [Read more about the history and work of the Growing & Belonging Committee.](#) Previously referred to as DEI or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Joy of Gardening Conference: An annual multi-day conference sponsored by OMGA. It includes classes, workshops, and seminars on horticultural topics; a quarterly meeting; and an annual awards banquet. It is an opportunity to receive advanced training and to meet and learn from Master Gardeners from around the state. It also is open to the gardening public. *Formerly known as “Mini-College.”*

Master Gardener: See also “OSU Extension Service Master Gardener”

Master Gardener handbook: Textbook used in Master Gardener training and as a reference for answering gardening questions. Also known as “Sustainable Gardening.”

Master Gardener program: A teaching and management program for individuals who want to expand their community horticulture skills and who agree to volunteer time to extend gardening knowledge to others. Its purpose is to provide OSU Extension Service educational programs in home horticulture to community members through trained and certified Master Gardener volunteers. If you have questions about the Master Gardener Program, contact your county Extension agent, the local county coordinator or program assistant, or, if there is no one serving in those capacities in your county, to the Master Gardener Program state coordinator.

Master Gardener training: A series of classes in community horticulture taught by OSU faculty, Extension personnel, other experienced teachers, and certified Master Gardeners, often paired with curated volunteer experiences for hands-on learning. All volunteers must complete this initial year of training within the time frame (usually ending October 31) to become a certified volunteer.

Mentor: A certified Master Gardener who agrees to support one or more first-year Master Gardeners during their training and the volunteer service requirements. A

mentor also helps trainees progress from new Master Gardener to active Association chapter member.

Mini-College: see also “Joy of Gardening Conference”

MG: Abbreviation often used for Master Gardener.

Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA): A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose purpose is to enhance and supplement the OSU Master Gardener Program. Note that the OMGA is separate from the OSU Master Gardener Program it supports. The OMGA has local chapters in counties that have Master Gardener programs. OMGA is financed by dues contributed at the county chapter level. Representatives from each chapter meet with OMGA state officers at quarterly meetings held in various locations around the state. These meetings provide a networking opportunity and a forum for chapters to share ideas and activities. OMGA sponsors an annual educational conference, Also see County Master Gardener Chapter.

Oregon State University (OSU): The land-grant college of the State of Oregon. The main campus of OSU is located in Corvallis; each county Extension office is an office of the university. The university has three missions: teaching, research, and Extension. Master Gardeners are part of OSU’s volunteer staff. The school colors are orange and black; the school mascot is the ferocious beaver.

OSU Extension Service: The educational outreach arm of Oregon State University that “extends” the research and services of Oregon State University to the citizens of Oregon. As part of the land-grant university system, the OSU Extension Service serves both rural and urban dwellers. Extension Service personnel include Extension faculty, program assistants, specialists, support staff, and a large number of volunteers like yourself. Extension works in several program areas including 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Community Health, Forestry and Natural Resources, and Sea Grant among others. The OSU Extension Master Gardener program is part of the Agriculture and Natural Resources program area.

OSU Extension Service Master Gardener: A person who has completed the first-year Master Gardener training and volunteer hours and performs volunteer activities in the Extension office and the local community. Master Gardeners who provide direct advice and education to the general public must recertify annually. See also “Recertification”

Plant clinic: In most counties, Master Gardeners host plant clinics at the Extension office or at various locations in the county on a specific day, usually for several hours, and answer gardening questions from the public. Also known as a “Help Desk.”

PNW Pest Management Handbooks: [Online reference site](#) updated at least annually by OSU, which specify management methods for insects, diseases, and weeds. There are

three handbooks: the PNW Plant Disease Management Handbook, the PNW Insect Management Handbook, and the PNW Weed Management Handbook. (PNW stands for Pacific Northwest.)

Recertification: A program to ensure that returning Master Gardeners keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date in the years after their initial training and certification. Recertification is on an annual basis, requiring at least 20 hours of volunteer service, at least 10 hours of continuing education, and signing OSU volunteer paperwork each year. The volunteer project requirements vary from county to county.

Returning MG: A Master Gardener who has completed the initial year of training and volunteer hours, and whose certification is current. May also be called veteran or perennial Master Gardeners. See also “Recertification.”

Statewide Master Gardener program manager: The person who is responsible for supporting and coordinating the activities of the Master Gardener program across Oregon. The Statewide program manager develops resources for statewide use, supports the efforts of county Master Gardener program coordinators, and represents Oregon at National Extension Master Gardener meetings.

Trainee: An individual who has not yet completed all of the requirements to become a certified Master Gardener. These requirements include completing the coursework, passing a final exam, and completing the required volunteer service. Also known as a “student” or “intern”, depending on the county.

Volunteer service: First-year Master Gardener trainees complete a curated volunteer experience (at least 40 hours) where they put the knowledge learned during training to practical use. The specific breakdown of hours varies from county to county but often includes work at the plant clinic, community outreach, teaching gardening, or in a Master Gardener demonstration garden. Returning Master Gardener volunteers also complete volunteer hours. The specific volunteer categories required depend on the needs of the county program. Your county program coordinator will provide this information.

Appendix

A brief history of the National and OSU Extension System

The Morrill Act of 1862 created land-grant universities in every state. Under the act, the Federal government seized nearly 11 million acres of land from 250 sovereign Tribal Nations—[including 90,000 acres in Oregon](#)—with little or no compensation.

In 1868, Corvallis College, now Oregon State University, became the state's official land-grant institution. OSU gained and then sold the land granted to the university for 117 times what the U.S. had paid Tribes for it, using the profits to fund the development of the university.

The Hatch Act was passed in 1887 to establish research farms where universities could conduct research into agricultural, mechanical, and related problems faced by many rural citizens. In the same year, the Dawes Act divided Tribal lands among individuals. Indigenous Americans were expected to assimilate by taking up settler-American agricultural practices and giving up their own longtime practices.

The nation's Cooperative Extension Service was established in 1914 when President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act. The creation of Extension formalized the public distribution and dissemination of science-based information developed by land-grant universities and Agricultural Experiment Stations. Oregon State is the land-grant university in Oregon.

The land-grant universities differ from other colleges and universities. Whereas most universities concentrate on teaching and research, land-grant institutions such as OSU have a three-pronged approach to the development and dissemination of knowledge. These three components are:

Teaching (including the teaching and training of degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students)

Research (including research on the OSU campus and at the 13 Agricultural Experiment Stations around the state)

Extension (including the OSU Extension Service programs that can be found in each of Oregon's 36 counties)

These three land-grant missions provide a basis for discovering, developing, and disseminating knowledge beyond the ivory tower and into our communities. Although the original intent of the Cooperative Extension Service was to improve agricultural practices, the scope and function of Extension is now much broader. Across the country—in classrooms, fields, gardens, and greenhouses, on paper, online, over the phone, and in person—Extension faculty, staff, and volunteers teach and distribute information that supports sustainable environments, healthy communities, and robust economies.

[Read more about the history of the OSU Extension program.](#)

A history of the Master Gardener program

Prior to the 1970s, University Extension horticulture programs were focused on crop production. However, in the early 1970s, Washington State University Extension, in response to increased public demand for gardening information, began a program in urban horticulture. Initially, David Gibby (then a WSU Extension agent in King County, Washington), delivered research-based gardening information via mass media, including radio broadcasts and newspaper articles. This approach was effective at reaching the general public, but it increased public demand for gardening information, resources, and programs, making it more difficult for Gibby to answer gardening questions.

As a result, Gibby and Bill Scheer (then a WSU Extension agent in Pierce County, Washington) met to discuss ways to serve the needs of home and community gardeners. One option was to recruit and train volunteers who could respond to gardeners' questions. Although this idea was initially met with skepticism by some, the first Master Gardener training classes were offered to about 200 people in King and Pierce Counties in 1973.

The program was an immediate success, with the newly trained Master Gardeners putting in far more hours answering other gardeners' questions than anyone could have anticipated. Since that time, the program has both endured and expanded. Today, Master Gardener programs are active in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, several Canadian provinces, and South Korea. There are more than 86,000 certified Master Gardeners in the United States. On average, active certified Master Gardener volunteers donate 60 hours per year. In 2018, Master Gardener volunteers donated over 5.6 million hours to their local Master Gardener programs and made face-to-face contact with over 8.6 million people across the United States.

[The National Extension Master Gardener program reports national impact numbers every year.](#)

[Read more about the history and founding of the Master Gardener program in Washington State.](#)

Oregon State's Master Gardener program is one of the oldest in the Nation. After Washington State started its program in 1973, Nevada and Ohio (1974), and then Colorado and Illinois (1975) followed. Duane Hatch and Gray Thompson started Oregon's Master Gardener program in 1976, when they were Extension agents in Lane and Clackamas Counties, respectively. Hatch and Thompson delivered the first training classes in Lane and Clackamas Counties to about 26 people.

The Oregon Master Gardener program has grown from 2 counties in 1976 to 28 counties. The first training class of 36 volunteers has grown to an average of 2,800 active Master Gardeners.

OSU Extension receives thousands upon thousands of gardening questions each year, and our Master Gardener volunteers play a major role in helping local Extension offices field and answer them. Literally, there is no way that we could serve the public's appetite for gardening information without the assistance of Master Gardener volunteers.

Master Gardeners volunteer deep within communities. Master Gardeners teach classes in school gardens, provide advice and education in community gardens, maintain demonstration gardens that illustrate a variety of gardening methods, deliver gardening information on local television and radio shows, write gardening columns in local newspapers, and host popular gardening fairs and seminars for the public.

[We publish a yearly impact report, with reports statewide and from each county, available on our statewide website.](#)

This guide replaces the OSU Extension publication *An Introduction to Being a Master Gardener Volunteer* (EM 8749) prepared by former OSU Extension Master Gardener statewide coordinators Gail Langellotto, Ann Marie VanDerZanden, Jan Powell McNeilan, and former OSU Extension faculty Ray McNeilan.