

# Cornell Cooperative Extension

## Cornell Garden-Based Learning



### **Best Practices for Plant Sales, MGV Events & Regular Volunteering Activities**

Facts about the SARS-CoV-2 Virus that Causes COVID-19:

- The virus is transmitted person to person through respiratory droplets, which is why 6-foot physical distancing is so important.
- There is no evidence that the virus can be transmitted by food.
- It can persist on surfaces for between 24-72 hours which is why sanitation of commonly touched surfaces is important.
- Risks of infection from touching surfaces can be significantly reduced by avoiding touching the face, frequent handwashing, or use of hand sanitizers.
- Cloth face coverings reduce spreading of the virus by those who may be infected but are not showing symptoms and should be used in addition to physical distance and hand hygiene.

As you are aware, Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University are actively engaged in planning as we reopen in light of COVID-19. The guidance from the New York State Department of Health is evolving. The latest guidance can be found at:  
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home> and <https://eden.cce.cornell.edu/coronavirus-response/>

Given that older adults are both a vulnerable population and an abundant group in the Master Gardener Program, we are recommending that local Master Gardener coordinators carefully consider the best practices provided for large events (such as plant sales) and ongoing Master Gardener activities (such as plant diagnostic clinics and demonstration garden work).

Specific best practices for large Master Gardener events and meetings, as well as work in demonstration gardens or plant clinics, can be found below. There is also updated guidance on completing Master Gardener training classes.

### **Guidance on Options for Large Master Gardener Events & Plant Sales:**

Large events pose a particular risk for the transmission of COVID-19. Master Gardener plant sales can easily draw 50 or more individuals, and often draw hundreds of people to a site. Given this reality, the following are best practices for those counties continuing their plant sales:

- Allow people to pre-order plants and pay online through your CCE website.
- Allow for scheduled drive by pick-up of plants outside of a CCE building, with only staff assisting with pick-up.

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- Continue to use bare root plants to prevent the spread of invasive species like [Asian Jumping Worms](#), or provide written guidance on how to stop the spread.
- Alternatively, hold a plant sale at an established nursery who is supporting the growing of your plants, without the participation of Master Gardener Volunteers.
- Partner with a farmers market locally to host additional plant sale vendors, and require pre-registration for the event so as not to exceed the 25 people maximum allowed at any one hour slot (for Phase 3 communities only: Western New York Finger Lakes, Southern Tier, North Country, Mohawk Valley).
- If having a plant sale outside in a farmers market setting with pre-registration, provide 6-foot spacing for entering the market space, sign-in table, and appropriate spacing of vendors, requiring all participants and vendors to wear masks. Have sanitizer and signs on hand to support best practices for vendors and customers (see CDC signage here).
  - Anyone adult who is able to medically tolerate a face covering must cover their nose and mouth with a mask or cloth face covering when in a public.
  - <https://bit.ly/34YQHHy>
  - <https://bit.ly/34VUCFe>

### Updated Guidance on Options for Completing Master Gardener Core Preparation Classes

At this time, no matter the number of attendees you have in Master Gardener Volunteer classes, the recommendation is to suspend face-to-face Master Gardener training, and pursue option(s) 1 (postpone and reschedule classes), 2 (use the online “Exploring the Garden-Based Learning Library” modules to complete your Master Gardener training remotely - contact [alm443@cornell.edu](mailto:alm443@cornell.edu) to get access to this course), or 3 (end your 2020 training classes).

### Guidance on Options for Other Ongoing Master Gardener Activities

Other ongoing Master Gardener activities, such as plant clinic and work in the demonstration garden, typically bring fewer than 25 people to a site. Please refer to our previous guidance on community and demonstration gardens: [COVID-19 Guidance for Community Gardens](#)

*At this time, we are recommending suspending all face-to face work in Plant Diagnostic Clinics, Master Gardener meetings and other non-essential Master Gardener volunteer work until deemed allowable by regional phases and CCE Administration.* If Master Gardeners come to the Extension office to volunteer, observe best practices for limiting the spread of the virus and require volunteers to sign a waiver of liability provided by your CCE Office.

### Plant Clinic

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Some best practices for supporting plant clinic operations are recommended below (based on MGV Robin Eiffert's work with CCE Rockland County). This plan is for Phase 2, Phase 3 and Phase 4 counties only with CCE offices open to the public:

- Define process for customers dropping off samples outside of the CCE building
  - How will samples be retrieved safely? An outdoor drop-box is recommended.
  - How will customers pay? Online payment is recommended.
  - Samples will be limited to plant related issues and non-health related insects except for ticks and bed bugs.
- Experienced MGVs return to lab (Phase 2 & 3)
  - One MGV per day
  - Mask worn except when on phone
  - Gloves worn when handling samples
  - Computer and keys will be wiped down at the end of each day.
  - Six feet of distance from office staff will be kept at all times.
  - Have Master Gardener Volunteers sign a liability waiver
- Other MGVs and Interns
  - If email volume for customer questions is sufficient, get other experienced MGVs involved remotely.
  - Identify factsheets that can be updated or initiated.
- Develop safety plan for lab and customers
  - Install barrier protection at horticulture lab counter.
  - Have hand sanitizer present.
  - Have 6 ft. spacing marks near counter in case more than one customer is present.
  - Limit access of customers to just the lab counter.
  - Have MGVs use gloves when handling samples and money.
  - Have a daily cleaning procedure for computers, counters, pens, etc.
  - Consider having MGVs log in the sample to the computer rather than the log book.

### Continuing Education Credits:

Master Gardener volunteers who are seeking continuing education options, during this down time, may want to catch up on their hourly credits by reading approved publications from our Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library, or by participating in upcoming webinars (advertised in our Horticulture Update newsletter sent to all coordinators) or reviewing past Cornell Garden-Based Learning webinars, updated regularly here: <http://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/for-cce-staff/cornell-cooperative-extension-master-gardener-volunteer-program/>

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Advanced Sessions through Moodle courses will be provided TBD to all MGVS, along with continuing remote learning opportunities from across the CCE network (all updated in our Horticulture Update Newsletter).

Coordinators may want to relax plant clinic and other volunteer service hour requirements, in lieu of this disruption to our programming.

### Master Gardener Volunteer Meetings:

The following are best practices for engaging Master Gardener Volunteers at this time:

- Inform your Master Gardener Volunteers, that face-to-face meetings are recommended to be suspended until further notice.
- Where possible, assist your Master Gardener Volunteers with remote meetings, when the meetings are necessary. Assistance could include setting up access to Zoom meetings, or conference call lines.

Please contact your CCE County MGVS coordinator and Cornell Garden-Based Learning with any questions or concerns. Please continue to prioritize your personal health and wellness. Take the time to regularly review updates from the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/) and the [New York State Department of Health](https://www.health.ny.gov/). Updates specific to the Cornell Cooperative Master Gardener Program will be sent out via the Hort Diagnostic Listserve and the Horticulture Update Newsletter.

### References:



Centers for Disease Control. (2020, April 1) <https://www.cdc.gov/>

Cornell Small Farms Program. (2020, June 1). <https://smallfarms.cornell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Cornell-U-Pick-Best-Practices-COVID-19.pdf>

New York State Department of Health. (2020, April 1). <https://www.health.ny.gov/>

*\*Disclosure: This document does not contain legal recommendations and is simply best management practices and that community gardeners need to look at the guidance appropriate for their region on the Moving NY Forward website: <https://forward.ny.gov/>*

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