

# Volunteer Orientation to CCE Master Gardener Volunteer Program Standards

## Executive Summary

The Cornell Cooperative Extension Gardener Volunteer Program is administered at the county level where recruitment, training, and volunteer service occur. Master Gardener Volunteers are required to participate in a minimum of fifty-five hours of Core Preparation and fulfill at least 40 hours of volunteer service in the first year, and 20 hours every year after. Qualifications, requirements, and steps to become a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener are included in the Standards below.

## Program Overview

The Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program is a continually evolving program since its inception in 1975 in New York State. The development of a new curriculum, statewide projects, and adult learning best practices are different now than they were over 40 years ago. Standards for excellence help to retain the integrity of a program, which is well-recognized and well-respected, so that everyone benefits: the volunteer knows what is expected of him or her; the county can plan for a peer-learning program; the public knows the value of an MGV in the state for community sustainability, food security and science-based gardening practices.

## Our Mission

We prepare volunteers to be peer educators who build relationships with community audiences to integrate local experience and research-based knowledge in planning for and initiating steps to manage gardens, lawns, and landscapes with an emphasis on food security and environmental stewardship.

## Our Vision

Adults, youth, and families who engage in our garden-based educational programs expand their learning networks and ecological gardening skills towards greater resilience and connections. As a result, they experience enhanced health and wellness, food security, ecological literacy, environmental stewardship, and they embrace sustainable community practices.

## Summary of Standards of Excellence for MGVS

### **I. Identification, Selection & Orientation (p. 4):**

- While the role of MGVS varies across the state, all roles are educational in nature.
- Policies and guidelines described in the statewide Volunteer Involvement Policy (VIP) and Volunteer Orientation Manual for all volunteers in the Cornell Cooperative Extension System apply to the Master Gardener Volunteer Program.
- The criteria for selecting volunteers in a program, which is well known for its unbiased, research-based information and client-appropriate delivery methods, require people who are suited to the role. The fact that MGVS are volunteers does not diminish the credibility of information they provide for others, the educational role they play in the community, and the educational system they represent (Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University).

### **II. Training (p. 6):**

- The Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library (CGBLL), or Core Preparation, is the core curriculum. Counties may add additional coursework, but the basic minimum expectation is mastery of the topics in the CGBLL.
- With general introductory sessions, minimum Core Preparation instruction to qualify trainees as MGVS is at least 55 hours. Training may be in half-day sessions or full day sessions, or blended online and in-person.
- One requirement of this training is to complete a Community Action Project that promotes community outreach, supports youth and adult education, and addresses food security or environmental stewardship.
- Attendance at the Core Preparation is required.
- Advanced Training & Continuing Education experiences after the Core Preparation will vary for each volunteer (10 hours per year minimum). Some will be trained in specific operations, such as diagnostic labs, demonstration gardens, public speaking or writing, and all MGVS should receive periodic updates on new developments in horticulture. Cornell Garden-Based Learning will provide Advanced Training Topics webinars.

### **III. Utilization (p. 10)**

- MGVS may account to Cornell Cooperative Extension only for volunteer projects that support Cooperative Extension's mission and objectives. All projects must be educational CCE sponsored events, statewide programs or with CCE identified partner projects.
- Volunteers are encouraged to take on leadership roles within CCE.

- MGV may 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.
- Cornell's horticultural standard is ecologically-sound research-based practices found in the Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library.
- All fundraising monies go to the association for management of MGV activities.
- The Cornell MGV title and events should not be used for personal monetary gain.

#### IV: Recognition (p.16):

- MGVs are expected to keep track of the time they volunteer in different capacities in the MGV Program. Volunteer hours serve the educational program mission and should only be with approved partner organizations of each CCE Office.
- To recognize volunteer service hours, there are available to all counties in the state Master Gardener Pins.

#### V. Evaluation (p. 17)

- Definition of Service Level:
  - Intern - Over a two-year time frame following Core Preparation, fulfillment of the volunteer service time from the training hours must equal at least 55 hours or to match number of training hours.
  - Active - minimum of 40 hours in the first Intern year, and at least 20 hours all subsequent years.
  - Emeritus- a designation counties give to advanced volunteers who have donated over 10 years of service (over 700 hours). If an MGV reached this status and is still volunteering for CCE, they must follow the VIP guidelines and submit paperwork as required to stay engaged.
- A MGV is an "Intern" during their first two years, and "Active" when he or she is still providing volunteer services as a MGV for the county.
- A county standard for advanced MGVs to remain active is to volunteer ten hours of Advanced Training & Continuing Education hours when the volunteer gains Emeritus Status.
- MGV event information is submitted through the CCE Program Development and Reporting Tool (in the CCE Business System).
- All MGVs track their hours and report to their MGV Coordinator or County, and contribute to the Cornell Garden-Based Learning MGV Yearly Data Collection via Qualtrics.

## **I. Identifying, Selection and Orientation of Volunteers**

### **Identification and Selection:**

**While the role of MGVs varies across the state, all roles are educational in nature.**

**Policies and guidelines described in the statewide Volunteer Involvement Policy (VIP) and Volunteer Orientation Manual for all volunteers in the Cornell Cooperative Extension System apply to the Master Gardener Volunteer Program.**

**The criteria for selecting volunteers in a program, which is well known for its unbiased, research-based information and client-appropriate delivery methods, require people who are suited to the role. The fact that MGVs are volunteers does not diminish the credibility of information they provide for others, the educational role they play in the community, and the educational system they represent (Cornell Cooperative Extension and Cornell University).**

Gardening has a universal appeal. MGV applicants are expected to demonstrate:

1. Basic gardening knowledge and experience, which qualifies them to train to become MGVs.
2. Ability to relate to the public with unbiased, research-based information and courtesy.
3. Ability to learn (and re-learn) new information, some of which is practically applied information and some of which is basic fundamental scientific principles from social-science and natural science disciplines.
4. Ability to pass Knowledge Checks, showing mastery of the wide range of gardening topics required to be a Master Gardener Volunteer.

5. Ability to educate people from diverse backgrounds with a lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness, as well as a willingness to explore their own identity and unconscious bias.
6. Willingness, commitment and the time to volunteer.
7. Willingness to reflect on their behaviors and evaluate their educational activities.
8. Some proficiency across all areas of development. For example, MGVs engaging with youth should be familiar with the mission, vision, values of 4-H Youth Development and the principles and practices of positive youth development.

In many cases, the assessment of a volunteer applicant who meets these minimum standards is a decision of the sponsoring county staff. It may also be based on limitations of class size. Not all qualified applicants need be accepted into a MGV qualifying educational course. The ability of county staff to manage the resultant graduates of the course in meaningful volunteer experiences, in concert with the county's educational goals in community horticulture is an important factor in selecting an applicant.

The main document that an incoming MGV must sign before beginning the training is the Cooperative Extension Volunteer Agreement with its accompanying Code of Conduct. This agreement is uniform for all volunteers in the Cooperative Extension System.

Cornell VIPP requires each volunteer applicant complete a Volunteer application first. Before they can begin training, candidates are required to submit a Background Check Authorization Form and have background screening approved. On the county level, required paperwork may include Risk Waivers, DMV Checks or other county specific documents.

Training is provided in exchange for the commitment to volunteer as a MGV afterwards.

### **Orientation**

MGVs will be asked to participate in orientation to the entire Cornell Cooperative Extension System in the county (as well as other counties, the state and the nation) This is part of every CCE volunteer's education, including MGVs.

## **II. Training**

## Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library (GBLL) Curriculum

The next standard is in the course, which qualifies individuals as MGVs.

**The Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library, or Core Preparation, is the core curriculum. Counties may add additional coursework, but the basic minimum expectation is mastery of the topics in the GBLL.**

The basic core curriculum in the Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library Moodle Course includes chapters (as of September 2019) on:

### **Introduction**

Section 0.1 Adult Learning and Peer Learning Networks

Section 0.2 Community Engagement and Action Projects

### **Module 1: The Fundamentals**

Section 1.1 Plant Biology for Gardeners

Section 1.2 Right Plant, Right Place

Section 1.3 Beneficial Insects

Section 1.4 Basic Plant Pathology

### **Module 2: Food Gardening**

Section 2.1a Vegetable Gardening (Part 1 of 2)

Section 2.1b Vegetable Gardening (Part 2 of 2)

Section 2.2 Fruit Gardening

Section 2.3 Nutrition, Food Safety and Food Security (Post-Harvest)

### **Module 3: Ornamental Plants and Ecosystems Services**

Section 3.1 Woody Plants

Section 3.2 Herbaceous Plants Folder

Section 3.3 Lawn Care and Ecosystems Services Folder

### **Module 4: Problem Solving**

Section 4.1a Pest Management Strategies and IPM (Part 1 of 2)

Section 4.1b Pesticide Use and Reading Labels (Part 2 of 2)

Section 4.2a Pests of Food Crops and Ornamental Plants (Part 1 of 2)  
Section 4.2b Pests in the Home and Garden (Part 2 of 2)

**Module 5: Management Strategies**

Section 5.1 Organic Waste Management (Composting)  
Section 5.2 Soil Amendments and Fertilizers  
Section 5.3 Invasive Species for Gardeners  
Section 5.4 Gardening in a Warming World

**Module 6: Starting and Sustaining Learning Gardens**

Section 6.1 Group Gardens and NYS Seed to Supper Network  
Section 6.2 Youth Development and School Gardens

**Module 7: Action Project Presentations & Orientation to Local Program Areas**

Section 7.1 Action Project Presentations  
Section 7.2 Orientation to Local Program Areas

**Advanced Training & Continuing Education Sessions:**

Cover Crops  
Seed Saving  
Unusual Fruits and Nuts for the Home Garden  
Engaging Low-Literacy Audiences  
Weeds  
Pollinator Protection Part 1: Bee-Friendly Basics and Needs  
Pollinator Protection Part 2: Habitat Protection

**Volunteer Management**

This section is primarily for MGV Coordinators but provides best practices in volunteer management, and excellent examples of county success stories, should new educators need inspiration.

Generally, each topic is covered as an in-person lecture, online, or as a blended option. However, other kinds of learning experiences are encouraged as long as the end result is increased knowledge of the material. The order in which topics are taught is flexible.

**The time devoted to each topic is generally 2.5 hours. With general introductory sessions,**

**minimum Core Preparation instruction to qualify trainees as MGVs is at least 55 hours. Training may be in half-day sessions or full day sessions, or blended online and in-person.**

**One requirement of this training is to complete a Community Action Project that promotes community outreach, supports youth and adult education, and addresses food security or environmental stewardship.**

### **Timing and Attendance**

The day and time of core training will vary from location to location, depending on local needs. The vast majority of in-person training is done on a pre-selected day each week, two topics per day (one in the morning, one in the afternoon) for 10-13 weeks.

**Attendance at the Core Preparation is required.**

### **Evaluation of MGV Trainees**

This has traditionally been done through quizzes and final exams. Sometimes the Course Facilitator may administer the quizzes and exams, often in consultation with the instructors. The ultimate responsibility of whether a particular individual is ready to volunteer in the county rests with the sponsoring county's MGV Coordinator.

Each Module of the Cornell Garden Based Learning Library has Learning Objectives. Almost all have Knowledge Checks at the end of the Module. Instructors who teach a particular topic often have specific main points that they make with the class. These are all sources of material for quizzes or the final exam. Speakers may have been asked in advance to provide the host site with sample questions for the quiz. Questions can also be taken directly from Knowledge Check documents.

### **Frequently Asked Questions on the Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library (MGV Core Preparation):**



- How do I access materials?
  - At this time materials are available in Moodle to MGV coordinators and County Educators, and the online course can be replicated for individual county MGV program use.
- How many sessions? How long is each session?
  - 22 sessions, 2.5 hours each session (including break)
  - This is just a suggestion, you can adapt to fit your schedule and setting.
- How many people can be in a training group?
  - This really depends on county resources and how many other helpers you have on hand.
- Do I have to cover every session?
  - No, there are fundamental sessions and optional sessions which can be tailored to meet your county needs.
- Will there be a printed textbook?
  - No, we do not have the resources to maintain a printed textbook. We will be creating a library of core preparation resources online using Moodle. Some counties use the Penn State or University of Maryland Cooperative Extension manuals. If desired, Coordinators could order manuals for their participants or ask participants to order the manuals themselves.
    - Penn State: <https://extension.psu.edu/master-gardener-manual>
    - University of Maryland: <https://extension.umd.edu/mg/maryland-master-gardener-handbook>
- What if my MGV trainees aren't technologically savvy?
  - We recommend establishing a MGV Tech Mentor system. Ask current MGVs who are comfortable with computers to mentor trainees who are not. A basic understanding of technology should be a requirement of MGVs. Information resources and training opportunities will only become more web based. Knowing how to use a computer and accessing those resources will become key.
  - For trainees needing support, consider adding a technology tutorial at the beginning of your training session, to guide them through different technologies you will be using during the course.
- What are some teaching and learning strategies to integrate this into my next preparation?
  - Offer regional trainings so that you may work with your fellow MGV Coordinators to plan, facilitate and share resources.
  - Ask participants to discuss pre-work at very beginning of session while everyone is getting settled.
  - Conclude each session with some form of reflection or evaluation tool, to assess participant's understanding of each topic.

## Advanced Training & Continuing Education

**Advanced Training & Continuing Education experiences after the Core Preparation will vary for each volunteer (10 hours per year minimum). Some will be trained in specific operations, such as diagnostic labs, demonstration gardens, public speaking or writing, and all MGVs should receive periodic updates on new developments in horticulture. Cornell Garden-Based Learning will provide Advanced Training Topics webinars.**

Lectures or workshops, which match the educational needs of MGVs, are excellent opportunities to learn. Conferences or lectures MGVs may attend at other organizations or outside the county are usually optional, but it is wise to encourage this form of learning. Preparing a talk or writing an article for others to learn about a topic is another form of advanced training, as it is a significant learning experience for a MGV to succeed in this process. Cornell Garden-Based Learning and the Sustainable Landscapes PWT also provide monthly webinars which will be available online and in Horticulture Update newsletters.

Conferences designed specifically for MGVs are:

1. Cornell Agriculture, Food and Environmental In-Service: every November
2. International Conference somewhere in the United States or Canada: every two years, on the odd year (ideal for advanced Master Gardeners)
3. Opportunities for MGV Field Days at Campus (dependent on availability of staff for planning and funding)

### **III. Utilization**

MGVs are increasingly volunteering to provide educational experiences for individuals or groups with unique needs. This may include youth audiences, physically or mentally challenged persons of all ages, and older adults. When working with youth populations, it is critical to be aware of the mission, vision and values of 4-H Youth

Development, as well as principles of positive youth development. This includes the aspects of positive 4-H youth development such as teaching new knowledge, fostering young people's learning about how to use the knowledge through experience, and engaging young people in decision-making. We encourage MGVs to contact staff in the 4-H youth development office for suggestions, encouragement, and support; 4-H educators should be informed when MGVs are engaging with youth. When working with audiences with special needs, we encourage advance preparation in terms of both awareness of tools adapted to enhance the learning experience and training to enhance sensitivity to working with this audience. Where that special training is not immediately available, it is recommended that MGVs work in an apprentice mode with others who have the experience and skills.

### Examples of Acceptable Volunteer Activities

The following are examples of Master Gardener Volunteer activities with an educational purpose or teaching component (credit to Penn State for the following list: [https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/join/default/pdf\\_factsheet](https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/join/default/pdf_factsheet))

- Support one of the approved statewide priority projects like:
  - [Seed to Supper](#)
  - [Vegetable Varieties Trial Gardens](#)
- Assist CCE staff to answer consumer/home gardener's telephone and email inquiries and assist Extension office visitors with plant and insect samples for identification or diagnosis, assist homeowners with reading pesticide labels correctly (Garden Hotline).
- Assist with Extension educational programming, such as talks for local organizations, Extension-sponsored workshops, exhibits, displays, etc.
- Write research-based gardening and horticultural information for fact sheets, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, etc.
- Assist with design or assist with establishing and maintaining **educational** demonstration gardens, such as Extension office gardens.
- Assist with development of community-based environmental stewardship projects. For example, planting a riparian buffer, developing a rain garden or creating a pollinator demonstration garden would be included in this project area.
- Assist teachers, 4-H volunteers and youth, and/or children with gardening education projects.

- Conduct/teach horticultural related clinics, pruning, or other demonstrations, at Extension offices, local libraries, farmers markets, government centers, fairs, expos, garden clubs, civic groups, community events, flower shows, etc.
- Teach Master Gardener training sessions.
- Serve on municipal street tree/shade tree committee.
- Create or prepare visuals/graphics, such as posters, flyers, program announcements, table top displays for horticultural programs and/or publications.
- Photograph Extension/MG events.
- Assist with community composting projects such as building compost bins for use in educational demonstrations.
- Teach others through demonstration how to build bird/bat boxes, raised beds/gardens, etc.
- Provide assistance to horticultural therapy programs for emotionally/physically/mentally disabled persons, nursing homes, hospitals, state/county prisons, youth detention centers.
- Organize and/or lead educational bus trips/tours and garden tours related to horticulture.
- Open personal garden to the public for educational tours/demonstration.
- Assist with planting and maintaining variety trials at experimental farms.
- Assist with data collection, testing, and evaluating new varieties of vegetable, turf, ornamentals, and/or flowers for research projects.
- Assist with or organize horticultural files in Extension office.
- Assist MGV staff coordinator with coordinating MGV activities in the county.
- Serve on Extension Board.
- Serve on Extension Advisory committees.
- Serve as liaison between the Extension office and municipal officials.
- Serve on state/regional/national Master Gardener committee(s).
- May hold fundraisers approved by supervising Extension staff.
- Conduct other activities as determined by local needs and the prior approval of supervising Extension staff.

### **Volunteering at Other Organizations**

MGVs are encouraged to share their talents with other organizations as a means of

participating in their community. Sometimes Cornell Cooperative Extension enters into a formal partnership relationship with other organizations, sometimes other organization actively seek individual MGVs, and yet other times MGVs volunteer for more than one organization -- sometimes with similar horticultural projects.

It is expected that county policies or guidelines on how MGVs account for these overlapping experiences are in concert with state standard. The statewide standard is that:

**MGVs may account to Cornell Cooperative Extension only for volunteer projects that support Cooperative Extension's mission and objectives. All projects must be educational CCE sponsored events, statewide programs or with CCE identified partner projects.**

**Volunteers are encouraged to take on leadership roles within CCE.**

All MOU's for community partner projects will be established by individual CCE Office policies.

### **Disseminating Research-Based Information**

**You are asked to agree to 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.**

We do not ask MGVs to leave their gardening experiences at the door and ignore them. However, there are many occasions our practices and environmental conditions or circumstances are not applicable to others. If research has been conducted and shown that there is confirmed evidence that differs from your experience, as a MGV (or staff) it is expected that the research-based information be disseminated.

**Cornell's horticultural standard is ecologically-sound research-based practices found in the Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library.**

Information generated from Cornell that MGVs are expected to disseminate can be from printed or electronic sources. Bulletins and factsheets can be found for the [Nutrient Management Spear Program](#), the [IPM Program](#), [School of Integrative Plant Sciences – Horticulture Section Publications](#) and [Research, Plant and Life Sciences Publishing, Pesticide Management and Education Program](#) and the [Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future](#). In addition, the evolution of online resources may be difficult to keep pace with. To minimize confusion for MGVs and county Horticulture staff, the [Cornell Garden-Based Learning](#) program links to relevant web-based publications from various departments on campus (e.g. Horticulture, Entomology, Plant Pathology, Natural Resources, Atkinson Center, Geneva AgriTech, and other university gardening websites, etc.) through the “Garden Guidance” section of the Cornell Garden-Based Learning Program website, and the new Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library (<https://moodle.cce.cornell.edu>). Request to be enrolled as a CCE Community Horticulture educator or MGV by contacting the Adult & Family Program Leader, Garden-Based Learning Program Extension Associate, Ashley Helmholdt at [alm443@cornell.edu](mailto:alm443@cornell.edu), or by contacting [gardens@cornell.edu](mailto:gardens@cornell.edu). Counties are encouraged to use the Cloned Website for Community Horticulture developed by Sandra Repp for Tompkins County Cornell Cooperative Extension as a standard location for common links and resources for all MGV.

Resources on file from commercial organizations are not acceptable resources. Resources from other states with different soils, weather conditions and laws should be disseminated only with approval from the appropriate county staff (one approved state resource is the Penn State Extension Master Gardener Manual). Opinions from authors in books, newspaper and magazine articles may also be questioned. Some may be valid opinions, based on research; others may be couched in terms of preference or convenience. Some may be downright wrong. Err on the side of caution when a resource of questionable validity is available. Much that passes for fact in the world of gardening is nothing more than personal information.

It is perfectly acceptable to offer a wide range of interpretations (from credible sources) on an issue as is applicable to conditions in your county. If Cornell has published or can be quoted on the issue, this should be stated in the lead of the message. Credible sources of garden-based horticultural information in our region are likely to be more

closely aligned with local growing conditions than credible sources at a greater distance. For instance, you might say that the University of Connecticut says one thing, Rutgers University and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden say something else.

### **Plant Sales and Educational Event Fundraisers**

**All fundraising monies go to the association for management of MGV activities.**

**The Cornell MGV title and events should not be used for personal monetary gain.**

The most common type of fundraisers for the MGV Program in New York State are plant sales. At these events, there are generally excellent opportunities for educating the buyer at point-of-purchase on proper selection and care of plants for the home and garden. Frequently, MGVs propagate plants from the excess or overgrown plants at home, pot them up and bring them in as merchandise for sale. This may be cause for concern about liability of transmission of invasive plants and animals. When done to insure that plants do not harbor invasives, these kinds of gifts for the fundraiser are tax-deductible at a fair estimate of their value.

There is often a real or perceived conflict with commercial growers to hold a MGV plant sale fundraiser. The county's policy on purpose and type of fund-raiser may consider the impact then MGV event might have on the relationship CCE has with the horticultural industry. In some cases, nurseries and other commercial vendors are invited to sell at the same MGV fundraising plant sale. County policy prevails on that element of a sale as well.

Educational events (e.g. Gardening Days, multi-county public conferences, educational bus trips) also generate revenue. Registration fees, books, plant or product sales by vendors at these events need county approval as well. A clear and consistent agreement between the MGV Program and the county CCE Association on the destiny of proceeds for this kind of event needs to be drawn.

Check county policy on door prizes, raffles or other activities involving the element of chance, especially those that could be construed as gambling.

The county policy for approving the fundraiser, disbursing funds and reimbursing

expenses apply. The county's policy on disbursing funds raised is perhaps the most important element for all volunteers involved with the event to understand. The policy may vary from county to county. If multi-county events are planned, take time to discuss the differences among the counties involved. In general, differing county policy on disbursement of proceeds fall into the following categories:

1. All proceeds are returned to CCE for administration
2. A percentage of the proceeds are returned to CCE, the remainder is a specially earmarked account for MGVS Program administration
3. All proceeds remain with a specially earmarked account for Master Gardener Program administration

Note that in some counties, MGVS or other volunteers may not be permitted to conduct fundraisers at all (eliminating any question about disbursement). Where the county CCE has approved MGVS administration of proceeds, the volunteer and the staff MGVS Coordinator responsible for the program generally determines how these funds are spent to enhance the educational nature of the MGVS Program (e.g. reference books, educational field trips, awards for excellence, etc.).

### **Using the MGVS Emblem**

The NYS MGVS Emblem is an easily recognized symbol of a successful program. Its use is subject to the same principles and guidelines of all Cornell emblems and symbols, as described in the CCE Volunteer Orientation. All merchandise using the MGVS program can be found at: <https://cce.adminders.com>

## **IV. Recognition**

### **Recording and Recognizing Volunteer Time**

Counties may set a minimum number of give-back hours for their MGVS. The expected volunteer time in counties of New York State for each MGVS is 40 hours in their first year (in addition to Core Preparation hours), and 20 hours in subsequent years (in addition to 10 Continuing Education Hours).

**MGVS are expected to keep track of the time they volunteer in different capacities in the MGVS Program. Volunteer hours serve the educational program mission and should only**



**be with approved partner organizations of each CCE Office.**

The records kept on Advanced Training & Continuing Education at CCE or through other organizations should be tracked separately from volunteer service hours.

**To recognize volunteer service hours, there are available to all counties in the state Master Gardener Pins.**

- 1. Green Pin – 50-70 hours minimum (equivalent to 2 year of service)**
- 2. Red Pin - 70-350 cumulative hours (equivalent to 2-5 years of service)**
- 3. Blue Pin - 350-700 cumulative hours (equivalent to 6-10 years of service)**
- 4. White with Gold Trim Pin - over 700 cumulative hours (equivalent to more than 10 Master Gardener Years of service).**
- 5. Purple Pin – Over 20 Master Gardener Years of Service**

**All pins can be purchased through:**

<https://cce.adminiders.com>

We encourage County level recognition of Master Gardener Volunteers, both for completion of the Core Preparation with a Certificate of Completion and with formal and informal recognition, like annual dinners for volunteers.

## **V. Evaluation**

There is no formal evaluation of the Master Gardener Volunteer, however we ask that participants in the program keep up the following basic requirements to remain “Active” in the program after the first two years as Intern during the training period:

- Commit to a minimum of twenty (20) hours of volunteer service to be completed each year;

- Hours beyond the minimum requirement for annual volunteer service may not be carried over to the following year.
- Exceptions to the requirements for annual volunteer service may be granted for hardship or extenuating circumstances at the discretion of supervising Master Gardener Coordinator.

### **Definitions of Service Level**

The following definitions are a best practice standard for counties recognizing service of all Master Gardener Volunteers:

<p><b>Intern - Over a two-year time frame following Core Preparation, fulfillment of the volunteer service time from the training hours must equal at least 55 hours or to match number of training hours.</b></p>
<p><b>Active - minimum of 40 hours in the first Intern year, and at least 20 hours all subsequent years.</b></p>
<p><b>Emeritus- a designation counties give to advanced volunteers who have donated over 10 years of service (over 700 hours). If an MGV reached this status and is still volunteering for CCE, they must follow the VIP guidelines and submit paperwork as required to stay engaged.</b></p>
<p><b>On Leave – granted for hardship or extenuating circumstances.</b></p>

### **Active and Inactive MGV Volunteers**

The status of Active MGV has historically been a difficult status to define. Counties set standards for active and inactive status. In essence, however:

**A MGV is "active" when he or she is still providing volunteer services as a MGV for the county.**

**A county standard for advanced MGVs to remain active is to volunteer ten hours of Advanced Training & Continuing Education hours when the volunteer gains Emeritus Status.**

**MGV event information is submitted through the CCE Program Development and Reporting Tool (in the CCE Business System).**

**All MGVs track their hours and report to their MGV Coordinator or County, and contribute to the Cornell Garden-Based Learning MGV Yearly Data Collection via Qualtrics.**

The county must put formerly active MGVs on an "inactive" status list, due to requirements for background checks for an MGV. Please see the VIP for details.

### **County and Out-of-State Transfers**

A CCE Master Gardener Volunteer in good standing in one county may transfer to another county within New York State at the discretion of supervising Master Gardener Coordinator in both locations. Written notice by the Master Gardener Coordinator must be provided stating the Master Gardener that requests the transfer has completed the Core Preparation and is in good standing.

Out-of-State transfers are required to complete all the minimum standards of training and volunteer hours for Cornell Cooperative Extension.

### **Values and Ground Rules for Engagement for Master Gardener Volunteers**

In addition to the basic requirements of the program, the following values and ground rules for engagement are core to the success of a Master Gardener Volunteer trainee:

## **Our Values**

- We uphold the nation's Land-Grant University System mission, as well as the mission, vision and values of Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- We support people as they initiate and grow successful gardens, connect in community, and live with meaning and purpose.
- We may be involved in creating and maintaining gardens to support learning. However, we do not provide labor for garden projects, nor do we support gardens that are outside the scope of our mission.
- We offer inclusive educational programming that reflects and respects the diversity of New York State communities and the local needs of those communities.
- We foster diversity by preparing educators and volunteers to build relationships beyond familiar networks.
- We provide garden-based education that incorporates principles of experiential learning, peer learning networks, reflection, and systems thinking.
- We embrace positive adult, youth and community development through sustainable gardening practices.
- We believe in the power of reflection to help us 'do less, better.' In an era of 'too busy-ness,' we strive to pause and consider wise action in all our program efforts.
- We promote trust and safe spaces as we engage in learning and collaboration with our network of educators and volunteer, community partners, and program participants.

## **Ground Rules for Engagement as an MGV**

- Be present as fully as possible. Be here with your doubts and your convictions, listen and speak up. Be present to all involved. Focus on the task at hand.
- Respect individual differences. Our views of reality may differ, but all are welcome to the table. Listen for understanding before responding. When offering an opinion, use "I" statements and create space for diverse voices and perspectives to be heard.
- Acknowledge challenges respectfully and avoid defensive behavior. Avoid denying problems or changing topics, allow others to talk without interruption. Lean into conflict. This is difficult, and often uncomfortable, yet vital.
- Seek first to understand. Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions instead of corrections as new ideas are presented. Practice restating what others have said in seeking clarity and understanding.

- When the going gets rough, reflect. Suspend judgement to create opportunities for discovering what you don't know that you don't know. Assume the best of intentions.
- Appreciate tension and complexity. There may be times we differ in our perspectives. Move away from "either/or" thinking. Know that "us and them" doesn't need to mean "us vs. them."
- Develop a sense of trust and team. Certain practices that help build "team:"
  - Ⓞ Demonstrate a willingness to compromise or seek consensus.
  - Ⓞ Accept and publicly demonstrate support for group decisions.
  - Ⓞ Support a strong sense of community and relationship.
  - Ⓞ Expect and accept that our work is ongoing. Have patience in the process.
  - Ⓞ Intentionally model collaborative behavior practices within and outside of the team.

### **Accountability for Standards of Excellence**

At the end of the day, some decisions are made at a higher level for all of us. Know that those in administrative roles wrestle with and set important priorities accordingly. Be respectful of this relationship. These standards are enforced by Sarah Dayton, Associate Director for Cornell Cooperative Extension. At the local level, CCE County Executive Directors choose and set the policy around various programs carried out by the staff and volunteers, and the MGV Coordinator role is responsible for administering the program. These standards are based on the *Nationally Unifying Mission Statement and Program Standards for Extension Master Gardener Programs at Land-Grant Universities* found at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2015february/iw1.php>

In summary, below are national best practices for MGV aligned to county programs:

National Best Practices	NYS MGV
Has an established statewide organizational system	CCE Master Gardener Volunteer Program Standards
Establishes state program goals that align to achieve the EMG program mission	CCE MGV Mission, Vision and Values CGBL Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025 (in devt.)
Engages in Extension-approved projects and programs designed to educate the public about horticulture and gardening	County and CGBL Program Statewide Projects
Uses recognized volunteer management practices	Volunteer Management Module, CCE VIP and CCE MGV Standards
Incorporates a system for volunteer leadership and development	Educators complete the Volunteer Management Module
Uses an established state training curriculum	CGBL Learning Library in Moodle
Requires volunteer service hours; 40-hour volunteer service minimum in the initial training year and 20-hour volunteer service minimum in subsequent years	We use the 40-hour volunteer service minimum as a recommended guideline for CCE Offices in the first year, and 20-hours minimum guideline in subsequent years.
Uses recognized volunteer management practices	Volunteer Management Module, CCE VIP and CCE MGV Standards

National Best Practices		NYS MGV
Requires annual continuing education and professional development hours; 10 hours minimum annually in subsequent years		Cornell Garden-Based Learning Library offers Advanced Training topics, at the discretion of CCE Offices –10 hours per year in addition to the total number of volunteer hours per year.
Uses an annual recertification criteria and process		Certificate of Completion for CGBL Learning Library
Follows the Equal Opportunity Guidelines for their state and/or university		CCE Volunteer Involvement Policy (VIP)

Updated 4/6/2020. Prepared by: Ashley Miller Helmholdt, Adult Garden-Based Learning Program Extension Associate, School of Integrated Plant Sciences, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853