

Clarification of Master Gardener Volunteer and OSU Procedures

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Key questions from volunteers, and answers from OSU leaders.

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What forms are we required to complete, and how often?

Master Gardeners must have up-to-date versions of the following forms signed and on file with their OSU Extension Office:

1. Conditions of Volunteer Service: form must be signed annually for anyone volunteering in any capacity for OSU. Applies to all volunteers (not just Master Gardeners). A frequently-asked-questions (FAQs) document about this form is available to help you understand why the form is needed.
2. Volunteer position description: must be completed before your first volunteer activity and then updated when there are certain changes in your volunteer roles, such as when OSU requires a criminal background history check (e.g. working in an unsupervised capacity with youth). Applies to all volunteers (not just Master Gardeners).
3. MG Code of Conduct: Must have a current version (2011) on file.
4. MG Pest Control Agreement: Should have been signed when you joined the MG Program
5. Use of the Title MG Agreement: Should have signed these when you joined the MG program.

These forms can be accessed online on the OSU Master Gardener Program website:

<http://horticulture.oregonstate.edu/content/master-gardener-program-forms>

If you are unclear whether you have updated forms on file, please contact the Extension Office. Sharon Evans has a list of who needs to sign forms.

We have conveyed your concerns about the Conditions of Volunteer Service form to OSU's Risk Management unit. We hope to work with them to make the forms friendlier and more supportive of you as OSU volunteers, but we don't have direct control over this form. Gail can modify the Code of Conduct, and based upon feedback from you and others it will be updated to reflect what volunteers can expect of OSU as partners in addition to the current list of expectations for volunteers. The new Code of Conduct form will be implemented in the 4th quarter of the year, when Master Gardeners across the state annually submit required paperwork.

Who should volunteers talk to if they have concerns about how the MG Program is run?

If you have questions about the statewide management of the Master Gardener Program, start by asking your Coordinator. If she does not have the information she'll contact Gail Langellotto. If you have concerns about how the local Coordinator, or any other local Extension staff member, is doing their job please share your concern directly with that person first, and then if you need further assistance contact your Regional Administrator (John Panches).

Who determines what counts toward MG volunteer hours, and why does OSU place so much emphasis on education?

Education is OSU's primary mission, and the Oregon Master Gardener Program was created to help us meet educational needs in home and community horticulture. We don't expect everything our faculty, staff or volunteers do to have a direct educational component, but all of our activities should support the overriding educational mission. OSU recognizes many types of volunteer hours and those for the MG program are defined in the online Volunteer Reporting System (VRS) and on the forms used for manual data collection in Josephine County. Since MG volunteers represent OSU in their public outreach activities (of any sort), MG projects should always be discussed with the MG Coordinator before volunteer time is committed, and the Coordinator is ultimately responsible for making the determination of what counts toward volunteer hours.

In order to make this a more inclusive process, we propose creating a Project Review Committee. The committee would consist of the MG Coordinator, one or two representatives from the Association board, and one or two MGs at large. Project ideas would be submitted to the committee and reviewed against a list of criteria. Projects that contribute to our collective missions, comply with applicable OSU rules/requirements, and have sufficient volunteer support would be approved. The committee can propose modifications to help projects gain approval if they initially fall short.

What role does OSU have in approving, or denying, other activities of the MG associations?

OSU and Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA) and their attorneys are currently working to determine what types of activities would constitute volunteering for OSU vs volunteering for Master Gardener Associations. We expect this process to be completed by end of 2016 or soon thereafter. This process will also lay out financial implications and liability responsibilities for each party when Master Gardeners volunteer for either party.

As we await the outcome of this process we reiterate that Associations are generally given a fair degree of latitude in planning activities that fall outside of the direct educational mission of the Master Gardener program. Even here, however, OSU has a role in communicating relevant policy. With MG Association plant sales, for example, OSU has fielded concerns from the Oregon Association of Nurseries and the Oregon Department of Agriculture regarding perceived rule violations related to temporary plant sales. This reinforces the need for the local OSU MG coordinator to be actively consulted prior to the Association committing to any activity.

The 2016 version of the OSU Extension Volunteer Reporting System (VRS) includes ten service categories: plant clinic, instructor, educational garden, educational writing, educational event planning, Master Gardener mentor, fundraiser, Extension office support, MG Association support, and other approved projects. These do not all involve direct education, but all contribute to OSU's broader educational mission. Projects in any of these categories require Project Review Committee approval before being implemented, ensuring that volunteer service projects are appropriate to overall programmatic goals, volunteer availability and volunteer interest.

Even Association social events need Project Review Team approval to ensure that the activities fit within the OSU overall mission, do not violate rules or laws, and conform to the appropriate use of the Master Gardener name (e.g. no Master Gardener tours of marijuana growing operations, unauthorized promotion of businesses, etc.). We recognize that social events, community events and other projects that lend positive visibility to the MG program and/or enhance the volunteer experience can contribute significantly to the success of the OSU community horticulture educational mission.

Who can possess, and wear, the MG badge?

There are differences between having a MG badge, being an MG volunteer, and being a certified MG volunteer.

- Anyone who has completed the MG program may possess an MG badge, and we don't typically ask for it to be returned if you retire from volunteer service.
- If you wear the MG badge, you are representing yourself as an OSU volunteer and must meet OSU's requirements. You must have current volunteer paperwork on file with your Extension office and must follow the MG code of conduct and other terms of your volunteer position.
- If you want to provide home horticulture information to members of the public, while identifying yourself as a Master Gardener, you must be up to date on your certification. This is needed to ensure you are providing current and correct information. This year we piloted a way to visually identify volunteers who are up to date on their certifications – via a sticker that attaches to the badge.

Are there standard, core classes for MG training?

Uniform curriculum requirements were developed and published in 2009, following a lengthy period of collaboration among MG coordinators and volunteer committees. The training series must include the MG Program Overview, Basic Botany, Pesticides. In addition, at least two of the following must be included: Plant Problem Diagnosis, Sustainable Gardening, Backyard and Community Food Production, Elective Classes. This approach provides curricular guidance, but also allows for local customization to meet each region's unique growing conditions and public interests. The Elective Classes allow MG Program coordinators to add classes or educational activities that specifically meet local needs.

Are there uniform standards for volunteer payback hour requirements?

The national standard for volunteer payback in the first year is at least 40 hours in approved educational, outreach and support projects. Volunteers in Josephine (and Jackson) counties have long

prided themselves on setting a higher standard (at least 70 hours). Karen, Gail and John would be very open to considering a refinement to the number of hours required in Josephine County.

Would it be possible to have a written agreement that defines our partnership with OSU at the local level?

We would welcome the opportunity to develop a memorandum of agreement that would define the respective roles of OSU and the Josephine County Master Gardener Association. Gail is working with the OMGA to create a master agreement that would then be adapted for each local MG chapter.

How can MG volunteers and/or association members convey ideas for policies and programs to Gail?

Gail works at a statewide level and needs to ensure policies and programs work well for all Oregon Master Gardeners. She works closely with the OMGA in this respect. Your chapter has an OMGA representative who can serve as your link to what's happening statewide. Get your ideas, concerns and feedback to your OMGA rep, and that person will carry them to the state meetings.