

Master Gardener Certification and Recertification: Definitions

A common understanding of key definitions related to the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Master Gardener Program will better enable Program faculty, staff and volunteers to understand, communicate, implement and adhere to associated policies. We offer these definitions for consideration and discussion.

Certified OSU Extension Master Gardeners are those individuals who have satisfactorily completed all requirements needed to become an Extension Master Gardener volunteer in Oregon.

- Master Gardener trainees become certified upon: completing the initial Master Gardener training course, passing a cumulative assessment with a score of 70% or higher, completing their required volunteer service hours (minimum of 40, actual number varies by county), and completing and filing **required paperwork**. Certification is valid for one year.
- Master Gardeners who continue past their first year of volunteer service must complete recertification requirements in order to remain a certified OSU Extension Master Gardener.
- Certification is **REQUIRED** to deliver direct educational outreach to the general public, as an OSU Extension Master Gardener. Examples of direct educational outreach are: answering gardening or pest management questions; providing gardening or pest management advice; teaching a class or workshop, writing a newspaper column, etc.

Recertification is the process of completing the required paperwork (e.g. the conditions of volunteer service form), volunteer service hours (minimum of 20) and continuing education units (minimum of 10 hours) needed to remain a certified OSU Extension Master Gardener. Certification is valid for one year. Recertification is thus an annual requirement.

Volunteer Service Hours: is the time that an OSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer spends on OSU Extension-approved projects.

Continuing Education Hours: are the credits that a Master Gardener volunteer receives, for participating in an approved educational program that supports a volunteer's ability to deliver research-based and objective information to the general public.

Volunteer Service Hours

Because the mission of the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program, as well as the National Extension Master Gardener Program, focuses on educating others about sustainable gardening practices ~ Master Gardener Volunteer Service Hours which support this mission should be given highest priority. Direct and indirect educational hours should constitute at least 50% of a Master Gardener's volunteer service hours in their initial year and 50% of a Master Gardener's volunteer service hours in their recertification years.

Direct Educational Hours: Master Gardener activities that have the potential to directly increase knowledge, change attitudes or change behaviors in ways that promote sustainable gardening. A Master Gardener must be current on their certification, in order to participate in activities that qualify for direct educational hours.

- Plant Clinic (no matter the venue): plant clinic is the venue through which Master Gardeners receive gardening questions and provide high-quality recommendations to the general public. Typical venues for plant clinic include: the Extension office (walk-in, phone or email), Ask an Expert, farmer's markets, Master Gardener events (e.g. plant sales, fairs), other community events.
- Instructor (at a conference, seminar series, Master Gardener training, speakers bureau, etc.): includes the time it takes to research, prepare and deliver the presentation.
- Educational Gardens (demonstration gardens, youth garden, school garden, prison garden, garden tour): education must be the focus of these activities, and not garden labor without education. Gardens should be used as teaching and demonstration sites, with appropriate signage and supporting materials. Teaching a class in an educational garden, leading a tour, preparing signage or educational displays, or other educational activities may count towards direct service hours.
- Writing an Educational Article: in a Master Gardener newsletter, for a local newsletter, or collaborating with an OSU Extension faculty member to write an Extension publication. Includes the time needed to research and write the article.
- Other approved activities: as determined by your local Master Gardener coordination, in the context of current OSU Extension Master Gardener guidelines and policy

In addition to direct educational hours, there are many activities that facilitate or support the efforts of volunteer educators. These are indirect educational hours. The volunteer is not directly teaching others (via plant clinic recommendations or gardening talks or demonstrations), but is supporting the efforts of others who are serving as direct educators.

Indirect educational hours: Master Gardener activities that facilitate or support the efforts of those who are teaching.

- Educational Event Planning (conference, seminar series, MG training)

- Master Gardener Training Class Mentor: assisting with the annual Master Gardener training course.
- Educational Garden Maintenance: Educational gardens require basic upkeep in maintenance, in order to be effectively used in educational outreach. Thus, garden maintenance and upkeep activities qualify for direct educational volunteer service hours if work in the garden supports an educational project or program, and if garden maintenance and upkeep activities are not the major focus of activity in the garden. If garden maintenance and upkeep becomes the major focus of activity, it is time carefully examine the project, and re-calibrate back to the educational mission and focus of the Master Gardener Program.
- Other Approved Activities: as determined by your local Master Gardener coordination, in the context of current OSU Extension Master Gardener guidelines and policy

Support Hours: Master Gardener activities not focused on educational outreach, but whose efforts help to support the mission of the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program.

- Fundraiser (plant sale, book sales, etc.)
- Extension Office Support: filing, database management, photocopies, or other duties related to the Extension office
- MG Association: including serving as an officer, board member or in an appointed position in a MG chapter or in the Oregon Master Gardener Association
- Other Approved Activities: as determined by your local Master Gardener coordination, in the context of current OSU Extension Master Gardener guidelines and policy

In order to qualify for MG Service Hours, projects or activities must:

1. adhere to applicable OSU policies and procedures,
2. be approved by the OSU Extension faculty and staff coordinating the Master Gardener Program
3. be reported to OSU Extension

Continuing Education Hours

Continuing education is critical to promoting high quality and up-to-date gardening advice and recommendations within the Master Gardener program. Thus, Master Gardener faculty and staff should carefully consider and plan for continuing education opportunities within their county, in much the same type of care used to plan annual Master Gardener training classes.

To be counted towards recertification, a continuing education class should:

- 1a. present research-based information on sustainable horticulture in an objective manner

or

1b. support or improve an individual's ability to serve as a volunteer Extension educator

2. be taught by a qualified instructor

***a qualified instructor is one who uses research-based information, presents information in an objective manner, and who is an effective and engaging presenter

3. extend the curriculum taught during the basic Master Gardener training course

***a Master Gardener should not be able to accrue all of their continuing education credits by sitting in on annual Master Gardener training courses. Endeavor to offer new or advanced classes, workshops or webinars.

Master Gardeners accrue continuing education hours as: time spent in class (rounded up to the nearest 15 minutes), qualifies towards continuing education hours requirements.

- Example 1: a Master Gardener views a webinar that lasts 90 minutes. They are able to report 1.5 continuing education hours.
- Example 2: a Master Gardener attends a class that lasts 70 minutes. They are able to report 1.25 continuing education hours.

To support recertification efforts, the statewide program office should coordinate the efforts of the home horticulture working group to:

1. share news and information about local advanced training opportunities, that qualify for continuing education credit
2. develop and publicize a calendar of continuing education opportunities across Oregon, as well as nationally-relevant and accessible webinars
3. develop a monthly webinar series of classes that qualify for recertification credit. If possible, these webinars will be archived, online, for future and repeat viewing.
4. develop an annual online assessment that Master Gardener volunteers can use to see what areas they may want to focus on, in order to improve their ability to provide research-based educational outreach to the general public