

# Mississippi Master Gardener Volunteer Program: A Quick Guide



## What Is the Master Gardener Program?

The Master Gardener volunteer program is a great way to gain horticultural expertise at a low cost, meet other avid gardeners, share gardening experiences, get connected to the community, and belong to a well-respected educational organization. This educational exchange program is offered through county offices of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Through this program, individuals are trained and certified in horticulture and related areas. In exchange for educational training, individuals are asked to volunteer their time to help county Extension offices with horticultural projects that benefit the local community. Master Gardeners help extend the educational arm of the university to the public by providing horticultural information based on university research and recommendations.

## What Does the Master Gardener Program Provide?

The Master Gardener training program provides 40 hours of classroom and hands-on instruction in horticulture and related areas. Class instructors include Extension specialists, Extension agents, and other horticultural professionals. Class topics include botany, soils, vegetables, ornamentals, insects, diseases, propagation, urban tree care, and lawn care. Curriculum material to support the classroom instruction is provided.

## What Does the Master Gardener Program Require?

In exchange for 40-plus hours of educational training, individuals are required to return 40 hours of volunteer

service within 1 year of completing the training. All volunteer service activities must be approved by the county Master Gardener coordinator. Any approved educational opportunities that will allow the Master Gardener to share horticultural information may count toward these hours. Each year after the first year, volunteers are required to return 20 hours of volunteer service and attend 12 hours of educational training to remain certified as Master Gardeners. Volunteer hours are digitally recorded in the designated Master Gardener reporting system.

There is a one-time \$125 fee for entry into the Master Gardener program. This fee covers the cost of curriculum, supplies, a name badge, and a 1-year membership in the state Master Gardener association. It also provides funding for future development and growth of the county and statewide programs.

## How Do I Apply?

The first option is to contact your county Extension office to see if any in-person trainings are planned. Locate your county Extension office by looking under the county name in the phone book or by visiting <http://extension.msstate.edu/county-offices>. The second option is to visit the Extension Master Gardener website at <http://extension.msstate.edu/community/leadership/master-gardener> to find information about online training options.

## What Are Some Sample Projects I Can Do as a Master Gardener?

- Conduct plant clinics
- Answer home horticulture questions (phone, email, face-to-face)
- Develop demonstration/teaching gardens
- Assist with research projects
- Provide leadership to county or state organizations
- Participate in 4-H Junior Master Gardener or other 4-H gardening projects
- Participate in community beautification/landscape projects

## Making Recommendations

When making horticultural recommendations, including the use of chemicals (insecticides, pesticides, fungicides, herbicides), Master Gardeners must follow published Extension recommendations. Some cultural problems may not be specifically covered by Extension publications. Experienced Master Gardeners may suggest nonchemical treatments they consider appropriate based on personal experience. You must state clearly that you are speaking from your own personal experience and are not presenting the opinion of the MSU Extension Service. Always cite the reference book or material used for a recommendation. All questions concerning the commercial production of crops and pest control should be referred to the county Extension office.

## Using the Master Gardener Title

Master Gardener is a nationally recognized title but has no service or trademark status. However, the title Mississippi Master Gardener or Mississippi State University Extension Master Gardener is used by Extension to indicate a person who has been trained and certified through our Extension program. The Master Gardener designation as considered void when individuals cease active participation.

Mississippi Master Gardeners are expected to use their title only when doing unpaid volunteer educational work for Extension. Master Gardeners should not advertise their names or places of business or be listed as Master Gardeners on business advertisements. The Master Gardener program is an Extension public service program. Appearing for a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or implying Extension endorsements of any product or business is inappropriate.

Master Gardeners may not solicit money for public speaking. Unsolicited money received should be donated to the local Master Gardener fund. Gift items may be accepted.

## Using the Master Gardener Logo

The Master Gardener logo may be used on printed materials, T-shirts, pins, and other items. If you do use the Master Gardener logo, it is recommended to also include the Extension wordmark. It is against university policy to change or alter the Extension wordmark in any way.

For additional information, visit the Master Gardener Extension webpage at <http://extension.msstate.edu/community/leadership/master-gardener>.

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