

Frequently Asked Questions about the Master Gardener Volunteer Training Course

I don't know much about gardening, is this course appropriate for me?

Absolutely! The course requires no background in plant science or gardening. The requirements are an interest in gardening along with the time and desire to continue volunteering once you complete your training as a Master Gardener. You'll acquire the vocabulary and experience you need through the time you invest in the program.

What is the volunteer aspect of the program?

The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) offers the Master Gardener Training Course to train volunteers to educate the public through a variety of established efforts, such as Plant Clinics, formal public education programs, demonstration gardens, and other projects that arise on an *ad hoc* basis.

What is the Extension Service and how do Master Gardeners fit in?

The Extension Service is an educational outreach program of the land grant institutions in every state. In Virginia, the Extension Service is administered through the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech and Virginia State Universities. It is designed to bring research-based information to bear on the issues or needs of the local community. There is a Virginia Cooperative Extension office in every county and many cities throughout the Commonwealth. Because the federal, state and local governments allocate resources to these programs, we document our educational impacts and hours of service in Arlington and Alexandria. You will be asked to maintain and submit a record of your work that will become part of a statewide system of data on Master Gardener impacts and activities.

Who are the instructors for the course?

The instructors are Extension faculty from Virginia Tech, Virginia State, Northern Virginia Community College, USDA, and professionals in both industry and non-profit horticultural institutions and organizations.

Is this program connected with Jerry Baker, America's Master Gardener?

No. VCE Master Gardeners learn research-based gardening techniques in class. They become volunteers for the local office of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

I feel very inexperienced... hardly a "Master," how do you expect me to answer questions on the phone or at a plant clinic?

Most participants feel this way at first! However, answering questions is a wonderful way to learn. The purpose of the training is to give you tools and teach you where to find the appropriate information. There are far too many facts to learn and retain through one class! Interns are always paired with experienced Master Gardeners and given back-up support and training from staff. We also provide free ongoing continuing education to help keep our skills up to date.

Can I start to volunteer before the end of the training course?

Yes. However, there are certain basics we want Master Gardeners to learn first. Usually we allow volunteer work to begin after the class is about 1/3 complete. We also want trainees to learn about the benefits and risks of volunteering with VCE (see below).

I would like to make a flower bed for my church, does this count as a volunteer activity?

To receive "credit" toward your certification as a VCE Master Gardener, volunteer activities must be educational, and approved by the Extension Office. While a church garden is certainly beneficial, it should have an educational component such as plant labels, a garden class for church members, etc. Otherwise, this activity would not count toward certification

I am from Montgomery County, MD; can I do my volunteer work there?

You are welcome to volunteer in Montgomery County; however, to apply toward certification for the VCE Master Gardener, volunteer work must be completed in the county where the training was given. The local jurisdictions provide generous support for the programs and this policy helps provide services and assistance to them, in return.

How do you keep track of my volunteer work?

Each project that Master Gardeners are involved in must be approved by the Extension Office. Interns and experienced Master Gardeners alike submit their volunteer work on a form on a monthly basis. This data is entered into a statewide database. Every hour contributed towards Master Gardener activities is accounted for that way!

What happens after the course is over? How do I stay involved?

After the final training class, we meet monthly on the fourth Thursday, alternating morning and evening, for continuing education classes. Topics are designed to strengthen your skills as a gardener and make you better equipped as a VCE volunteer. You may also join the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia, Inc. (MGNV), the local organization of certified Master Gardeners. VCE MG's also meet for in-service trainings, organize field trips, raise funds through plant sales, participate in many educational programs and events, and maintain extensive

demonstration learning gardens in our community. Many certified VCE MG's will assist with the implementation of the Training Course. Finally, after enrollment in training, you will be a part of the statewide Master Gardener program administered by Virginia Cooperative Extension. You will receive newsletters and be invited to various events such as the annual Master Gardener College, which are designed to improve your gardening knowledge and help you understand Master Gardening.

What about insurance? Am I covered when I volunteer with Master Gardeners?

When you volunteer as a VCE Master Gardener you are automatically covered under an umbrella liability policy through Virginia Tech. However, your volunteer activities must be approved activities and fall within the "Plan of Work" of the local Extension Agent. Further discussion of insurance and Risk Management will take place in class.

What is this Virginia Cooperative Extension Volunteer Application/Enrollment Form?

This form **must** be returned with your Master Gardener class application. When serving the public as an Extension Master Gardener volunteer, you work under the auspices of Virginia Cooperative Extension and are covered by their liability coverage. This form is kept in the office as part of your official record of accomplishment and registers you with VCE as a volunteer.