

## POLICY STATEMENT AND GUIDELINES

### **PURPOSE:**

The West Virginia University Extension Master Gardener Program is a volunteer educational program designed to meet the horticultural needs of citizens of West Virginia. Its purpose is to train volunteers and utilize their expertise to teach people more about plants, their culture, and their importance to the environment and to our quality of life. Master Gardener volunteers provide technical assistance to their county Extension office in order that consumer horticulture activities and programs can be more effectively and efficiently carried out.

Master Gardener trainees receive formal training from their county Extension office covering a wide range of pertinent horticultural topics. To become a Master Gardener, the trainee must complete the training program, pass the required exams, volunteer a specified number of hours to Extension and do a required presentation during training.

The volunteer commitment may be fulfilled in a number of different ways depending on the determined needs of the county residents. After the completion of the initial required volunteer time, volunteers are encouraged to continue to assist with horticultural program delivery as a West Virginia University Extension Master Gardener Volunteer.

### **TRAINING:**

The formal training program is the responsibility of the County Extension Faculty managing the program. Instructors are West Virginia University faculty, Extension specialists, experience Master Gardeners, and other experts.

The training program is to provide a balanced, integrated, practical course in plant science. Core topics that are to be part of the training in every county are Orientation to Extension and the MG Program; Basic Botany; Soils and Soil Fertility; Basic Entomology; Plant Disease Diagnosis, Integrated Pest Management and Pesticide Use and Safety; Home Lawn Care; Annuals, Perennials and Bulbs; Trees and Shrubs, Home Vegetable production; Home Fruit production; Houseplants; and Communication Skills. Special topics, based on local needs, may be part of the curriculum.

### **FEES:**

To cover the cost of training manuals and supplies, a non-refundable standardized fee approved by the State Coordinator will be charged. Upon an individual's acceptance into the program, this fee will be paid at the county level.

### **ATTENDANCE:**

1. Each Master Gardener trainee is expected to attend every class session.
2. The trainee is responsible for initiating provisions to make up any missed sessions.
3. 80% attendance at training sessions must be maintained for completion.

### **EXAMINATIONS AND QUIZZES:**

1. There will be an open-book exam to test the trainee's abilities to retrieve information from reference materials.
2. Trainees must accurately complete 80% or better.

### **CERTIFICATION:**

A West Virginia Master Gardener must attend the prescribed hours of instruction, pass the final examination and fulfill the 40-hour volunteer commitment before becoming a certified Master Gardener. Upon completion he/she will be awarded a West Virginia University Master Gardener certificate and name badge. This certification is restrictive in nature in that it is valid only when the individual is participating in the West Virginia Master Gardener Program and for one year only.

### **VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT:**

1. Attend required training sessions consisting of a minimum of 40 hours of instruction.
2. Perform an equivalent number of horticulturally significant volunteer hours for West Virginia University Extension Service. Normally, only unpaid public service in WVU Extension-sponsored activities counts toward the requirement. Other volunteer activities may be counted after receiving prior approval by the local coordinator. The required volunteer hours should be completed within one year of completion of the training course.
3. Each Master Gardener will have a completed application, signed Master Gardener Volunteer Agreement, signed WVU Extension Code of Conduct, and a service record on file at the local Extension office. This information is treated confidentially. Volunteers' records are kept in separate files in a secured place and are accessible only by trained Extension staff. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to make sure that the information on their application (i.e. address) and their service record is kept current and accurate. This is necessary for liability reasons and for the protection of the Volunteer as well as program clientele.
4. Maintain an activity log and submit it to the county Extension office on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis, as required by county procedures.
5. Attend meetings as scheduled to update information, discuss gardening problems and coordinate Master Gardener activities.

### **SPEAKING:**

When master Gardeners speak before groups on horticulture topics it is permissible for them to accept unsolicited reimbursements or gifts. It is inappropriate; however, to seek paid speaking engagements while participating in an authorized Extension function and while using the WVU Master Gardener title. In all cases the county Extension office policy on a speaking engagement fees should be honored. When a Master Gardener travels out of county for speaking engagement, it is appropriate to request payment for travel expenses from the county Extension office or other organization requesting the Master Gardener's services.

### **USE OF TITLE:**

The title “West Virginia Master Gardener” is to be used only and exclusively by individuals trained and certified to assist the West Virginia University Extension Service, and the title is valid only when the volunteer is participating in the West Virginia University Master Gardener Program. The title Master Gardener is to be used only when doing unpaid, volunteer work in a program activity approved by an Extension agent.

The training and experience gained by participating in the West Virginia University Master Gardener Program are valuable, and may rightfully be listed as qualifications when seeking employment. Once employed and while serving as a paid employee, or if self-employed, Master Gardeners should not display credentials or give the appearance of being a Master Gardener at the place of business, unless the place of business is specifically designated by an Extension agent as a Master Gardener clinic location.

#### **PESTICIDE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

When making recommendations that include the use of fertilizers and pesticides, Master Gardeners must follow current Extension recommendations. In addition to their training, Master Gardeners receive diagnostic support from the Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic at WVU and from various Extension specialists. Horticultural problems that are not specifically covered by Extension recommendations should be referred to an Extension agent. Questions concerning commercial production of crops and pest control on such crops should be referred to an Extension agent.

#### **RECERTIFICATION:**

Master Gardeners must be recertified each year to remain on the “active” list and maintain the Master Gardener title.

A Master Gardener may recertify for participation in the program for another year by:

1. Committing to a minimum of twenty (20) hours of volunteer work to be completed each year **and**
2. Completing or having completed ten (10) additional hours of horticulture training each year. Examples of additional training are: New Master Gardener training, Master Gardener Advanced Training, State/Regional/International MG conferences, University or Community College courses, Arboretum and Botanical Garden seminars, and annual horticulture conferences. The training must be approved by the county Extension agent responsible for supervising the Master Gardener Program.

#### **INACTIVE STATUS:**

An inactive Master Gardener is one who is unable to commit to an additional twelve (12) hours service plus six (6) hours advanced training at present, but would like the opportunity to recertify themselves in the future. The following policies apply:

1. An inactive Master Gardener is one who is in good standing, having **completed** the original commitment of training, exam, and volunteer service.
2. The inactive Master Gardener must attend or have attended six (6) hours of acceptable horticulture training for each year of inactive status. (See Recertification #2 for examples of training.)

3. An inactive Master Gardener may recertify within three (3) years as long as the above criteria are met. Individuals on inactive status for more than three (3) years are required to retake the New Master Gardener training.

**OUT-OF-STATE:**

Master Gardeners who are **certified** in another state may be admitted to the West Virginia University Master Gardener program by meeting the following criteria:

1. Acquire or be provided with a current West Virginia Master Gardener training manual.
2. Acquire or be provided with a West Virginia Master Gardener name badge.
3. Score a minimum of 80% on a final exam administered by WVU Extension Service.
4. Meet the recertification requirements listed above.

**DISMISSAL OF A MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER:**

Repeated and consistent disregard for the policies and guidelines established by the WVU Extension Service and the West Virginia Master Gardener Program are grounds for dismissal as a Master Gardener Volunteer

When the county Master Gardener coordinator finds it necessary to dismiss a volunteer, the volunteer must be informed in writing of the termination of his/her volunteer status. This notice of dismissal will become part of the volunteer's confidential file.

Master Gardeners are not to advertise their name or their place of business nor be listed on the advertisements of business places as West Virginia Master Gardeners. Because the Master Gardener Program is a West Virginia University Extension public service program, providing unbiased research-based information appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or implying West Virginia University Extension Service endorsement of any product or place of business is improper and grounds for dismissal from the program.

**LIABILITY:**

Master Gardener Volunteers are insured under the West Virginia Board of Risk liability insurance program provided to WVU. Coverage applies only to individual volunteers while they are performing their volunteer activities for West Virginia University Extension. The coverage does not extend to other organizations or groups that volunteers are working with. Volunteers may not sign contracts or leases assuming liability responsibility on behalf of other organizations or groups.

**I have read and understand the West Virginia Master Gardener Program Policy Statement and agree to comply with the guidelines and fulfill the commitments required.**

**I also understand that failure to comply with the above guidelines and policies may result in expulsion from the West Virginia Master Gardener Program at the discretion of the supervising Extension agent.**

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>County</b>
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**Statement of Nondiscrimination**

Programs and activities offered by West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation or national origin, and marital or family status.

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