

**Additional Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the
New MSU Extension Master Gardener Program**

Below are additional questions regarding the Michigan Master Gardener program with responses from MSU Extension leadership. You may notice some changes since the program re-structuring began. This is an important example of how MSUE is listening to your concerns and has been responding to those concerns when possible.

The restructuring continues to be an evolving process so please continue to ask questions and voice your concerns. Thank you.

What will MSU continue to provide for Master Gardener Program participants?

- Basic and advanced Master Gardener classes, including MG College and other horticulture education programs;
- Certification and recognition items (certificates, name badges, pin, hour bars);
- The online record keeping system (and new data and communication system, which will soon replace the current antiquated system).

What is MSU no longer providing?

- Day-to-day volunteer management
- Liability coverage for volunteers unless the volunteer project is clearly an MSU organized and delivered effort (e.g. toll-free hotline, or Ask an Expert activity)
- Background checks for volunteers unless they are working on an MSU project with youth and/or vulnerable populations.

IDENTITY

Are we still Master Gardeners? Can we use the title? Will we still be called MSU Extension Master Gardeners/Advanced Master Gardeners?

- Absolutely and you can still use the title MSU Extension Master Gardener.

Who will issue the MG Certificate? Will it have the MSUE logo on it?

- MG Certificates will have the logo. You will continue to be MSU Extension Master Gardeners.

Can we use “Master Gardener” in the name of our group when we apply for 501c3 status?

- Yes

BUDGET

How many administrators have been laid off due to budget cuts?

- We eliminated the position of County Extension Director and reassigned those individuals to educational programming roles. MSUE went from 45 full-time equivalent (FTEs) in administration to 20 FTEs in administration.

Have other MSUE programs been affected by the restructuring? Is Conservation Stewards next?

- Some programs were eliminated as a result of the restructuring and others had to refocus their efforts to maintain or increase the quality of programs with fewer staff members. Changes will take place in the Conservation Stewards program.

What funding options are being considered? Will there be an organized effort to do fundraising on a state level?

- The MSU Extension educators who work with MGs and other home gardeners (the Consumer Horticulture Team) and the transition team for the new statewide association have brainstormed possibilities, but no specific plans are in place at this time. If you have ideas, connections or resources please share them with any of the [Consumer Horticulture team members](#).

Will funds from programs such as Ask-a-Master Gardener be sent to the state office or will they stay locally with the coordinator or local association?

- Ask-a-Master Gardener revenue has always stayed locally and will continue to be structured this way.

Will the county continue to receive a portion of the registration fees?

- As of July 1, 2012, counties will no longer have local MSU accounts and checkbooks to pay bills, so the majority of the registration fee will be kept on campus. All local expenses (i.e. speaker honorariums, mileage, teaching supplies, room rentals fees, etc.) will be paid directly by campus. Local partners will receive a percentage of the registration fees in exchange for hosting a class (This percentage is still being determined.).

Will funds raised locally stay local?

- Money generated by local groups through efforts such as Ask-a-Master Gardener, programs, seminars or conference will be retained locally in an account controlled by the local group or coordinator.

EDUCATION

How will the MG advanced training and continuing education change?

- The only change to advanced training will be a focus on education topics that contribute to focus areas (groups) in the record keeping system. Note that most of the education currently being offered already aligns with the new focus groups.

I hope there is some way we can continue to have the statewide Master Gardener College.

- Absolutely! We will continue to offer this training. [MG College](#) for 2012 is scheduled for June 8- 9 at MSU.

Can we offer MG educational credits for local workshops and seminars?

- Yes, as long as the program information is science-based and fits into one of the educational focus groups (These groups are fairly broad so this shouldn't be an issue in most cases.).

Is there any consideration for offering online classes in the future?

- Yes, we are developing online modules to increase access to training. Three sessions (Plant Science, Soil Science and Turfgrass) will be available this fall.

If a county is used to holding two training classes a year, can they continue to do so?

- A county may provide two training classes a year as long as there are enough approved instructors and a minimum of 30 participants. Also, these counties are encouraged to rotate training site locations to increase accessibility.

When the new manual is done how can we obtain a copy? What will it cost?

- We will send an email to all Master Gardeners when the new manual will be available for sale with the associated cost.

If a person wants to become a Master Gardener, where do they start?

- Start by going to the Michigan Master Gardener website (www.mg.msue.msu.edu). This site lists upcoming class locations and the local coordinator for each site. The local coordinator will walk the individual through the application process to follow. Once an individual successfully completes the class and 40 volunteer hours, they will become an MSU Extension Master Gardener.

Many people have dial-up Internet connections; if you are on the computer for some time with a dial-up connection you will eventually get booted off. I know there are several people who do not even have a computer. How will you address these challenges?

- For online education classes, we anticipate training sites where people will meet in groups to participate in the learning experience. These sites will be located where equipment supports this technology (e.g. local Extension offices, MSU research stations, county facilities, community college/university facilities). Libraries may also be an option for some classes. For people that do not have computers, several counties have already developed “Internet buddies”. These MGs make sure non-computer users receive all MG communications and help the non-computer users enter their education and volunteer hours into the record keeping system. We anticipate this concept expanding throughout the state.

Is this becoming a program for the retired and rich? It seems like the only way I can get education hours for recertification is to travel. This is time consuming and expensive.

- Several online learning opportunities are being developed by the Consumer Horticulture Team so you can obtain your educational hours in the comfort of your home or at your local library. Check out some these classes on the Gardening in Michigan website (<http://www.migarden.msu.edu/>). Most classes are free and Master Gardeners can receive 1 hour of educational credit for each hour of lecture. In return, we request that each viewer completes an online evaluation for the specific class or classes they view. Also, local associations or programs may also schedule face-to-face programming. Other local community groups often offer quality programming open to Master Gardeners.

Where are the seven basic training locations for Fall 2012?

- Classes are currently planned for Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Waterford, Wayne, Macomb, Kalamazoo, and Howell. Additional sites will be available in 2013. Site locations will change according to the ability to meet the 30 participant minimum, availability of approved instructors and partner support for a coordinator.

Were the seven locations chosen due to being profitable?

- Locations were determined:

- Based on population and the likelihood of having a minimum of 30 participants to cover costs (These locations are within an hour of 70 percent of the state's population which increases the probability that the required number of participants will be available.).
- Based on presence of a coordinator committed to promote, organize and facilitate training and to manage the MG trainees until they are certified
- The Master Gardener Program is a two-phase program: educational and volunteering. To complete the program in a specific location, both components need to be fully supported and in place for at least 18 months.

How will future MSU Extension Master Gardener participants earn certification?

- This aspect of the program will not change. A participant must first successfully complete the class by meeting the attendance requirement (not missing more than one class) and passing the quizzes and final with a score of at least 70 percent. The next step is the completion of 40 volunteer hours within one year of class completion. These volunteer opportunities will be promoted through the local coordinator, association/chapter, other Master Gardeners and MSUE.

VOLUNTEER SELECTION PROCESS/BACKGROUND CHECKS

MSU Extension currently requires background checks of Master Gardener applicants. How will this continue to be implemented?

- This will no longer be an MSU requirement for the Master Gardener training program. Local partners may still require background checks and they will determine the method for completion of the background checks.

Will criminal background checks be necessary for MGs working with the Junior MG Program and other youth programs?

- Yes. For Junior MG and 4-H programs, 4-H staff in the local office will conduct necessary background checks on MGs. For school programs, the school staff will conduct the necessary background checks.

Our association wants to continue to conduct background checks since we have a volunteer project at a nursing home. Is this okay?

- Associations can continue to conduct background checks, but they will need to work directly with Michigan State Police on this effort.

We currently interview prospective applicants. Will that continue?

- While the decision will be up to the local coordinator, it's highly recommended to continue the interviews. Interviewing a new potential volunteer is an effective first step for orienting new participants and developing a more successful volunteer program.

VOLUNTEER EFFORTS

I've heard that what qualifies for volunteer hours will change. It seems that the only volunteer hours that count towards maintaining certification are hours provided in educating others. Is this true?

- This is actually not a policy change but a policy that has been inconsistently enforced! In fact, some states use the title Master Gardener Volunteer Educators to emphasize this criterion. Requirements for approved volunteer hours continue to be:

- Educational – Keep in mind that there are many ways to make projects educational. Education doesn't have to occur just in a classroom. There are many informal ways that education occurs, both actively and passively. Consider brainstorming with a local coordinator, other Master Gardeners or the [Consumer Horticulture team](#) for ideas.
- Group related,
- Non-paying and
- For non-profit organizations.

For Master Gardeners who took the class because they like to GARDEN, the LAST thing they want to do is teach while volunteering (i.e. perhaps they teach for a living). What is the point in continuing with this program?

- Volunteering to educate others may not be for everyone. In this case, perhaps the volunteer is more suited to be part of a garden club. However, many garden clubs also have a mission to educate others. Also, bear in mind that when teaching and educating others, you can do so in traditional and non-traditional ways. MGs do NOT have to educate others only in a classroom setting; education can be provided through hands-on demonstration of plant care and maintenance as examples.

Are you saying that the traditional volunteer efforts of planting, weeding, and maintaining gardens will no longer count as volunteer hours unless you are demonstrating or teaching others? That will greatly affect organizations that rely on volunteers.

- What you refer to as “traditional volunteer efforts” is not the case throughout many areas of the state. The policy for volunteer projects for the Michigan Master Gardener program has always been educational, and many local programs have adhered to this policy. Also, people trained as MGs can still volunteer for other organizations that rely on what you refer to as “traditional volunteer efforts”. There are many wonderful and worthwhile local community projects in which to take part. However, to receive MG volunteer hours for these efforts, the project needs to be educational in nature and fit into one of the focus groups.

Will volunteering at places like the Detroit Zoo still count for hours?

- Yes, if it is educational in nature. Work with the local coordinator in Oakland or Wayne counties to determine how to make your project educational. Keep in mind that as long as education is part of the long-term goal for this project, not every volunteer moment must be spent in education. There is often an opportunity to educate other volunteers who aren't Master Gardeners about plant health care practices, integrated pest management or plant identification.

Regarding volunteer required hours, has where we may volunteer changed?

- Where you may volunteer has not changed, provided it's for a non-profit organization (Exception: The statewide Ask-A-Master efforts where MGs answer questions at local retail establishments in May/June to help address customers' questions. In return, the business donates \$7.50 per hour back to the local coordinator to support the position and local outreach activities/projects.).

My team has been fundraising to host an educational garden conference next year. We aren't teaching per se, but working to raise money to underwrite the costs for this an educational event. Will my team's volunteer hours will still count?

- Yes, fundraising to support the educational efforts of a local association or program will count.

Are we going to be able to continue going to farmers market, home shows and county fairs as Master Gardeners and educate the community?

- Absolutely! These are great venues to share what you've learned during your basic and advanced Master Gardener training. In fact, the new [Michigan Fresh](#) initiative provides some new material to share and educate consumers about gardening and Michigan produce.

Will our work in plant-a-row gardens still count for our volunteer hours? It's an important program, but not necessarily educational.

- Actually, there are many opportunities within plant-a-row garden projects for an educational element; teaching others about pests and diseases while working in the garden, demonstrating gardening techniques for community volunteers, demonstrations at the garden, sharing new techniques you've learned during programs at other locations.

If a project takes a long time to complete, do we hold off reporting hours until we get to the point when we met the educational requirement (e.g. labeling plants, notating plants used and how to use growing degree days to predict when pests may be present, etc.) or would we record hours as they occur?

- Please record your hours as they occur.

Since we do not have a coordinator or an association, can we record our entire MG reporting, question asking, etc. online?

- The reporting should already be done online at <https://mi.mgrecord.com/>. If you need assistance with online hours reporting, there is a tutorial posted at http://mg.msue.msu.edu/mg/recordkeeping_system. Questions may be directed to [Consumer Horticulture team members](#).

To whom do I report my hours?

- You still continue to submit your hours through the online record keeping system (<https://mi.mgrecord.com/login.php>). If you need a re-fresher on how to use the system, please visit http://mg.msue.msu.edu/mg/recordkeeping_system where there is a tutorial, as well as instructions on obtaining your login and password.

Who will be approving volunteer hours?

- As with many other states, when you enter hours into the online system, they will be automatically verified. However, remember that the hours must align with the [new groups](#) or focus areas. With these pre-approved groups for projects, coordinators no longer need to also approve hours. Administrators will be able to audit records as needed.

In the past the county where a class was held had the administrative rights to those students' records. How will this change in the future?

- If there is no coordinator, we will work with local groups to identify a point person for each county.

Can associations or counties pool their resources to hire a local coordinator?

- Absolutely. One district is already exploring this option.

Can a coordinator be a volunteer?

- Yes. In fact, we have several counties that have had unpaid coordinators for several years.

CONNECTIONS

How will the local MG programs without a coordinator stay connected to MSU, MSU

Extension and research-based information?

- We received several suggestions from Master Gardeners and consumer horticulture team members. Some of the ideas include:
 - Developing and distributing an electronic newsletter from the MSUE consumer horticulture team to all Master Gardeners across the state.
 - Participation in online webinars conducted by MSU and MSUE staff and researchers. These may be live or recorded sessions.
 - Developing a statewide social media team;
 - Obtaining the new online record keeping system which has enhanced communications functions;
 - Collaborating with the Michigan Master Gardener Association that is organizing to offer volunteer-based unifying leadership and communications.

How will we know about volunteer and educational opportunities?

- Our current plan is to post MSUE and local association educational events on the MG website and the new online system we're currently obtaining (This new system has the ability to assist in informing MG about volunteer and educational opportunities.).

How will Master Gardeners get linked to their local association?

- The coordinators for the training sites can send a class list to the local Master Gardener Association (MGA). Some training sites may also hold a volunteer orientation session during which the local MGA may make a presentation. Details will be up to the local coordinator.

Communication between the regions is critical to sustain cohesion. Will there be a central coordinator to assist with outreach?

- There will not be a single person serving as state coordinator after July 1, 2012. The MSUE Consumer Horticulture Team members will be the primary contacts for Extension and will work in partnership with local coordinators and the future state MG association board. These entities will develop a statewide communications plan to maintain the statewide MG network.

I'm really concerned about communicating only with MGs that have a computer and Internet connection. Aren't you excluding people?

- We recognize that not everyone has a computer and Internet connection. Coordinators and several association board members have made several suggestions on how to maintain connections with these individuals. These ideas include:
 - enlisting the help of other MGs as email or internet buddies;
 - offering training on how to set up a free gmail account;
 - allowing MGs to use a dedicated computer in the county MSUE office;
 - allowing MGs to use the local association laptop computer at association meetings;
 - identifying association members to adopt MGs without email addresses and/or have members communicate with them via post cards and/or phone calls.

RECOGNITION/RECERTIFICATION

Will MG recertification requirements change?

- No, they will remain the same: 15 volunteer hours and 5 educational hours per year.

Who issues certificates that verified that I'm a Master Gardener?

- MSU Extension will continue to issue basic certificate and advanced certificates to those individuals meeting the requirements.

If volunteer hours are reported to a central location, will name badges and certificates still be sent out?

- Those will continue to be available through MSUE. Our ultimate goal is to have them available to local coordinators or support staff through the MSUE Bookstore.

Who will know once I accumulate enough hours to become an Advanced Master Gardener?

- For areas that have local coordinators, the coordinator can still do this. In other areas, associations may assist with this. Once the new data and communications system is in place, each Master Gardener will also be able to view his/her current totals at a glance each time he/she logs in to the system.

Has the new record keeping system been approved?

- Yes, a decision has been made to purchase a system developed by the University of California at Davis (This system is currently used by Master Gardeners in California, Virginia, Colorado and Florida.). We hope to start moving volunteer records to the new system in June with the actual system becoming available to MGs by early fall.

Will MG groups have to pay for the data base system? If so, how much?

- There will probably be a user fee but details are yet to be determined.

I have heard discussions regarding a recertification fee for Master Gardeners. Is this true?

When will this go into effect?

- Several states have already implemented an annual MG fee to help support the program and cover ongoing program costs (i.e. name badges, certificates, pins, hour bars, online record keeping system etc.). We previously declined to implement this concept in Michigan. Due to our budget, we have re-examined this option and will implement a fee sometime in mid-2012. We feel this has several benefits as outlined below:
 - Benefits to MGs – Statewide e-newsletter, statewide calendar, discounts for MSU Extension horticulture programs, including MG College.

- Benefits to a new state MGA – revenue to help pay the liability insurance premium for Master Gardeners.
- Benefits to MSUE – revenue to purchase and maintain the new online record keeping and communication system that enhances communications between MGs, MG project managers, coordinators, and MSUE educators.
- Benefits to all – revenue to support an employee to assist the consumer horticulture team and the new state MGA. This person could also serve as the “connector” for associations without a local coordinator and MG without a local association or coordinator.
- Also, we are sensitive that there are other fees that MGs may have to pay at a local level and are working with the statewide MG transition team to find a workable solution.

LIABILITY

As a volunteer, I'm quite concerned about no longer being covered by MSU's liability insurance. Can you please address this?

- Most locations and community groups that you will be directly volunteering for (e.g. parks, schools, municipalities, watershed groups, etc.) have liability insurance that should cover you when volunteering and sharing your MG expertise. Also, the transition team working to form a new statewide MG association is looking into providing insurance coverage for its members.

When I volunteer at MSU Tollgate Education Center, am I covered by MSU liability insurance?

- Yes.

In the past, researchers have used MGs to help monitor for new insects and diseases around the state. The researchers are interested in continuing this relationship. These MGs would be MSU volunteers, right? What about liability coverage?

- If Master Gardeners are performing activities at the behest of and supervised by an MSU staff member, they are covered by MSU.

What must the liability insurance cover?

- Since there has only been one Master Gardener claim filed, ever, the primary purpose of liability coverage is that it is often required to rent space for events. Other considerations are general liability and Director and Officer Insurance (for local groups).

ASSOCIATIONS

How can associations help the program survive?

- Several ideas presented by coordinators and association leadership include:
 - Help to strengthen the connection with MGs
 - Connect with MGs in counties without a coordinator
 - Shepherd MGs to input hours into the record keeping system
 - Help managing volunteers
 - Help communicate about programmatic changes
 - Work toward developing a statewide network of associations
 - Consider making a donation to MSUE toward the new record keeping / communications system (Any amount would be welcomed!)

- Sharing association information with one another (e.g. “How to become a chapter or association)
- Help keep MGs abreast of volunteer opportunities (post on the MG website and association/chapter websites)
- Brainstorm on ways to generate revenue to keep the program affordable for all
- Remain positive.

Will associations be able to use MSUE office meeting rooms?

- Yes, these are public meeting spaces. Since MSU employees or county staff members are responsible for building security, their schedules may affect times when the facility is available.

Will associations need to apply for their own non-profit status or will we still fall under MSU's status?

- Local groups will need to become a chapter under the statewide MGA or form their own non-profit organization.

Will you help set up a statewide MGA?

- We will help facilitate a transition team of MGs to work on developing this new organization.

Will MGAs be able to make new by-law changes?

- The statewide association is developing bylaws to file for nonprofit status with the IRS and obtain liability insurance. Local chapters interested in affiliating with the state association will have some flexibility to make changes. However, local bylaws need to stay within the parameters of the state association bylaws if they are interested in obtaining liability coverage through the state association.

How will current MGs find an association in their area?

- All local groups and contact persons are listed on the MG website (http://mg.msue.msu.edu/mg/county_association_websites). This information will be updated as needed.

Is the statewide umbrella organization being formed?

- Yes, there is a 24-member MG transition team drafting bylaws, articles of incorporation, projected budget, and operating structure. Members are working with an attorney to file for IRS non-profit status and a subcommittee is exploring options for liability insurance coverage. Updates will be shared with board members across the state for additional input. Individual Master Gardeners can follow the progress of the state association development by progress at http://mg.msue.msu.edu/mg/state_master_gardener_association

RELATIONSHIPS

I order apparel for our county for the Master Gardeners. How will these changes effect what we order or wear to be representatives of the Master Gardeners?

- The logo will not be changed.

What you are saying is MSU is dropping the MG program?

- We continue to state that we are NOT dropping the program. For the program to survive the budgetary cuts, a new model needed to be created. As a reminder, the Master Gardener Program has two components: education and volunteering. The implementation of the volunteer component is at the local community level while MSUE is focusing upon our strength, the educational component.

I have several friends that were interested in taking the MG program, and they have voiced to me that the program was eliminated. What steps are you taking to address this in communities?

- There have been several emails sent across the state to communicate the program changes and stress that it will still remain viable. Information is also being provided via the MG website and at MSUE workshops and meetings being held across the state.

How can we help MSU and MSUE?

Remain positive and supportive with the changes. We don't want to make these changes but our backs are against the wall. The sad truth is that we either make changes or don't have a program.