



THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY  

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EXTENSION

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION  
MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

POLICY STATEMENT

**PURPOSE**

The Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program is an educational program designed to meet the consumer horticulture needs of Ohio citizens. Its purpose is to train volunteers and utilize their expertise to teach people more about plants and pests, their culture, and their importance to the environment and to our quality of life. MGVs provide technical assistance to their county Extension office so that consumer horticulture activities and programs can be more effectively and efficiently delivered to Ohio's gardening public.

MGV trainees receive formal training provided by their county Extension Educator covering a wide range of pertinent horticultural topics. To become a certified MGV, the trainee must complete the training program coursework, pass the required quizzes, exam, project, or coursework with a grade of 70% (or equivalent) and above and volunteer 50 hours of service to OSU Extension on projects determined by the Extension Educator.

The volunteer commitment may be fulfilled in several different ways depending on the needs of the county residents as determined by the county Extension Educator. After the completion of the initial required training and volunteer hours, one is considered a certified OSUE MGV. Volunteers are encouraged to continue with the program by recertifying and assisting with the horticulture program as a certified OSUE MGV.

The OSUE MGV Program is supported on the state level by the OSU Extension Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR) program area. The State MGV Program Director and Program Manager, along with the guidance of a State MGV Advisory Committee develops policies and guidelines for the operation of the program; develops and implements the state support budget; provides training and recognition materials; schedules in-service opportunities; and develops other resources for counties conducting the program. On the county level, the ANR Educator is responsible for the program directly and can supervise a staff program manager or coordinator or volunteer coordinator to assist with the day-to-day management activities.

**TRAINING**

The formal training program is the responsibility of the county Extension Educator. Instructors are The Ohio State University (OSU) faculty, Extension Specialists, Extension Associates, Extension professionals, experienced MGVs, and other experts.

The training program is to provide a balanced, integrated practical course in plant science. Core topics that are required to be part of the training in every county are orientation to Extension and the MGV program; basic botany and plant physiology; soils and fertilizers; basic entomology; basic plant pathology and plant diagnostics; integrated pest management and pesticide use and safety; and good agricultural practices. Additional topics may include any content in the OSUE MGV Training Manual and other topics, based on local needs.

The principal resource for the training will be the Ohio MGV Training Manual that includes the core topics and material appropriate to Ohio. Training can be face to face in a classroom or a hybrid model with online training using Scarlet Canvas; and at least three face-to-face sessions. Training is held at the discretion of the Extension Educator, with continuing education or in-service training provided during the year in accordance with county and regional needs and resources. An annual statewide conference is offered to assist in fulfilling continuing education requirements, providing program updates, and presenting state MGV awards.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Each MGV trainee is expected to attend every class session. The trainee is responsible for initiating provisions to make up any missed sessions. A limit on the number of allowable absences may be made by the county Extension Educator.

## **ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION**

Each trainee must pass all quizzes, exams, projects, etc. with a cumulative average of 70% or better. There may be homework, quizzes a final open-book or take-home exam, a project or a presentation that test the trainees' knowledge of broad plant science principles or project and the abilities to retrieve correct research-based information from reference materials. Other assignments to enhance training may be required at the discretion of the county Extension Educator offering the training.

## **CERTIFICATION**

Upon entering the training program, each trainee becomes an MGV intern. Upon fulfillment of the training classes and the 50-hour volunteer commitment, the participant will receive an official MGV certificate and will be considered a certified OSUE MGV.

## **VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT**

The MGV training course consists of a minimum of 50 hours of instruction. A volunteer then completes 50 hours of service to OSUE to become a certified OSUE MGV. Only unpaid public service in OSUE-sponsored activities counts toward the requirement. Other volunteer activities may be counted after receiving prior approval by the local Extension Educator. The required volunteer hours should be completed within one year of completion of the training course or other time as designated by the county Extension Educator.

Each MGV will complete an application, an online background check or fingerprint background check if required, a signed OSUE Standards of Behavior, a signed Pest Management Information Policy (see below), a signed Abuse Recognition and Reporting Form, and have a service record kept in Hands on Connect (HoC) (volunteer management tracking system). OSUE MGVs and interns are responsible for tracking the hours they earn while volunteering for OSUE. Tracking volunteer time is critical for measuring the impact of our program. The data helps inform if we are meeting our mission. Additionally, we can understand internally where we are making the most impact and determine how much OSU MGVs' services are saving OSUE in time and dollars each year and how much they are contributing to their community. If an MGV or intern is unable to enter their hours, their Extension Educator may do so on their behalf.

This information is treated confidentially. Volunteers' records are kept in separate files in a secured place and are accessible only by trained Extension professionals. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to make sure that the information on their application (i.e., address, phone, email) 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. Note: OSUE replies to any public records requests as required by law.

## **USE OF THE TITLE**

The title “Ohio State University Extension Master Gardener Volunteer” is to be used only and exclusively in the OSUE MGV program. OSUE MGVs are expected to identify themselves as such only when doing unpaid public service work under the auspices of OSUE. MGVs are advised not to advertise their place of business during Extension-sponsored activities and are not to be listed as MGVs on the advertisements of businesses that they own or where they are employed. Since OSUE is a source of unbiased, research-based information, appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or giving implied University endorsement of any product or place of business is prohibited.

MGVs shall not engage in any activity (paid or unpaid) that creates the perception that OSU Extension endorses the products or services of any organization or business.

## **PESTICIDE RECOMMENDATIONS**

OSUE MGVs, when performing MGV activities, are considered unpaid staff of OSUE. MGVs are trained by Extension personnel and other experts and are provided with Extension publications. In addition to their training, MGVs receive diagnostic support from the C. Wayne Ellet Plant and Pest Diagnostic Clinic at OSU, and from various Extension specialists. When it is necessary to make recommendations that include the use of pesticides, MGVs must follow product labels or OSUE recommendations. They are not to rely on their own personal experience, that of others, or common garden folklore. OSUE MGVs are not permitted to entertain any potential herbicide complaints in the county; this must be referred to the county Extension Educator.

## **RECERTIFICATION**

Once an individual has completed the necessary requirements and is certified as an OSUE MGV, he or she is not automatically a MGV for life. MGVs must be recertified each year to remain on the “active or active Emeritus (see below)” list and maintain the MGV title; in addition, if they do not recertify each year, they are not eligible for OSUE liability insurance protection and the background check is null and void. MGV Recertification is achieved by fulfilling the following requirements:

- 1) Completing a minimum of twenty (20) hours of volunteer service each year, and
- 2) Completing a minimum of ten (10) hours continuing education by any of the following options:
  - \* Participation in State, Regional, National or International MGV Conferences.
  - \* Participation in county or district sponsored- continuing education sessions.
  - \* Participation in any other programs approved by the local MGV Coordinator for recertification.
- 3) Paying \$15.00 per year State Support fee.
- 4) Completing MGV program recertification online annually that consists of reviewing the MGV Standards of Behavior, Pest Management Policy, Abuse Recognition and Reporting form, and other OSUE policies.
- 5) For those counties in which there are projects that involve working with minors in a care custody and control situation must complete a criminal fingerprint background check every four years; this varies by county.

Note: Each county MGV program may set its own recertification standards above and beyond these minimum requirements.

## **INACTIVE STATUS**

An inactive MGV is one who is unable to commit to the annual recertification requirements listed above at some point in time but would like the opportunity to remain in the program and recertify in the future. The following policy applies:

- 1) To request Inactive Status the MGV must be in good standing, having completed the original commitment of training, exam, and volunteer service.
- 2) The inactive MGV must obtain ten (10) hours of acceptable Continuing Education Credits during the total inactive time period. (See Recertification #2)

3) An inactive MGV may recertify within three (3) years as long as the above criteria are met. Individuals on inactive status for more than three years must, in addition to meeting the above continuing education requirements, complete an online or fingerprint criminal background check and complete any additional county requirements as determined by the Extension Educator.

## **RESIGNED**

A volunteer who has left the program due to termination, resignation, death, or other reason will be considered RESIGNED. They are no longer a volunteer for the OSUE MGV program.

## **EMERITUS**

This status and any associated criteria are left up to each individual county Extension Educator to determine using state guidelines. However, if the county allows Emeriti to volunteer for any activities, they are considered an Active Emeriti. To qualify for the OSUE liability insurance, Active Emeriti must pay the state support fees, recertify annually as an Active Emeritus, and report volunteer hours and activities in Hands on Connect. If the Active Emeriti volunteer is active in working with youth in a care, custody, and control capacity, they must complete a fingerprint background check every four years.

## **OUT-OF-STATE TRANSFERS**

A MGV who was certified in another state may be admitted into the Ohio MGV Program by meeting the following criteria:

- 1) obtain an online criminal background check or fingerprint background check.
- 2) show that he/she is a MGV in good standing in the other state;
- 3) complete the Volunteer Involvement packet for his/her file;
- 4) acquire a current OSUE MGV training manual;
- 5) pay the \$15.00 State Support fee;
- 6) acquire an OSUE MGV name badge;
- 7) score a minimum of 70% on a final exam administered by the OSUE County Extension Educator;
- 8) meet the recertification requirements listed above and any additional criteria established by the county Extension Educator.

## **IN-STATE TRANSFERS**

Current OSUE MGVs transferring from one county to another must also be in good standing and have their file transferred to the new county. The Extension Educator in each county should communicate through this process and make the necessary changes in Salesforce. MGV should contact their county Extension Educator, who will contact the Extension Educator in the county they wish to transfer. Each county will have different requirements for transfers.

## **DISMISSAL OF A MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER**

Volunteering for OSUE is a privilege and not a right. Disregard for the policies and guidelines established by OSUE, the state OSUE MGV program, and the OSUE County MGV Program are grounds for dismissal as an MGV. When the county Extension Educator 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.