

# Ohio Master Gardener Volunteers



## Chapter 1 Introduction to Ohio State University Extension and the Master Gardener Volunteer Program

### OSU Extension's Vision

OSU Extension is a dynamic educational entity that partners with individuals, families, communities, business and industry, and organizations to strengthen the lives of Ohioans.

### OSU Extension's Mission

Engaging people to strengthen their lives and communities through research-based educational programming.

#### In Extension, we value:

- Excellence in educational programming.
- Grassroots programs that engage local people in solving problems and addressing challenges.
- Unbiased research-based information.
- Practical education that helps people help themselves.
- Timely responses to clientele concerns.
- Credibility with clientele and funders.
- Honesty and integrity in our work.
- Teamwork within offices, with clientele, and with our educational partners.
- Flexibility/adaptability in local programming.
- Programming without discrimination, and employment of people representing the diverse population of Ohio.

### THE EXTENSION-VOLUNTEER PARTNERSHIP

Volunteers have played an important and essential role in the delivery of Extension educational programs since before the Cooperative Extension System was officially established. Some of the first pre-Smith-Lever Act "county agents" were volunteers.

The time and talent donated by volunteer educators have assisted the Cooperative Extension System to achieve stronger, more relevant programs and greater visibility in the community than could ever have been achieved by Extension agents alone.

Volunteer-supported efforts have resulted in more people reached, more communities served, and greater clientele confidence. The presence of Extension volunteer educators in the community helps the Extension professionals keep a finger on the pulse of their clientele more effectively than they would be able to do alone.

How do the volunteers benefit? Studies have shown that volunteers that receive extensive training, as in the Master Gardener volunteer (MGV) program, also receive greater satisfaction from their volunteer experience. The training your Master Gardener volunteers receive should

provide them with the basic knowledge and assurance to carry out Extension programming with confidence. Thus, as an Educator or MGCV Coordinator, you should strive to ensure top-quality training for your MGCVs.

The MGCV Program should give volunteers an opportunity to develop talents and skills, such as leadership abilities and horticulture teaching for instance. MGCVs will develop new friendships with other volunteers and possibly with program clientele. Moreover, helping others in the community is a very satisfying experience for our volunteers.

## **THE MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM GETS ITS START**

The first group of Master Gardeners to be trained by Extension specialists was in King and Pierce Counties in the state of Washington in 1972. The Extension Agent for horticulture in those counties, Dr. David Gibby, was inundated by the number of requests for gardening information that came into his office. He tried to answer questions more efficiently by using the media, but this only served to increase the volume of calls by people looking for individual attention.

Dr. Gibby then hit upon the idea of using specially trained volunteers to do outreach work in the area of home gardening. In the beginning, Extension administration was reluctant to move forward on this type of program. However, when the first group of trained volunteers started their outreach efforts, the program was deemed a success. These first 120 MGCVs served more than 7,000 clients at plant clinics during their first year.



Denise Johnson, Dr. Gibby, Pam Bennett

It was a great concept that has now spread to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Canada and South Korea. Today, nearly 100,000 volunteers have received Master Gardener training and contributed hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours to their communities.

In addition to plant clinics and garden hotlines, still a basic activity of most MGCV programs, volunteers conduct research; maintain demonstration plots; and carry out gardening projects with school groups, 4-H clubs, youth at risk, senior citizens, and other special groups. MGCVs are involved with community beautification, composting and recycling, and similar planting and environmental projects. The list of activities goes on and on.

## **THE MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM IN OHIO**

In Ohio, Franklin and Cuyahoga Counties piloted a training program and started working with MGCVs beginning in the late 1970's. These first endeavors were short-lived. In 1986, however, Cuyahoga County once again initiated the program and now has the longest continuous running MGCV program in Ohio. The program slowly began to build in northeastern and northwestern Ohio, with about 10 counties involved by 1990.

Since 1991, the presence of a State Coordinator for the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program, guided by an Advisory Committee consisting of Extension professionals and MGCVs from around the state, has added impetus to the program. In 2004, due to budget challenges, the State Coordinator position was eliminated. In 2006, it was reestablished as a .50 position. In 2016, 65 counties, rural as well as urban, are served by nearly 3,500 MGCVs.

Much of the work accomplished to date by the State Master Gardener Advisory Committee has concentrated on ensuring consistency among counties regarding how training is provided, the State MGV Awards, as well as establishing general guidelines for managing the program. The types of activities with which the MGVs are involved are still left to the discretion of the county coordinator and are based on local needs. This is crucial to the success of the overall program in Ohio.

The Advisory Committee developed State Master Gardener Policy Guidelines, Master Gardener Standards of Behavior, and the MGV Agreement that indicates how and when the title OSU Extension MGV should be used, and that "only OSU Extension-approved pesticide recommendations" may be provided to clientele. You should be familiar with these documents.

In addition to the work carried out by the Advisory Committee, the writing of the MGV training manual provided a big boost for the MGV program. The **Ohio Master Gardener Manual** was initially developed by Jack Kerrigan with considerable input from MGVs, as well as State Extension Specialists, and other Extension Educators. It is precisely suited for Ohio conditions and to our needs within the OSU Extension MGV Program. The manual was revised in 2007 with the aid of volunteers, Extension Educators, and State Specialists. It was updated again in 2014 and is in the process of being updated and completely revised in 2016.

Opportunities abound for MGVs to gather together. Continuing education opportunities, idea-sharing, and camaraderie are promoted at the annual State Conference, to which all Certified MGVs are welcome. In addition, a biannual International Master Gardener Conference is held on odd calendar years.

The MGV program is guided by the MGV mission statement and four state-wide initiatives which compliment OSU's Discover Themes. The majority of your county projects should fit into one of these Initiatives. We use this information for reporting our impact to our stakeholders.

**MGV Mission:** Ohio State University Extension trained volunteers empowered to educate others with timely research-based gardening information.

**State-wide MGV Initiatives:**

- Integrated pest management
- Invasive species
- Backyard and local foods
- Environmental horticulture

The Ohio State University Extension MGV program provides intensive training in horticulture to interested Ohio residents who then volunteer their time assisting with educational programs and activities for Ohio residents through their local OSUE county office. Volunteers are not required to have gardening skills or knowledge; a passion for learning about gardening and sharing this knowledge with others is a must.

The MGV program has been able to grow even in counties without Educators or staff support thanks to dedicated volunteers who have taken leadership for their group. Even in counties with Extension Agriculture and Natural Resource Educators, MGVs serving in the role of Volunteer Coordinator is vital in extending the reach of OSU Extension.

An annual state support fee of \$10.00 is charged per MGV in each county in order to help make the program sustainable and provide funds for recognition awards, state website management and maintenance, travel and administrative assistance, and to purchase resources to assist the county programs. Of this \$10.00, more than \$7.00 is given directly back to the MGV program.

## **Resources:**

*Volunteer Management System (VMS)* is our online system for record keeping, emailing groups, posting newsletter and resources as well as miscellaneous program needs and communications. Annual MGV Recertification is required and is handled electronically to ensure a yearly review of the Standards of Behavior, Pest Management Policy, OSU volunteer policies and confirmation of meeting the program requirements for volunteer hours and continuing education requirements.

*MGV Training Manual* is used for the 50 hours of training required for new intern MGVs. It is presently under revision and expansion.

*Monthly MGV County Coordinator Conference Calls (3rd Wednesday of each month unless otherwise noted, 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.)* to discuss important updates and disseminate new information. Periodically there is another hour added to the call (11-12) that features a Volunteer Management topic for Coordinators with guest speakers to help Coordinators build volunteer management skills.

*Monthly New MGV Coordinator Chat (4th Thursday of each month unless otherwise noted, 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.)* are set up as open discussion. New Coordinators (and any others who want to attend) can pose any volunteer management question, suggestion, tip, etc.

*State MGV Advisory Committee* consists of representatives from around the state and meets four times a year to work with the State Coordinator and Program Manager to discuss new developments, brainstorm, and share information for the advancement of the program. The Committee consists of Educators, staff, and volunteers from every region of the state. There is a three year term of service to allow an influx of new participants. Requests to fill positions come out in November.

*MGV Awards and Recognition Program* is held annually as part of the State MGV Conference. Individual volunteers, staff and projects are recognized with plaques and monetary awards for their programs. State funds are used to support the awards program.

*State MGV Conference* is held annually and hosted by a different county or group of counties each year. This is an opportunity for MGVs to host a major conference and for MGVs to meet and share ideas.

*MGV Coordinator's Volunteer Management Workshop* is held annually to assist County MGV Coordinators in developing skills needed to effectively and successfully manage volunteers.

*MGV State Coordinators' Conference* is held annually in November to review successes, discuss challenges, and provide information and resources needed to prepare MGV Coordinators for a new program year.

## **Statewide MGV Projects/Activities**

There are a variety of projects at the county level designed to engage MGVs. In addition, there are a few statewide projects and activities in which MGVs can participate. This is up to the discretion of the County MGV Coordinator. You can determine if you have enough MGVs and manpower for local projects and allow for MGVs to participate at the Statewide level. These activities and hours are also reported in the VMS.

*Ask a MGV (AaMGV).* MGVs from around the state are trained online to provide timely responses to home gardening questions that come into an Extension website in order to free up Educators' and staff time. AaMGV also helps counties who do not have an ANR Educator by providing local clientele a service. The focus of the AaMGV program is to provide outstanding customer service and research-based responses within 2 business days; ideally in less than 24 hours.

This team of MGVs answered over 280 questions during the months of May and June 2015 representing over 60% of all of the responses to Ohio questions in the national eXtension Ask an Expert service. AaMGV started in 2012 and since that time has grown to a group of over 80 qualified and specially trained volunteers to respond to online questions. Advanced continuing education is provided annually to AaMGVs through 8 to 10 online current-issue webinars with OSUE specialists as well as diagnostic walkabouts when possible. These webinars are recorded and provided to all MGVs for their continued education.

An AaMGV display is available and can be used in your county to promote the online service. It is also taken to the Farm Science Review, Home and Garden Shows as well other public events. Volunteers typically are on-hand to answer gardening questions and to provide science-based resources.

*Ohio Governor's Residence through the Ohio Heritage Garden Ambassador Program.* In 2006 we developed a relationship with the former First Lady, Hope Taft. We planted the meadow garden at the residence and have a partnership through the Ambassador program. MGVs in counties are recommended by their County Coordinator to serve as an Ambassador (only one person per county). These Ambassadors are then trained at the Governor's residence regarding the native plants located at the garden. Their responsibility is to return to their county to present a PowerPoint program about the Heritage Garden.

The relationship with Hope Taft led to a collaborative effort to provide an international service and learning opportunity for Ohio MGVs. Beginning in 2013 a group of MGVs have traveled each year to Otavalo Ecuador with the Tandana Foundation to help local indigenous communities with reforestation and water erosion and quality issues through the propagation of native trees at their community nursery. Other activities include teaching local school children, planting beans, potatoes and maize and assisting wherever community projects dictate. Cultural activities, sightseeing and horticultural tours are also included.

The Ohio MGV Program is vital but fluid and ever changing. Conversations and planning are continuous to keep the program up-to-date to meet the changing needs of Ohio residents and to stay current as volunteer trends change. Many of our volunteers are connected in their community and serve as stakeholders for OSUE. We rely on them in times of budget issues in the county as well as at the state level.

## **About OSU Extension**

(We thank the Ohio 4-H Volunteer Handbook and Kirk Bloir for permission to use portions of the following materials.)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuP5o\\_i4Hk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuP5o_i4Hk)

## Ohio State University Extension

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### What is Extension?

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Ohio State University Extension brings the knowledge of the university directly to you. We fulfill the land-grant mission of The Ohio State University by interpreting knowledge and research developed by Extension and other faculty and staff at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Ohio State main campus, and other land-grant universities – so Ohioans can use the scientifically based information to better their lives, businesses and communities.

The Extension system is the world's largest non-formal educational system. Extension's hallmark is programming delivered by professionals to address the needs of the local community while also addressing state, national, and global issues. Our ... [Read more](#)

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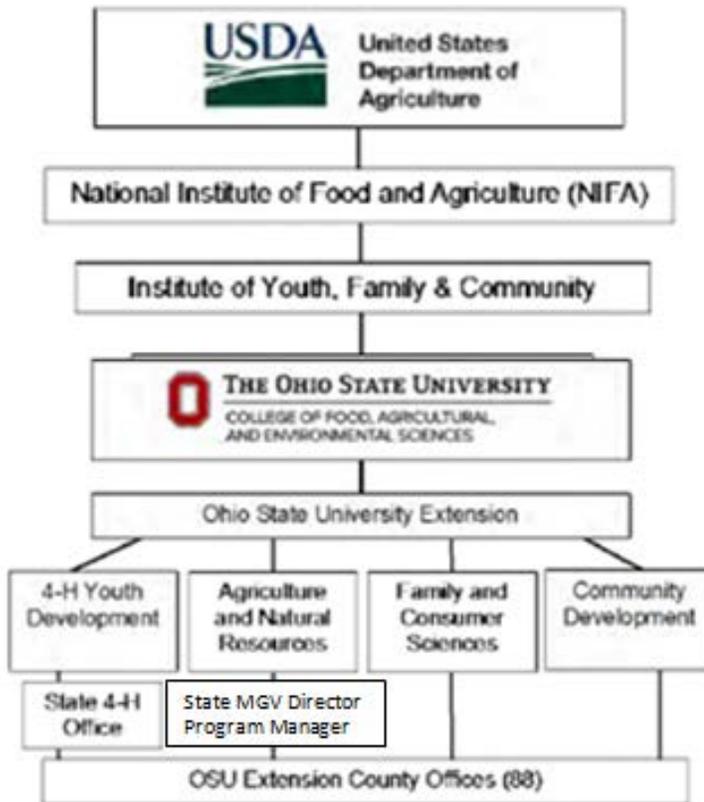
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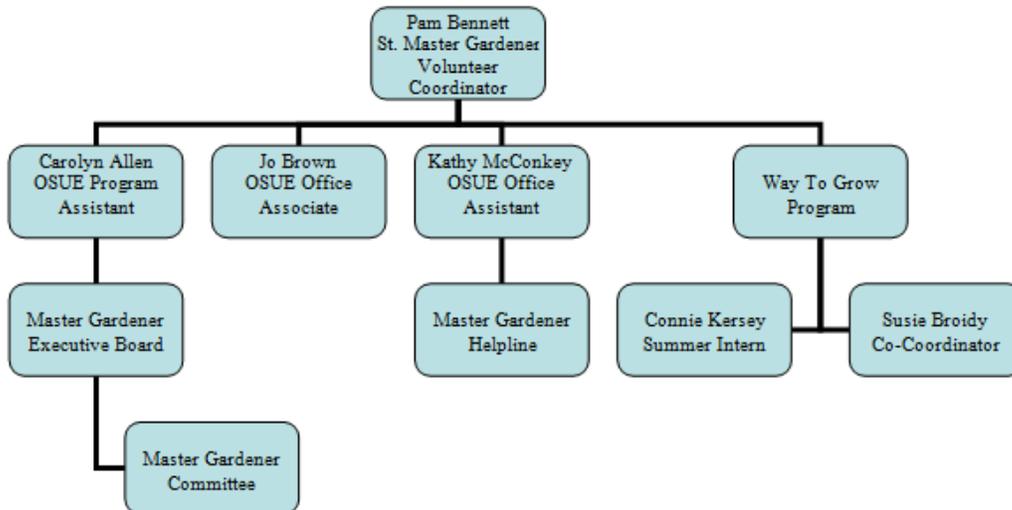
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## Organization Chart

Here is an organizational chart showing where the Ohio MGV Program fits into the big picture.



Here is an example of a County organizational structure. Every county is unique but it is helpful to understand the management hierarchy. Make an organizational chart for your MGV program so that everyone is clear on the reporting protocols.



## REPORTING

MGVs are responsible for reporting their hours in the VMS. A Statewide report is pulled each January and data is then distributed to our stakeholders. It is critical that you encourage your MGVs to enter their hours and contacts in the VMS. This is usually a challenge as people don't usually want to worry about their hours. They are volunteering because they want to help the community. However, keeping our relevance to our stakeholders is critical to the ongoing success of this program. Continue to stress the importance of turning in MGVs hours. Below is the annual report from 2015 that is shared with Extension Administration as well as legislators and stakeholders. You can use the template to insert specific county information in order to share with County Commissioners and your stakeholders.

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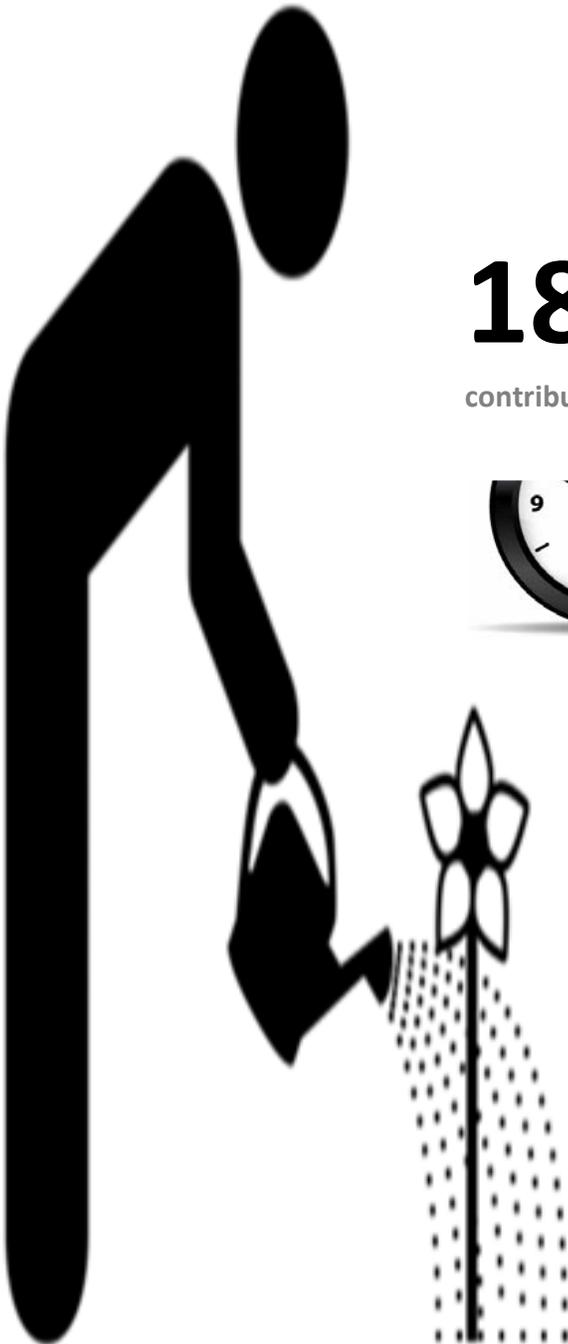


# Making a Difference

The value of MGV services in Ohio

**\$4.2 Million**

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in 2015

Using the current national estimated dollar value of volunteer time of \$23.07 per hour, from Independent Sector.

**184,187+** hours

contributed by MGVs to OSUE and their communities in 2015



**45,644+** hours

advanced training by MGVs in 2015

**2,927**



Master Gardener Volunteers certified for 2015

**280**



New Master Gardener Volunteers trained in 2015



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES