

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County

Master Gardener Volunteer Program

Policy Statements

Including qualifications, requirements, and steps to become a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer in Erie County New York.

I) Program Mission

The mission of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteer program is to support Cornell Cooperative Extension by utilizing research-based information to educate the public on best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship.

II) Program Overview

Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners are volunteers who support Cornell Cooperative Extension's educational programs in consumer horticulture. They develop their horticultural expertise through participation in educational programs conducted by Cornell University faculty and Cooperative Extension staff. The county Extension Educator/coordinator provides diagnostic support for horticultural issues and questions to Master Gardener volunteers actively participating in the program. Extension publications, teaching materials, and other program support materials are provided as deemed appropriate by campus and county educators. Information presented by Master Gardeners must be consistent with Cornell Cooperative Extension recommendations concerning various aspects of consumer horticulture.

III) Cornell Cooperative Extension Association Volunteer Code of Conduct

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Volunteers are required to accept and adhere to the following standards of behavior when engaged in assigned volunteer activities.

- Respect and adhere to CCE rules, policies and guidelines that relate to the volunteer activity and program I serve.
- Execute CCE business in an ethical manner.
- Preserve the confidentiality of information (and sign confidentiality agreement if required by my volunteer role) about the program participants and Cornell Cooperative Extension internal affairs that have been entrusted to me as affirmed by my signature on the Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement.
- Refrain from using Cornell Cooperative Extension volunteer status for personal or business financial gain.
- Fulfill assigned volunteer duties. Complete required records, evaluations, or reports in a timely manner.

- Use my time wisely and work cooperatively with Extension staff and other volunteers.
- Participate in required training programs and use the required policies and procedures.
- Accept supervision and support from professional Extension staff and/or supervisory volunteers.
- Respect and uphold the rights and dignity of all staff, other volunteers, and all individuals who participate in CCE programs recognizing that people's values, beliefs, customs and strengths differ.
- Encourage participation of and respect for individuals of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives.
- Refrain from the use of alcohol, tobacco and inappropriate language when acting in official Master Gardener Volunteer position.
- Commit no illegal or abusive act.
- Report all unsafe conditions and accidents to Cornell Cooperative Extension staff as soon as possible.

IV) Guidelines for Volunteer Participation

a) General Guidelines

- Attendance at meetings is strongly encouraged and counts as volunteer service time.
- Volunteer service for outside organizations which satisfies the requirements for participation or membership in those organizations may **not** be counted as Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteer activity, unless you are there to represent Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners.
- Master Gardener participation in non-Extension sponsored programs/activities/events without prior approval of supervising Program Educator/coordinator may or may not count as volunteer service time, at the discretion of the supervising Program Educator/coordinator.
- Travel time to and from approved Master Gardener volunteer activities counts toward volunteer service hours.
- Volunteers should wear the official Cornell Extension Master Gardener Name Badge while volunteering for Cornell Cooperative Extension.

b) Use of Title

The title "Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener" is to be used only and exclusively by an individual trained to assist Cornell Cooperative Extension. The title is valid only when the volunteer is participating in the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program. The title "Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener" is to be used only when doing **unpaid** volunteer service in a program activity approved by the supervising Program Educator/coordinator.

c) Endorsements

A Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener may not advertise his name or his place of business or be listed on the advertisements of business places as a Cornell Cooperative Extension

Master Gardener. Because the Master Gardener program is a Cornell Cooperative Extension public service program providing unbiased, research-based information, appearing as a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or implying Cornell Cooperative Extension endorsement of any product or place of business is improper and not allowed.

The training and experience gained by participating in the Cornell Cooperative Extension 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, a Master Gardener must not display credentials or give the appearance of being a Master Gardener at the place of business or in any literature, brochures, advertising, or marketing materials associated with that business, unless the business is specifically designated by the supervising Program Educator/coordinator as an approved location for a Master Gardener activity.

d) Educational Recommendations

When making recommendations, which include the use of fertilizers and pesticides, a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener must follow current Cooperative Extension recommendations. Horticultural problems which are not specifically covered by Extension recommendations should be referred to an Extension educator or Extension specialist. Questions concerning commercial production of crops and pest control on such crops must be referred to an Extension educator or Extension specialist.

Written materials (news releases, newsletters, fact sheets, etc.) prepared by a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener must be reviewed and approved by supervising Extension staff prior to release or publication.

V) Volunteer Qualifications

- See CCE Master Gardener Program Volunteer Position Description.
- Strong interest and knowledge in horticulture as evidenced by scoring a minimum of 70% on a final exam administered by Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Willingness and availability to undertake extensive training in horticulture.
- Dedication and willingness to perform the required hours of volunteer service for Cornell Cooperative Extension.
- Ability to communicate in an effective, diplomatic, and professional manner with others by telephone, personal contact, group contact, email, and in writing.
- Willingness to support Cornell Cooperative Extension staff in providing Extension audiences with unbiased, research-based consumer horticulture information.

VI) Basic Training

In Erie County, the Master Gardener Basic Training Course is offered regularly based on community interest. Notice of courses will be shared with those who have indicated an interest in participating. If you are interested in being part of a future course, email cae83@cornell.edu. Links to sample application materials are provided below.

County Master Gardener programs offer a comprehensive basic training. Each trainee is expected to attend all core classes with any missed sessions to be made up at the discretion of supervising CCE Educator/coordinator.

Volunteer Preparation Classes Cover:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension System Orientation and Policies including Risk Management and Crisis Management
- CCE Erie County Association Orientation including Program oversight by staff and local policies
- Master Gardener Program Orientation
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Technical topics covered may include:

- Communicating Scientific Information
- Botany
- Pesticides and Pest Management
- Basics of Entomology
- Plant Diseases
- Soils and Fertilizers
- Turfgrass Management
- The Vegetable Garden
- Pruning Ornamental Plants
- Composting
- Woody Ornamentals
- Native Plants
- Invasive Species
- Weeds
- Herbs
- Annuals
- Perennials
- Growing Fruit at Home
- Sustainable gardening concepts and practices are included as an integrated component throughout basic training. Weekly or occasional quizzes may be administered at the discretion of supervising Program Educator/coordinator.

VII) Completing Program Apprenticeship

To become a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener ‘Active’ Volunteer, in Erie County each trainee must complete the following requirements upon successful completion of core volunteer preparation:

- Pass the final examination with a minimum score of 70% within one year of completing the training.
- Complete any county-required activities (e.g., post-training presentations, office orientation, additional training workshops, etc).

- Fulfill the 2-year 100-hour volunteer service commitment. Submit volunteer hour record form to Program Educator/coordinator by date established based on the ending date of the Basic Training.
- Trainees may begin to volunteer as soon as training classes begin, with supervision from an Active Master Gardener Volunteer.
- Pay annual program dues as established by the Master Gardener steering committee for all applicable dues cycles of their apprenticeship.

Upon successful completion, the trainee is awarded a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener certificate of completion of the program training requirements. The title CCE Master Gardener Volunteer is valid only while the individual is participating in the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program. To remain a Program volunteer, participants must annually make a commitment to continue in the Program as outlined in Section VIII. When an individual ceases active participation in the program by not meeting the requirements as described in this document, his or her designation as a Cornell Extension Master Gardener becomes void. An individual not continuing in the program should be aware that continued representation as a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener is a violation of the original commitment made to Cornell Cooperative Extension.

VIII) Master Gardener Volunteer Status

a) Titles Used in the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program

- **Master Gardener Volunteer Trainee** - through completion of core preparation.
- **Master Gardener Volunteer Apprentice** - from completion of basic training through completion of initial volunteer service. See requirements in Section VII.
- **Active Master Gardener Volunteer** - active in the program, meeting annual volunteer requirements.
- **Semi-Active Master Gardener** - see guidelines below.
- **On-Leave Master Gardener** - see guidelines below
- **Lifetime Master Gardener** - Status is to be bestowed to a Master Gardener who has served with distinction and retired with 25 or more years of exemplary service; title with status awarded after nomination or recommendation by the steering committee and acceptance by supervising Program Educator/coordinator. Emeritus members are exempt from the annual service, and education requirements. Annual dues are still required. They are entitled to attend monthly meetings, scheduled events, and tours. They may not vote, serve on committees, or hold elected offices. An Emeritus member cannot be returned to active status. Emeritus status may be bestowed posthumously.
- **Honorary Master Gardener or Master Gardener Friend** - may be granted to an individual who is not a Master Gardener for outstanding service to the program.

b) Active Status Guidelines

- Commit to a minimum of thirty (30) hours of volunteer service to be completed each year; see Volunteer Activities and Guidelines for Volunteer Participation (Sections X and IV) below.

- Complete ten (10) hours of approved continuing education (CE) each year; see Guidelines below. At least five (5) of the ten (10) required continuing education hours must be Extension affiliated programming.
- Submit volunteer hour record form to Program Educator/coordinator by October 15th.
- Hours beyond the minimum requirement for annual volunteer service and annual continuing education may not be carried over to the following year.
- Exceptions to the requirements to maintain Active Volunteer status may be granted for hardship or extenuating circumstances at the discretion of supervising Program Educator/coordinator. See description of Semi-Active and On-Leave status below.
- Pay annual program dues as established by the Master Gardener steering committee.

c) Semi-Active Status Guidelines

- Commit to a minimum of twenty (20) hours of volunteer service to be completed each year; see Volunteer Activities and Guidelines for Volunteer Participation (Sections X and IV) below.
- Complete ten (10) hours of approved continuing education (CE) each year; see Guidelines below. At least five (5) of the ten (10) required continuing education hours must be Extension affiliated programming.
- Submit volunteer hour record form to Program Educator/coordinator by October 15th.
- Pay annual program dues as established by the Master Gardener steering committee.

d) On-Leave Status Guidelines

- On-Leave status may be requested by a Master Gardener who is unable to commit to thirty (30) hours of volunteer service plus ten (10) hours of continuing education at present, but would like the opportunity to volunteer in the future.
- The request must be made in writing on the on-leave Status Request Form to the county Program Educator/coordinator or supervising Extension staff.
- Approval is at the discretion of the Program Educator/coordinator.
- A Master Gardener requesting on-leave status must be in good standing and have completed the original commitment of training, exam, and volunteer service up to the time of requesting on-leave status.
- An on-leave Master Gardener must attend ten (10) hours of acceptable continuing education for each year of on-leave status and pay annual dues. (See Section IX for examples of continuing education, CE.)
- An on-leave Master Gardener may return to the Program within two (2) years as long as the above criteria are met.
- An individual on on-leave status for more than two (2) years is required to retake the basic Master Gardener training. A fee for tuition may be assessed to cover the basic training costs.

e) Transfers

i. Out of State

- A Master Gardener who has successfully completed a Master Gardener training course and is currently in good standing with a program in another state may be admitted to the Master Gardener program at the discretion of the supervising Program Educator/coordinator and by meeting the following criteria:

- Volunteer screening required at the “Enrolled Volunteer” level due to long term and higher risk nature of the year long, sometimes unsupervised volunteer activity. This level of volunteer screening includes a criminal background check, application, interview and reference check.
- Provide proof of completion of an out-of-state or basic training program and verify current status within that Master Gardener Program.
- At the discretion of the Program Educator/coordinator may be required to take the Master Gardener Basic Training and successfully complete the examination.
- Acquire a current Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener training manual. A fee for program materials may be assessed.
- Acquire a Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener name badge. A fee for materials may be assessed.

ii. Within New York

A CCE Master Gardener Volunteer in good standing in another county may transfer to the Erie County Program at the discretion of the supervising Program Educator/coordinator. Written notice by the Program Educator/coordinator from the county which the volunteer is transferring from must be provided stating that the Volunteer who requests the transfer is active and in good standing. Refresher training may be required at the discretion of the Program coordinator. If a Program Educator/coordinator is not available to make this determination, the Program’s Steering Committee Apprentice Advisor may make the determination.

IX) Guidelines for Continuing Education (CE)

- At least five (5) of the ten (10) hours must be Cooperative Extension-affiliated programming.
- Examples of continuing education are: basic Master Gardener training; advanced Master Gardener training; state, regional, and international Master Gardener conferences; approved university and/or community college courses; arboretum and/or botanical garden seminars and conferences; webinars; approved Extension-sponsored seminars and conferences; and Federation of Garden Club courses.
- For events organized by entities other than our county or state Master Gardener Program, continuing education training must be pre-approved as acceptable by supervising Program Educator/coordinator.
- Only actual instructional hours may be counted toward the annual continuing education requirement. Travel, lunch, or break times are not included in continuing education hours.

X) Guidelines for Projects or Activities

- **All activities should be approved by the county Program Educator/coordinator.** (In the absence of the Program Educator/coordinator or other designated staff, the Steering Committee Vice President will work with fellow committee members to approve volunteer projects and activities.)

- Projects should align to the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program mission and be listed as an acceptable activity in the guidance that follows in this section.
- There must be an educational purpose and/or teaching component to all approved projects or activities.
- Projects will strive as much as possible to reach diverse Erie County audiences and be accessible to all residents.
- If the project involves producing a tangible resource or educational piece, the project should not duplicate other recent efforts of Program volunteers.
- Approved projects should be open to the participation of any interested Master Gardener volunteer unless permission to vary from this requirement is given by the Program Educator/coordinator.

Examples of **ACCEPTABLE** activities are:

1. Answer consumer/home gardener's telephone and email inquiries and assist Cornell Cooperative Extension office visitors with plant and insect samples for identification or diagnosis, and give general pesticide recommendations (Garden Hotline).
2. Assist with Cornell Cooperative Extension educational programming, such as talks for local organizations, Cornell Cooperative Extension-sponsored workshops, exhibits, displays, etc.
3. Write research-based gardening and horticultural information for fact sheets, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, etc.
4. Design or assist with establishing and maintaining **educational** demonstration gardens, such as community, healing, school, pollinator, and Cornell Cooperative Extension office gardens.
5. Develop or assist with community-based environmental stewardship projects, including community composting
6. Assist teachers, 4-H volunteers and youth, and/or children with gardening education projects.
7. Conduct/teach horticultural related clinics, pruning, or other demonstrations at Cornell Cooperative Extension offices, local libraries, farmers markets, government centers, fairs, expos, garden clubs, civic groups, community events, flower shows, etc.
8. Teach about use of culinary herbs.
9. Teach Master Gardener training sessions.
10. Serve on municipal street tree/shade tree committee.
11. Create or prepare visuals/graphics, such as posters, flyers, program announcements, table top displays for horticultural programs and/or publications.
12. Host, produce, or appear as guest on radio/TV and/or use station's radio/TV equipment.
13. Photograph Cornell Cooperative Extension/Master Gardener events.
14. Solicit donations and/or sponsorships to benefit the Master Gardener program.
15. Haul materials such as plants, program displays, soil clinic totes or other materials in his/her own vehicle in support of Cornell Cooperative Extension projects.
16. Provide assistance to horticultural therapy programs for people with emotional/physical/mental disabilities, nursing homes, hospitals, state/county prisons, youth detention centers.
17. Organize and/or lead educational bus trips/tours and garden tours related to horticulture.
18. Open his/her garden to the public for educational tours/demonstration.

19. Assist with data collection, testing, and evaluating new varieties for vegetable, turf, ornamentals, and/or flowers research projects.
20. Assist with or organize horticultural files in Cornell Cooperative Extension office.
21. Serve on Cornell Cooperative Extension Association Board, Cornell Cooperative Extension Advisory committees or as liaison between the Cornell Cooperative Extension office and municipal officials.
22. Assist with fundraisers approved by supervising Cornell Cooperative Extension staff.
23. Conduct other activities as determined by local needs and the prior approval of supervising Cornell Cooperative Extension staff.

The following activities are **NOT ACCEPTABLE** for Master Gardener volunteer service:

1. Develop and deliver training for garden center employees, ground manager, and nursery personnel, unless approved by Cornell Cooperative Extension.
2. Teach pruning to municipal tree trimmer (arborist).
3. Design gardens/landscapes for schools or communities that are **non-educational**.
4. Maintenance of garden for schools, civic groups, communities.
5. Organize community garden club.
6. Establish and manage a farmers market.
7. Glean fields/orchards for distribution to food bank.
8. Teach or make recommendations about the use of medicinal herbs.
9. Any activity that has not been approved by the Program Educator/coordinator supervising the Master Gardener Volunteer program.

XI) Recognition of Volunteer Service

- Successful Completion of Master Gardener Basic Training and Exam – Program Name Tag
- Successful Completion of Master Gardener Apprenticeship – Certificate of Completion
- Volunteers will be recognized as follows for each year that they fulfill the annual requirements for their volunteer status starting from the date that they began their internship or apprenticeship:
 - Three Years of Service –Green Lapel Pin
 - Five Years of Service – Red Lapel Pin
 - Ten Years of Service – Blue Lapel Pin
 - 15 or 20 Years of Service – White Lapel Pins
 - 25 Years of Service – Lifetime Member (See IX. Master Gardener Status)

XII) Financial and Liability Information

a. Fees

To cover the cost of the training manual and supplies, a non-refundable fee determined by the Cornell Cooperative Extension county program is charged. Training may be via webinar or face-to-face as determined by each county program. The fee for the Adobe Connect state-wide training will be determined by the State Educator. The fee for face-to-face county specific training will be determined by the county program. Individual counties may charge additional fees to cover meeting room rental, travel expenses for instructors, or other costs.

These additional fees are itemized and kept to a minimum. Upon an individual's acceptance into the Master Gardener program, this fee is paid to the local county Cornell Cooperative Extension office or to the Master Gardener program as per county policy.

Cooperative Extension programs are open to all regardless of their ability to pay. Provisions must be made to reduce or waive fees when an individual is unable to pay.

b. Cash Handling Procedures for Program Events

i. Plant Sale

Start-up money for the Plant Sale (\pm \$100) will be provided from Program petty cash for opening, and retained from the previous day's cash for the second day of the Plant Sale. The Plant Sale chair/co-chair will be in charge of safekeeping the cash box prior to and during the event. Whoever receives the money and cashbox will sign acceptance at the time it is received and a designated slip will be kept in the *firebox* in the office.

Plant sale monies will be taken from the cash box for counting by the Plant Sale chair, co-chair, or CCE Program Staff person. These funds will be counted by two people, the amount written across the sealed envelope in such a way that tampering would be evident, and signed by the two people counting.

The CCE Program Staff person will take monies collected during the day from the Sale for safe keeping in a locked location. The CCE Program Staff will turn all deposits in to the CCE office at the end of each Plant Sale day.

Once at the CCE office, the funds will be handled as normal during regular business hours per the Association Cash Handling policies.

ii. Other Outreach and Events

For other outreach or events (examples – Speaker's Bureau, Soil Clinics), all funds collected should be submitted to the county office staff within two weeks of event (or sooner if possible) with receipts if applicable. For larger events, procedures should be developed with the Program Educator/coordinator similar to those provided for the Plant Sale above.

c. Liability Insurance

Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteers are insured under the P.W. Wood & Son, Inc. general liability insurance policy. Coverage applies only to individual volunteers while performing volunteer activities for Cornell Cooperative Extension. The coverage does not extend to other organizations or groups with which a Master Gardener volunteer is working. A volunteer must not sign contracts or leases assuming liability responsibility on behalf of other organizations or groups. All contracts or "Facilities Use" agreements that require a CCE Association Executive Director signature must be reviewed by the Wood's office prior to signing. Contract submission must follow approved protocols and appropriate paperwork as identified by Cornell Cooperative Extension policy.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Association Liability insurance protects you from bodily injury and/or property damage claims made against you as a Master Gardener program volunteer by other parties who claimed you caused their injury or damage but only when you are acting within the scope of your assigned volunteer responsibilities. If you have personal insurance (e.g. Homeowners, Renters, or Personal Umbrella) that includes liability coverage for volunteer activities, the Association's general liability program will act as excess coverage for you. If you do not have such personal insurance, the Cooperative Extension Association's General Liability Program will apply provided the incident is within the scope of insurance coverage.

d) Speaking Engagements

When a Cornell Extension Master Gardener speaks before a group on a horticultural topic, it is permissible for him or her to accept reimbursement for expenses and/or gift donations to the county Master Gardener fund. However, a Master Gardener is not allowed to seek personal paid speaking engagements while participating in an approved CCE function and while using the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener title.

In all cases, the county CCE office policy on speaking engagement fees must be honored, provided it complies with the guidelines described above. When a Master Gardener travels outside of his or her home base county for a speaking engagement, it is allowable to request reimbursement for travel expenses from the county CCE office requesting the Master Gardener's services.

All reimbursements and gifts must be deposited directly into the Master Gardener's home base county Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Program account. Checks must be made payable to "CCE.". Checks must be turned over to the office administrative assistant in a timely fashion for deposit into the county CCE office program account.

e) Background Check Policy

Master Gardener volunteers are at the 'enrolled volunteer' level – long term (one year) and higher risk, representing CCE without staff or supervising volunteers and working with vulnerable audiences. At this level, new volunteers are required to complete an application, interview, and provide references from two unrelated individuals. For volunteers who will drive as part of their role, a motor vehicle driving record check must be completed. The personal information gathered on volunteers to conduct the screening is treated as confidential, restricted to the screening company and a small number of staff. This information is not shared with the insurance company or any other outside party.

f) Clearance for Work with Youth and Other At-Risk Populations

A Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener must provide a safe environment by not harming youth or adults in any way, whether through discrimination, sexual harassment, physical force, verbal or mental abuse, neglect, or other harmful action. A Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener must commit no illegal or abusive act. At-risk populations include senior and disabled individuals.

- When Master Gardeners are sponsoring and presenting youth programs, two or more "authorized" adults with background clearances must be in attendance.
- A Master Gardener desiring to work in conjunction with 4-H programming will fall under 4-H guidelines for volunteer screening.
- The cost of volunteer background clearances will be covered by county Master Gardener program funds or individual Master Gardeners.