Volunteer Handbook

2017
FORWARD

The Master Gardener Volunteer program was conceived at Washington State University. It was the answer to insufficient staff to answer home gardener horticulture questions. The Master Gardener Volunteer program has been replicated in the United States, Canada and Europe. The term “Master Gardeners” comes from the German “gartenmeisters,” who were highly respected horticulturists in their communities. Master Gardener volunteers are a cadre of university trained volunteers who provide “the face of Oklahoma State University” across our state.

Each Master Gardener Volunteer program is unique in many ways. This handbook is intended to take the mystery out of how our program is structured and to provide general answers and policies for OSU’s Extension Master Gardeners.

OSU Extension programs are based on a philosophy of partnership. All program staff and volunteers work together to share vision, ideas and responsibility for program success. Leadership roles and decision-making are shared along prescribed guidelines. This structured yet dynamic partnership allows Extension staff and volunteers to work together in planning and implementing programs.

Master Gardener volunteers are valued program partners and considered unpaid educators of Oklahoma State University. They represent an outstanding example of land-grant university outreach as they serve their local communities, the county and the state.

Each partner should know that the program is strengthened with the cooperation and support of the other partners. Active communication between partners is essential. For the partnership to be successful there must be a balance of trust, credibility, truth and accountability.

Volunteers are valued partners whose service is vital to the educational mission of Oklahoma State University. Frankly, we could not serve our county adequately without you. Thank you for your passion, your participation, and your support.

Annie Napier

ABOUT OSU COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

Oklahoma State University is mandated by state and federal law to target concerns and issues of importance to Oklahoma. It does so through the Oklahoma State University’s Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (DASNR), which is dedicated to making available research-based information relevant to improving the quality of life for the people of Oklahoma. The Division is comprised of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and two state agencies: the Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station and the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. The Division conducts basic and applied research, develops new technologies and scientific practices and then proactively assures the innovations are provided to the public through Extension programs.

OSU Extension brings the university to the people in their communities. It “extends” the knowledge of the land-grant university beyond the campus borders throughout the state.

Mission Statement of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES)

OCES county educators and area, district and state specialists develop research-based educational programs to help Oklahomans solve local issues and concerns, promote leadership and manage resources wisely. Programs focus on:

• Increasing opportunities for agricultural enterprises
• Natural resources and environmental management
• Food, nutrition, health and safety education
• Youth, family and community development

OCES is the engagement enterprise of the university serving the people of Oklahoma and the global society in which we live. Our close relationships within communities allow us to deliver personalized education that challenges and inspires individuals. We create, interpret and deliver knowledge to society that improves the health and well-being of individuals and the environment, fuels our state’s economy and enhances and enriches our communities.
OCES is important to the state because:
- We work in partnership with communities to identify issues that the university's research and knowledge bases can address. Application of new knowledge and technologies contributes to the economic and cultural vitality of the state.
- As part of Oklahoma State University, we provide unbiased, research-based information that gives people the knowledge to improved their health and livelihoods.
- We deliver educational programs that are adapted to critical needs in the community. As a result, outcomes are long-lasting and have deep impact on the health and well-being of all citizens and the environment in which they live.
- Our presence in every county enables community members to come to OSU directly with their issues. The assistance that they receive helps them improve their lives.
- Our strong local partnerships allow us to leverage human and capital resources in order to affect action on critical issues.

OCES County Funding Sources Include:
- State of Oklahoma through Oklahoma State University;
- County government, as determined by county commissioners and council members;
- The United States Department of Agriculture through the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (USDA-CSREES);
- Fees for service;
- Donor gifts and bequests.

**ABOUT THE OCES MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM**

OCES Master Gardener (MG) Volunteers are trained volunteers who support OCES’s educational and community programs in consumer horticulture. They develop their horticultural expertise through participation in educational programs conducted by OSU faculty and OCES staff. MG Volunteers must present information consistent with OSU Cooperative Extension and other university research-based recommendations concerning all aspects of consumer horticulture.

**OCES Master Gardener Volunteer Program Funding Sources** are received through fund raising, grants, donations, and receiving fees for services.

**Addressing Critical Issues** Annually, the horticulture Program Advisory Council (PAC) comprised of MG Volunteers, industry, and community leaders provides direction for local efforts. As a public good supported by taxpayers, “Master Gardening” must remain relevant to the larger issues facing society.

**Serving Diverse Audiences** Our communities represent a diversified population. The land-grant university system was built on the principles that all people should have access to education and that the land-grant university “should serve the needs of the common person.” Master Gardeners must continue that tradition by having diversity in the volunteers who offer the programs and ensuring that the programs available serve all residents.

**Local Organizational Structure**

Master Gardener volunteers may participate in a wide variety of other OSU Extension programs such as 4-H, Blue Thumb, Master Composter, Master Naturalist, Master Wellness, and others. In addition, Master Gardeners may partner with various federal, state, city, county and local organizations.
POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Extension staff are responsible for leading and supervising the MG Volunteer program, and will provide appropriate extension publications, teaching materials, and/or other program support materials. The goal of our training is to produce quality volunteer community educators through exceptional training and ongoing support.

Criteria for Acceptance into the OSU Master Gardener Volunteer Program.

Successful applicants to the OSU Master Gardener Volunteer Program:
- Want to learn more about horticulture;
- Are eager to participate in a practical and intense training program and willing to complete assignments;
- Have enough time to attend the Basic Training and “give back” the required hours each year;
- Look forward to sharing their knowledge with people in the community.
- Have a strong volunteer ethic;

Becoming a Certified OSU Master Gardener

There are three stages in becoming a certified OSU Master Gardener: the application and interview process, completion of the basic training and the volunteer internship year.

1. The Application and Interview Process
   - Attend the Master Gardener Volunteer Orientation.
   - Complete the OSU Extension Volunteer Application Form.
   - Sign up for and attend an interview.
   - Accept an invitation to enroll in training, pay registration fee.

2. OSU Master Gardener Volunteer Basic Training
   - The OSU Master Gardener Volunteer Basic Training course is intensive and exposes volunteers to a balanced, integrated, practical course in home horticulture. A combination of lecture, problem-solving, hands-on, field trips and experiential learning methods are used during the training sessions. The exact teaching format may vary each year depending on the available resources and instructors. The training is intended to familiarize volunteers with research-based material and reference resources available from Oklahoma State University. Volunteers must attend all training sessions to be certified as a Master Gardener.

3. Volunteer Internship – After an intern attends the prescribed hours of instruction, demonstrates a strong interest in and knowledge of horticulture as evidenced by scoring a minimum of 70% on test scores, the intern then participates in an extension based internship in the calendar year following the completion of their Basic Training, beginning in January and concluding in December. The volunteer internship is when the real learning about plants and people begins—by:
   - applying the information taught when answering the telephone helpline,
   - educating others through outreach programs, providing lectures, staffing booths, organizing educational programs and conferences,
   - creating and maintaining demonstration gardens which showcase new plants, new planting methods, composting, and irrigation methods

4. Certification - Upon completion of the Basic Training and Volunteer Internship, students will become certified OSU Extension Master Gardeners.

Use of the Master Gardener Title - The complete title for volunteers from this program is “Oklahoma State University” OR “Extension” Master Gardener Volunteers. The abbreviations “OSU Master Gardener” or “Extension Master Gardener” may be used. These titles are to be used exclusively by volunteers who have been trained in the OSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer program.

- OSU Master Gardener Volunteers should not display their credentials in advertising any place of business including their own, or to give endorsement of any product or place of business.
- When serving at OSU/Extension functions, volunteers should not wear apparel imprinted with nursery or garden center logos, lawn and garden services, or other gardening business related logos.
5. **Retaining Certification** - Active MG volunteers wishing to continue participation in the program are asked to renew their commitment annually by:

- Returning forms as may be required by the County Extension Service.
- Submitting a quarterly accounting of continuing education and volunteer hours
  - Oklahoma County re-certification commitments are as follows:
    - Completing 10 hours in Continuing Education;
    - Volunteering a minimum of 30 hours.

Determining the value of educational and service activities is the responsibility of the County Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Advisor. Further instructions for submitting requests for recertification credit and examples of service and education opportunities are further outlined in Chapter 1 of the state Master Gardeners Manual.

**Leave of Absence and Recertification** – OCES realizes that there will be times when a Master Gardener Volunteer may need to take a leave of absence from the program due to the uncertainties of life. If you successfully completed the OSU Master Gardener Volunteer Basic Training course and left the program in good standing, then you may submit a written request for a leave of absence for a period of no longer than two years to the county Master Gardener Volunteer advisor in the county where you received Basic Training. During the withdrawal period, volunteers may not represent themselves as OSU Master Gardeners. After that period volunteers who wish to return to the program should follow the recertification guidelines. You may be re-admitted to the OSU Master Gardener Volunteer program after you complete a re-orientation session with the county Master Gardener Volunteer Advisor. The county Master Gardener Volunteer Advisor specifies the timeline for completion of any retraining, volunteer activity or continuing education deemed necessary for reinstatement.
Reimbursement for Expenses, Acceptance of Gifts

MG volunteers provide own transportation and pay own expenses as part of official volunteer activities. Travel and other expenses can be tax deductible with proper documentation. A volunteer should not seek paid speaking engagements while using the OSU/Extension Master Gardener Volunteer title, however, when a volunteer gives a presentation, it is permissible to accept unsolicited reimbursement or gifts to the OCES Master Gardener Volunteer Program. Volunteers may ask for reimbursement of supplies used in presentation or project supplies used during audience participation.

Liability Coverage for Volunteers - If authorized to act in official capacity, OCES Master Gardeners are provided protection as employees under the Oklahoma Tort Claims Act. Tort Liability Coverage is provided for volunteer actions when “performing a function assigned or delegated by a "competent authority," a volunteer should attempt to perform only those functions directly or indirectly related to the particular job.” In other words, Extension Master Gardener volunteers have general liability coverage if they are involved in Master Gardener Volunteer activities that have been authorized by the Oklahoma County Extension Horticulture Educator and/or the County Extension Director. To be acting in the official capacity of an OCES volunteer, you must be:

- Currently enrolled in the Master Gardener Volunteer program, be in an “active” status or actively pursuing recertification as an OCES MG.
- Acting in good faith and in accordance with OCES Master Gardener Volunteer guidelines, and
- Engaged in activities planned and approved by OCES.

It is imperative to follow the below guidelines to remain in compliance with OSU liability coverage.

- Do NOT Address On Master Gardener Volunteer Duty:
  - Mushroom identification
  - Food preservation and safety questions should be referred to the Extension family and consumer sciences.
  - Commercial questions: If the inquiry applies to any commercial or business situation, such as: nurseries, growers, spray services, landscapers, farmers or ranchers, refer it to the appropriate Extension educator.
  - Legal questions: If the situation is one in which someone seeks a legal opinion or an expert witness is needed, OSU Master Gardeners are not allowed to answer these questions, and must refer the inquiring party to seek their own legal counsel.
  - Product or service endorsements: Do not endorse any particular product, business, or service.
I ________________________________, as an OSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteer, agree to following Code of Conduct standards designed to maintain a high-quality program that effectively serves the community and provides a positive volunteer experience. I agree to:

- Represent OSU and OCES with dignity and pride.
- Be a positive role model.
- Always wear a name badge when acting as an OCES MG volunteer.
- Respect and follow OSU Policies and Guidelines.
- Comply with Equal Employment Opportunity and nondiscrimination laws as outlined below.

**Affirmative Action Policy** - Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

**POLICY AND PROCEDURES STATEMENT**

I have read and understand the Oklahoma State Master Gardener Volunteer Program Policy Statement and agree to comply with the guidelines outlined in this Volunteer Handbook. I also understand that failure to comply with the above policies may result in expulsion from the Oklahoma State Master Gardener Volunteer Program at the sole discretion of the acting County Master Gardener Volunteer Advisor.

___________________________
Printed Name

______________________________
Signature

______________________________
Date