

**Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the
NEW Master Gardener Program
December 2011**

Does MSU Extension value Master Gardeners?

- One of MSU Extension's (MSUE's) most important functions is to develop individuals to serve their communities. The Master Gardener Program is a great example of this. As interest in home and community gardening grows, the skills that Master Gardeners possess become increasingly valuable to local organizations interested in bettering their communities through programs and projects that range from teaching people about environmentally friendly gardening practices to community gardening to youth farm stands. We hope to integrate Master Gardeners across Extension's programs in new ways.

What is administration trying to do by changing the program? It sounds like they are anti-school and garden club.

- Our new structure addresses two issues: First, with the challenges the state of Michigan and counties have been dealing with, MSU Extension's budget has declined substantially in the past few years, meaning fewer resources for all of our programs, including consumer horticulture. Secondly, we were expending an increasing share of those limited resources on coordination of local activities and therefore less on our educational mission. Our new structure focuses our efforts and our limited resources on educating Michiganders about various aspects of managing their yards and gardens in ways that are economically and environmentally friendly.

If money is such a motivating factor then why cancel winter Master Gardener classes that must be worth thousands of dollars?

- The simple answer is that the new Master Gardener manual and online content is not ready and our new restructured class schedule could not be implemented in such a short time frame. The MSUE consumer horticulture team is also developing online modules that will allow us to provide instruction from our best experts at a lower cost. This will also allow our horticulture educators to develop other curricula for delivery in Spring 2012.

Please define what "consumer horticulture" means.

- Consumer horticulture is a term that MSU Extension uses to distinguish community and home gardening educational efforts from those that support greenhouse, nursery, landscape firms and other commercial horticulture operations.

Aren't the changes to the MGVP going to show politicians/funders that they really didn't need to support MSUE and the MGVP in the past and don't need to do it in the future?

- No, we will still be using state, federal and local dollars to support our consumer horticulture programs (along with program fees) but will be relying upon community support to coordinate and manage local activities and projects. What these changes will demonstrate to stakeholders is that we are working to make the best use possible of the resources that they provide us while maintaining a level of quality in serving Michigan residents.

TRAINING/EDUCATION

When will we get information about Fall classes?

- MSUE administration and the consumer horticulture educators are currently planning Fall 2012 programs. There will be Master Gardener training sites at locations around the state so that most participants would have a short drive to the classes. In some areas this may only be offered on alternate years. The in-person sessions will also be augmented by some online training and other possible distance learning options.

What does it mean to say you are standardizing curriculum and instructor quality?

- Because Master Gardener is a statewide program, all participants should receive similar training by highly qualified instructors. Regrettably, this has not always occurred in recent years. All locations should deliver the 12 core classes for the same number of hours. In the past, some topics have not been taught at all, some combined and some are taught only in abbreviated sessions. Coupled with this, instructors for some training sessions are not following the curriculum or providing the most recent science-based information. To ensure that the educational quality and consistency is strong across the state, each instructor delivering Master Gardener training will need to meet specific criteria. These criteria will be completed in the near future. We will also provide consistency by using online training options.

Will MGs who have been professional teachers and long-time MGs be considered appropriate for teaching hands-on activities during MG classes?

- This might be possible if they meet the criteria that are being developed.

What is meant in the letter “by creating class links”?

- This phrase simply means that links to Internet materials appropriate to each lesson would be provided. This will allow students to easily obtain more specific information related to their needs.

The letter mentioned that there will be "advanced training targeted at the specific needs" of the Gardening Hotline and Ask an Expert programs. When will that training be offered and how do I know if I qualify to take it??

- Training began earlier in 2011. There were face-to-face and online components. Future training will be recorded and made available online to any interested Master Gardener volunteer.

Because several locations no longer have local coordinators, how can we maintain our education requirements for certification?

- We plan to offer online education programs for people to access either from their homes, a library or in group settings at Extension offices or other meeting locations.

When will Master Gardener training classes be offered in the U.P.?

- Our plan is to offer consumer horticulture programs in 2013. In 2010, two U.P. counties offered MG training but canceled due to low enrollment. Beginning in 2012, we will need a minimum of 30 participants to hold a class in any location.

Will education offered by associations still count for education credit for MGs?

- Yes, as long as the focus is on increasing Master Gardeners' knowledge base. All MG education (and volunteer efforts) should fall under one of the following focus areas that are based on federal, state and local priorities:
 - 1.) Environmental quality
 - 2.) Improving food security and decreasing hunger
 - 3.) Youth development through gardening
 - 4.) Improving the community

Will new MSU Extension gardening programs classes replace those that have been developed by our local MG Continuing Education Committee?

- The new consumer horticulture classes will not replace classes that are offered locally; these classes should complement one another. Local programming should be coordinated with MSUE horticulture education programs to avoid duplication and competition.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Will I still earn volunteer credits for the projects I've been working on as a MG volunteer?

- Yes, as long as you are educating others while working on a project that fits into one of the following focus areas. Note that focus areas may change over time depending on local, state and federal priorities.
 - 1.) Environmental quality –
 - Water quality protection: e.g. rain gardens, buffer strips green roofs, sound fertilizer use (soil testing, fertilizer selection and application)
 - Water conservation practices: e.g. rain barrels, trickle irrigation, low-water-use plants
 - Integrated Pest Management: e.g. plant selection, pest identification and management, pesticide selection and safety, supporting beneficial insects
 - Recycling (reducing yard waste going to landfills): e.g. composting, grass recycling, plant container recycling
 - Native plants
 - Invasive pests: e.g. emerald ash borer, giant hogweed, *Phragmites*, gypsy moth, spotted wing drosophila, brown marmorated stink bug, late blight, etc.
 - 2.) Improving food security and decreasing hunger -
 - Growing fruits, vegetables and herbs
 - Community gardening projects (e.g. PAR, Manna, Ample Harvest, food banks) to provide fresh produce to vulnerable populations
 - 3.) Youth development through gardening -
 - Junior Master Gardeners
 - School gardens
 - Youth farm stands
 - Garden-based nutrition programs
 - 4.) Improving community -
 - Landscape design
 - Selection and use of landscape plants
 - Improving quality of life

If a Master Gardener provides an educational program, have you considered charging fees for those presentations to help support the MGVP and MSUE?

- Yes, this is a great idea and several counties have already started doing this to support local programming efforts. MSUE will support our consumer horticulture programs through our appropriated funds and program fees.

Does it matter if we volunteer in another county?

- This is something that varies from county to county, but we hope to standardize this so people can volunteer anywhere in Michigan. This is especially important for MGs in a county that no longer has a coordinator.

Will Master Gardener volunteers be asked for their ideas?

- Definitely! We welcome input from Master Gardeners and have scheduled brainstorming sessions with Master Gardeners (January 11) and with local coordinators. If you have suggestions that you'd like to share, please send them to any of our consumer horticulture Educators.

Please clarify what all of this means. Are we still MSU volunteers?

- As a result of our budget cuts, we no longer have the capacity to manage and coordinate community activities and organizations. We will be focusing our efforts on educating prospective and present Master Gardeners and other residents who want to learn about caring for their yards, their gardens and their communities.

Volunteers are essential to many local projects and we will provide as much training and support as possible, but our efforts will be restricted to horticulture education and limited training on leadership and organizational readiness for community associations. Our hope is that all Master Gardeners will continue to register for our educational programs and that they will continue to share their expertise in their communities. We will only ask those Master Gardeners who work with our Hotline, Ask an Expert or Diagnostic Center to go through our Volunteer Selection Process and only those Master Gardeners will be covered by MSU liability.

The letter from the director's office made it sound as if there will be limited Master Gardener volunteer projects available. Which volunteers will get priority for those projects--those who are working on their advanced status or new MGs?

- There are no limits on the number of community projects; that will be determined by you in your community. MSUE will suggest criteria that you can employ to ensure that your projects truly serve the community, but the ultimate choices will be made by the local Master Gardeners.

The stated intent to "integrate Master Gardeners across Extension's programs in new ways" sounds very positive. Can you share any details about the new ways that Master Gardeners will be able to participate in MSU Extension programs?

- We're working on it! One thing that's in the works is to develop lesson plans and materials that you can use in your community projects. By reducing the time MSUE staff spend coordinating local activities, we be able to produce more educational products. Also, rather than dictating which local volunteer projects qualify for continuing education credits, we'll spend time developing criteria and outlines of possible projects for local volunteers to undertake.

I know growing food and working with young people are important foci for MSUE. Can Master Gardener volunteers still be involved in projects that place importance on the enriching and life-changing aspects of creating and maintaining ornamental gardens?

- Absolutely. Though as previously stated, MGs need to be educating others while performing their volunteer activities. Simply planting and maintaining a beautiful ornamental garden, while a wonderful community project, is not something that should qualify for MG volunteer hours. However, if a volunteer works with and teaches a group how to select plants for a specific site and how they can maintain the garden in an environmentally safe manner, then it should qualify. The volunteer effort should also fit into one of the previously mentioned focus areas.

ASSOCIATIONS

What does this change mean for the local association?

- Because we no longer have adequate staffing to oversee and coordinate local associations, they will be encouraged to form separate 501c3 organizations or other appropriate organizational structures to provide them with the necessary financial and organizational services. We are currently planning a meeting on January 18, 2012 with association board members to discuss options and ideas. One idea we have received is to form a statewide association with local charters. The statewide association would be the umbrella 501c3 organization. We are hoping that every association will be present at the January 18 meeting so we can work together to develop a workable solution.

Our local association is looking for guidance and is anxious to learn what, if any, options are available to us. (We do not plan to become a free standing non-profit organization.)

Can you please share what our options are?

- There are several options to consider: 1.) Develop a 501c3 organization, 2.) become a chapter under a statewide MG association, 3.) disband the association or 4.) become a local garden club. Again, more will be discussed at on Jan. 18, 2012.

Are area associations still important and valued by MSUE?

- Absolutely. With staff reduction though, we need associations to function more independently than they did in the past. We hope to continue this valuable partnership within a different structure that allows MSUE to focus upon consumer horticultural education and allow you to focus on using your gardening knowledge to serve your community.

Will our association's garden conference be covered by MSU's liability insurance?

- No. MSU's risk management policies only cover staff members and volunteers who have completed our volunteer selection process (VSP); we simply do not have the resources to continue to process all Master Gardeners through the VSP.

Are association bylaws going to allow for provisional or associate members?

- Membership requirements will be established by each local organization. We only ask that if you call yourselves a Master Gardener Association, you restrict membership to those who earned MSU Extension Master Gardener certification.

Why should associations continue to contribute funds to MSU Extension from their local conferences if MSUE staff members are no longer involved?

- They will not be asked to do so. The 10 percent of revenue that MSU Extension staff members had to remit to campus from conferences they held was part of a state-level policy. These “recovered funds” were used to fund new programs or educational materials. For example, these funds are being used to support development of the new Master Gardener Manual. In 2012 we will no longer ask any program staff to remit to the Director’s Office funds from the programs they deliver. Development of future curricula will be funded by our programmatic institutes.

What happens to the money our association raised?

- If money raised by the association is in a separate bank account with your own EIN (employee identification number), the association retains control of the money. If the money raised by the association is held by the local MSUE office, association board members need to work with their MSUE district coordinator to set up a separate bank account and have money transferred to an association-controlled account. This money should still be used to support local horticulture education efforts as the original intent of the fundraising.

COMMUNICATIONS / INPUT / STAYING CONNECTED

How can we stay in touch with the state Master Gardener office if the local coordinator isn’t funded?

- This is one of our concerns as well. We want to stay in touch with you! We are looking at several options:
 - 1.) Through the current online recordkeeping system (<https://mi.mgrecord.com/login.php>). Email addresses in the recordkeeping system are used by local coordinators and the state coordinator. In the future, we hope to obtain a different online records and communications system that will better facilitate communications for everyone. This would include staff, Master Gardeners, project leaders, etc.
 - 2.) One volunteer suggested developing a social media team. This team would be comprised of MGs and staff members and would help everyone stay connected.
 - 3.) Another option is an e-newsletter that would be sent out on a regular basis. This newsletter would contain upcoming events, science-based news you can use in your volunteer and personal gardening efforts and other information of interest to MGs.

How can you provide personal communications that will be lost by employing using technology like webinars?

- While webinars are excellent means of communicating information, they are not nearly as interactive as often desired. Through MSUE educational offerings (e.g. Master Gardener College, regional educational workshops, etc.) we hope to maintain current and establish new relationships with Master Gardeners and associations across the state. We will also offer curricula specifically targeted to local coordinators (paid and volunteer) and local association officers. In addition, we are open to other ideas that would strengthen our partnership.

Please explain what a webinar is and how we will be involved?

- A webinar is short for web-based seminar. It's an electronic communication format for a lecture, workshop or seminar. Webinars can allow polling, Q&As, telephones and speaker phones. Specifics on how to join a webinar to discuss the Master Gardener volunteer program are posted on the MGVP website (www.mg.msue.msu.edu) under "For Master Gardener Volunteers."
http://mg.msue.msu.edu/mg/for_master_gardener_volunteers

When will the webinar that further explains these changes be held?

- One webinar will be held Jan. 11 at 4 pm. Details for connecting, along with the URL, are posted on the MGVP website (www.mg.msue.msu.edu) under "For Master Gardener Volunteers."

Will MGs be asked to provide their ideas about how to move the program forward in a positive way?

- Absolutely! MSUE values input from clientele across the state. Please share your feedback and ideas to us via email (mg@anr.msu.edu) or during face-to-face meetings with local associations. In the near future, we will develop an advisory committee comprising MGs from around the state.

Since there's no longer an MSU Extension horticulture educator with responsibilities in northern lower Michigan or the U.P., who do we contact when we have questions about the Master Gardener program?

- For now, contact one of the MSUE Consumer Horticulture Team members and /or your district coordinator (<http://bit.ly/rHPiwe>).

What is the timeline for final decisions about the future of the MGVP?

- Changes will start being phased in Jan. 1, 2012. We realize not everything will be in place by then but hope to implement changes as soon as possible.

COORDINATOR Q AND A

I noticed on the MG site that a few counties have classes listed for fall 2012. Who decides when and where classes are going to be held at that time? Can I add a class?

- The class locations for Fall 2012 were chosen by MSUE Consumer Horticulture Team members. We only scheduled what could be delivered through face-to-face training by those educators and that would serve as broad a population base as possible (70 percent of Michigan's population is within one hour of these sites). We will not add any training sites until we have funding to develop more online training modules...

How will the money part of local MG work after the first of the year?

- The fees for any MSU Extension educational programs, including Master Gardener, will continue to go to campus. However, campus will now shoulder the training expenses (e.g. speaker fees, mileage, room rental, teaching material fees, etc.). Coordinators for training locations will receive a site fee. Community program organizers will determine their own fee schedules, be responsible for paying expenses and retain any unexpended dollars.

How will I generate money for my coordinator's salary? What will the money flow be in the future? Currently, we make money through our local program, put it in an account and send MSU my salary amount quarterly and then they pay me. Fundraisers, including proceeds from local classes, were used to support the coordinator position and some of the costs for our volunteer projects. Do the current MSUE administrative plans support these local funding raising opportunities?

- See above. The major difference will be that the money would be deposited in a local account (county or private) and you would receive your salary from that entity.

How are you communicating with MGs who do not have email addresses?

- This is a situation we want to discuss with coordinators at an upcoming meeting. We need to brainstorm cost effective and efficient solutions that can be addressed within our current staffing situation.