

# Master Gardener Volunteer Manual



**MASTER GARDENER**

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Extension and Outreach



# Objective

This guide will help answer the following questions:

- What is the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Master Gardener program?
- What is the connection to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach?
- Who can become a Master Gardener?
- What can Master Gardener volunteers do?
- What are the responsibilities of Iowa Master Gardeners?



**Learn more about the Iowa Master Gardener program:**

**Visit the Iowa Master Gardener website:**  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/)

**Find us on Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/iamastergardeners](https://www.facebook.com/iamastergardeners)

**Follow us on Twitter:**  
[twitter.com/mgardener\\_ia](https://twitter.com/mgardener_ia)

**Follow us on Instagram:**  
[@mgardener\\_ia](https://www.instagram.com/mgardener_ia)

**Sign up for News & Views, the Iowa Master Gardener newsletter:**  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/newsletter-archive](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/newsletter-archive)

**Contact the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Master Gardener Staff: Statewide Coordinator Alicia Herzog,**  
[mgardener@iastate.edu](mailto:mgardener@iastate.edu)

# Table of Contents

---

<b>ISU Extension and Outreach’s Master Gardener Program.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Mission statement .....	5
History of the Master Gardener program .....	5
History of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach .....	5
Using research-based information.....	6
Standards of behavior .....	6
Master Gardener staff and support .....	8
<b>Program Guidelines, Policies and Procedures .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Age requirement .....	10
Trainee application and selection process .....	10
ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener Internship .....	10
Certification and Recertification.....	10
Using the Master Gardener title .....	11
Role as horticulture judges .....	11
Volunteer categories .....	11
Communications and statewide volunteer opportunities .....	12
State volunteer recognition .....	13
Volunteer service and continuing education hours .....	13
Volunteers transferring between states .....	16
Transferring between Iowa counties .....	16
Iowans training in other states .....	17
Reinstating Master Gardeners who have been inactive .....	17
Using Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Branding .....	18
Extension nondiscrimination statement .....	18
Media release .....	19
Copyright .....	19
Liability and accident coverage as a volunteer .....	20
Policy statement .....	20
Commercial liability insurance .....	20
Volunteer reimbursements for Master Gardener program expenses.....	20
<b>Fundraising and Financial Management .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Fundraising by ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardeners .....	21
Financial stewardship .....	21
Tax deductible donations .....	21
Use of university sales tax exemption .....	22

**Appendices ..... 23**

- Appendix A: Master Gardener advisory Committee ..... 23**
- Appendix B: Position description: ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener volunteer ...24**
- Appendix C: Netiquette: Etiquette for the internet, email, social media and listservs ..... 25**
- Appendix D: Diagnosing horticultural problems: Tips for Master Gardeners ..... 27**

# ISU Extension and Outreach's Master Gardener Program

## Mission statement

The purpose of the Iowa Master Gardener program is to provide current, research-based, consumer horticulture information and education to the citizens of Iowa through Iowa State University Extension and Outreach programs and projects.

The Master Gardener program is an educational and volunteerism organization of Iowa State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and Extension and Outreach. Through the Iowa Master Gardener program, interested volunteers receive training in horticulture and environmental topics of special value to home gardeners.

In exchange for this training, Master Gardeners share their time and knowledge on approved projects within their communities. Through the leadership, instruction, and hands-on assistance provided by Master Gardeners, the broad resources of Iowa State University are extended to benefit Iowans at the local level and enhance the quality of life in Iowa communities.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is a partnership among campus-based Iowa State specialists and staff located in Ames, the United States Department of Agriculture, and local extension districts. This partnership cooperates with local governments and citizens to extend information from the research done at the university to citizens throughout Iowa.

## History of the Master Gardener program

The Master Gardener program began as a response to public demand for horticultural information from local extension offices in the state of Washington in 1973. The pilot program provided interested individuals with specialized home garden horticulture training in exchange for volunteer assistance to extension service personnel in providing individualized information to clients.

The successful program in Washington provided a pattern, and now the program spans the nation and the globe. It is estimated that there are nearly 100,000 active participants in the Master Gardener program nationwide.

The Iowa Master Gardener program was first offered in Scott County (Davenport) in 1979 with 17 trainees. More than 14,000 Iowans in nearly all of Iowa's 99 counties have been trained as Master Gardeners. In a typical year, training is held in approximately 75% of the state. The Master Gardener program also has been used as a model for several other volunteer training programs, including the Iowa Master Woodland Steward Program, Master Composter and Master Conservationist.

## History of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is part of the [Cooperative Extension Service](#). Congress established this national program in 1914 to distribute information developed by land grant universities and research stations to citizens. For more information on the [history of Iowa State University](#) go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/100years](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/100years).



## Using research-based information

Providing research-based information is at the core of extension's work, purpose and mission. As extension volunteers, Master Gardeners are expected to uphold university research-based findings even when the information is new or different from a volunteer's personal experience or opinion.

Master Gardener volunteers are provided with core course education, resources and other information founded on the research of ISU experts to help them and the public they assist to make informed choices. Volunteers work with gardeners of differing philosophies. While it is important to respect individual beliefs, Master Gardeners are expected to make recommendations based on scientifically defensible information from Iowa State University or other reputable sources. This is especially true in the use of fertilizers or pest control where the label is the law. Volunteers may answer homeowner questions, but must refer questions concerning commercial production or commercial pest control to an extension staff person. While information from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is always the first choice as a resource, information from other state extension services and academic sources may be used.

The internet gives Master Gardeners access to numerous resources. However, volunteers must reference websites that are reputable based on responsible research that preferably is academic, and appropriate to Iowa's climate, conditions, and cold hardiness zones.

## Standards of behavior

Extension Master Gardener volunteers are representatives of Iowa State University and their local county extension program, and serve at the discretion of ISU. Just as it is a privilege for extension to work with volunteers who offer their time and talents, it is a privilege—not a right—to be an extension volunteer. Participants must understand and accept responsibility for their actions, words and deeds when volunteering on behalf of Iowa State.

Master Gardener volunteers are expected to review and abide by the standards of behavior as listed. These important policies are designed

to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all Master Gardener participants (audiences, staff, professionals, and other volunteers) and promote a positive, enjoyable experience for all. Extension volunteers are representatives of the Iowa State University and must conduct themselves accordingly.

### Extension Master Gardener volunteer standards of behavior:

- Uphold volunteerism as an effective way to meet the horticultural education needs of Iowa citizens.
- Accept supervision and support from extension staff while involved in the program.
- Represent the local county program and the Iowa Master Gardener program with dignity and pride by being positive spokespersons and mentors for others.
- Be courteous, civil, and respectful, refraining from profanity and behavior that physically, verbally, or emotionally abuses, threatens, or harms any extension program participant.
- Abstain from the use or the influence of alcoholic beverages or other controlled substances when interacting with the public as an extension Master Gardener volunteer.
- Comply with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws and the policies of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.
- Perform duties in a responsible, professional, and timely manner.
- Dress professionally and wear the Iowa Master Gardener nametag whenever serving as a volunteer.
- Report immediately any threats to the volunteer's emotional or physical well-being to the county or state extension staff coordinating the extension Master Gardener program.
- Be responsible and accountable for personal actions.
- Promote and support extension Master Gardener activities and volunteer peers in order to develop an effective county and state program.

- When applicable, operate machinery, vehicles, or other equipment safely and responsibly.

Failure to follow the standards of behavior listed above can result in termination from the program and loss of all privileges associated with the status of an Iowa Master Gardener volunteer. Should an issue arise, the volunteer will be placed on temporary leave, and the local Master Gardener coordinator will inform and work in concert with the state coordinator to resolve the issue and determine what, if any, disciplinary steps need to be taken. While attempts may be made to correct disqualifying behavior, resolution may lead to reinstatement, reassignment of volunteer duties, reinstatement with limitations, or termination from the program. The volunteer may also be terminated immediately. The state coordinator must authorize any termination from the program.

### **Netiquette**

“Netiquette” refers to etiquette displayed while using the internet. As more web-based tools and programs are used to communicate and share information electronically, it is important that volunteers follow good netiquette standards. Inappropriate communication or misuse of the internet as a volunteer can lead to restrictions on using Master Gardener internet-based tools and programs. For more detail consult [Appendix C](#).

### **Public benefit of the Extension Master Gardener program**

In 2021, Iowa Master Gardeners reported more than 97,000 hours of volunteer service. According to the Independent Sector, the value of this service to the state of Iowa is more than \$2.16 million dollars. By another measure, the hours of Master Gardener volunteer service are equal to the work of 46 full-time ISU Extension and Outreach staff.

Other societal benefits are more difficult to measure, but are significant nonetheless. Among the thousands of hours of volunteer service, are numerous hours of teaching adults and youth about sustainable gardening

techniques that lead to a safer, cleaner environment, economic sustainability, strong, vibrant communities, better nutrition for consumers of the produce grown in home and community gardens, and a better quality of life.

As public organizations, ISU Extension and Outreach and the Master Gardener program have a responsibility to undertake projects and activities that deliver public benefit or value. Public value accrues when a program improves the quality of life of those who do not directly benefit from the program. For example, if 20 homeowners are taught to build rain gardens and they do so, the amount of runoff in local waterways is reduced. The public benefit is cleaner water for the general public. When planning Master Gardener projects for a local program, be intentional about selecting those projects that provide public benefit in addition to personal benefit for the program participants. More and more, stakeholders request public benefit from programs they fund. Do your local projects have public benefit?



## Program funding

Funds for the Iowa Master Gardener program come from core training fees, continuing education, conference registration fees, and sales of Master Gardener promotional items. While ISU Extension and Outreach indirectly supports the Master Gardener program through staff salaries, no direct line-item budget exists for Iowa Master Gardener program operational expenses.

The Master Gardener management team seeks external grants for specific programs that involve Master Gardeners. Similarly, many local Master Gardener programs apply for and obtain grants for specific projects. In addition, fundraising events such as plant sales and class fees help support local Master Gardener groups.

The table below outlines various Master Gardener funding sources and where those funds are used.

## Master Gardener staff and support

The Iowa Master Gardener program is supported by an array of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach staff. These include state Master Gardener program staff, Department of Horticulture faculty, extension horticulture and pest management professionals, and county level staff. The Iowa Master Gardener program receives guidance and support from the State Master Gardener Advisory committee.

### State staff

The statewide Master Gardener coordinator is responsible for scheduling Master Gardener training sessions and assuring training materials are accurate. They work with ISU faculty and extension staff to set objectives and prepare training materials. They are responsible for statewide communications and social media as well as supporting county MG coordinators.

Funding source	What the funding source supports
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and Department of Horticulture through Federal and state funds	Master Gardener state coordinator position; state extension faculty positions that support the Master Gardener program; operational expenses (facilities) for the above positions
State Extension Master Gardener office through core course fees; ProHort class fees; continuing education class fees; sale of promotional items; conference fees; grants; donations	Operational expenses for the state Master Gardener office and staff including production of educational materials for volunteers; volunteer continuing education classes, conferences, events; volunteer recognition; program promotion and marketing; newsletters; telephone, printing, postage and materials handling fees; IT support for the core course and webinars; state coordinator travel costs; support for selected educational programming activities; scholarships
County extension funds based on county extension budget allocation	Local extension staff and Master Gardener coordinator positions; county extension support staff positions; county extension office operations
Local Master Gardener Program: local program generated fees through classes; horticulture events; sales, gifts, grants; donations	Local Master Gardener educational events, classes, etc.; local Master Gardener operations; possibly local Master Gardener revenue share toward local extension staff position and/or operations; scholarships

### **County ISU Extension and Outreach staff**

Iowa has 100 Extension and Outreach county offices. To find out who the Master Gardener coordinator is for your county, please contact the [local county](#) Extension and Outreach office. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/content/county-offices>

### **State Master Gardener advisory committee**

The State Master Gardener Advisory Committee provides advice and direction to the statewide program including voting on program policies, judging Search for Excellence award applications, and planning state and regional conferences. The group's objectives are to develop programming strategies and governing policies that are in the best interests of the Iowa Master gardener program and its volunteers. Each member of the advisory committee serves as an ambassador of the Iowa Master Gardener Program by promoting its mission in word and deed as a volunteer and with particular attention toward communicating this mission to local, county, regional, and state officials in order to assure the continuance and effectiveness of the program throughout the state.

The advisory committee meets at least twice per year. Membership consists of five Master Gardeners and five county coordinators representing five geographic regions of the state. In addition, an extension regional director and members of the state Master Gardener staff serve on the committee. For more details on the committee, including minutes from past meetings, see the [State Advisory Committee](#) web page [www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/advisory-committee](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/advisory-committee). Additional information about the advisory committee is found in [Appendix A](#).

# Program Guidelines, Policies, and Procedures

## Age requirement

Any adult (18 years of age or older) with an interest in gardening is eligible to apply for Iowa Master Gardener training. A potential Master Gardener must demonstrate interest in gardening, enthusiasm for acquiring and sharing knowledge, and a sincere commitment to volunteerism and community betterment.

## Trainee application and selection process

The application and selection process of an individual to become a Master Gardener intern is made at the local/county level. Individuals are selected based on applicants' interests, the need for volunteers in the local program, and the individual's successful completion of the application and selection process.

The process requires an individual to:

- Complete an application through the statewide application system.
- Successfully clear the volunteer background check as required by ISU Extension and Outreach.
- Receive confirmation of selection including instructions for beginning the core course training.
- Complete an assessment of current knowledge of gardening and horticultural information.

Generally, Master Gardeners participate in the program in their county of residence. In cases where a trainee participates in a country training program other than their county of residence, they may be required to complete their internship in the training county. Applicants who are considering training in a county other than their county of residence should communicate with the training county MG coordinator prior to starting training to understand the local guidelines and expectations.

## ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener internship

After completing the Master Gardener training, the internship period begins. Trainees may choose to start working on their internship requirement before class ends, but they are not required to start volunteering until successful completion of the course. Interns must provide at least 40 hours of volunteer service on approved projects and opportunities by the end of the following calendar year. Learners who do not wish to become Master Gardeners and complete volunteer service for the county may enroll in the course as a Pro-Hort student. Pro-Hort students pay the full course price of \$550, while Master Gardener volunteer trainees pay the discounted fee of \$150.

Following the completion of the 40-hour internship, interns are recognized as Iowa Master Gardeners. To remain active in the program, individuals must complete a minimum of 10 hours of continuing education and 20 hours of volunteer service annually after the year of internship.

## Certification and recertification

Following successful completion of the internship, the volunteer becomes an Iowa Master Gardener and is considered active. The volunteer receives a certificate, an official Master Gardener name badge, and lapel pin with the Iowa Master Gardener logo. Active status is valid for one calendar year.

Recertification of active status as a Master Gardener requires the volunteer to sign an annual volunteer agreement and to complete and report a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service by the end of the calendar year. The volunteer must also complete and report a minimum of 10 hours of continuing education during that year. Local Master Gardener programs may require additional service or education hours.

## Using the Master Gardener title

The title "Iowa Master Gardener" is to be used only and exclusively in the ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener program. Iowa Master Gardeners are expected to identify themselves as Master Gardeners only when doing unpaid public service work for ISU Extension and Outreach-sponsored programs. Master Gardeners should not advertise or promote their places of business while volunteering as a Master Gardener nor solicit business because of their training as a Master Gardener. Appearing at a commercial activity, having association with commercial products, or giving implied university endorsement of any product or business is improper. ISU Extension and Outreach, of which the Master Gardener program is a part, must be viewed as a source of unbiased, research-based information. However, an individual may list his or her Master Gardener education and volunteer service experience on a resume.

When performing Master Gardener activities, Iowa Master Gardeners are agents of Iowa State University. When it is necessary to make recommendations that include the use of pesticides, Master Gardeners must follow Iowa State University and label recommendations. Master Gardeners are expected to give Iowa State University sanctioned recommendations and not rely merely on their own personal experience, that of others, or common garden folklore.

Experienced Master Gardeners may receive invitations to give educational presentations to various groups and organizations. Any payments or honoraria received can be accepted if offered at the discretion of the group or organization sponsoring the presentation. However, Master Gardeners should not seek payment for such activities. Many Master Gardeners contribute the honorarium money back to their local program to purchase reference materials or to support other local horticulture programs. It is appropriate for Master Gardeners to seek reimbursement from program sponsors for the cost of travel or materials needed to conduct the class.

## Role as horticulture judges

From time to time Master Gardeners may be asked to serve as a judge at local fairs or horticulture shows. This is a special honor and recognition, as well as a considerable responsibility.

Master Gardeners must have specialized training beyond the basic Master Gardener curriculum in order to be qualified to be 21 horticulture judges. It is not fair to exhibitors, nor is it educational for the public when entries are judged improperly. All judges must be knowledgeable and articulate about published exhibition criteria, skilled and practiced in uniform judging and scoring practices, and able to clearly communicate and educate the public as to why one entry is better than another. Master Gardeners, by their training, have taken an important first step but must have additional training and/or experiences to be considered qualified judges.

Judging youth and 4-H exhibits involves additional skills and abilities. 4-H judges support youth, affirm their efforts, and help youth grow and learn through the 4-H exhibit experience.

In order to count judging services as volunteer service for the Master Gardener program, service time must be unpaid in alignment with overall program volunteer requirements. Master Gardeners may be compensated for their role as judges if they are not counting the time as volunteer hours for the program and are functioning on their own behalf instead of the program's behalf.

## Volunteer categories

### Master Gardener trainee

Someone who has been accepted into the Master Gardener training course and completed the background check.

### Master Gardener intern

- Volunteer-in-training who has successfully completed the Master Gardener training: local sessions, canvas modules, and has passed the final class assessment with a score of 70/100 or higher.

- Has access to all program and extension resources, staff, website, education, events, etc.

### **Inactive Master Gardener intern**

- Volunteer-in-training who has not completed the 40-hour internship by the due date (December 31 of the year after the Master Gardener training is completed).
- May reactivate by: Logging 40 hours of volunteer service.
- Logging 12 hours of continuing education within 12 months.

### **Active Master Gardener**

- Successfully completed initial internship of 40 volunteer hours.
- Annually fulfills and reports online a minimum of 20 volunteer service and 10 continuing education hours.
- Signs the annual volunteer agreement.
- Has access to all program and extension resources, staff, website, education, events, etc.

### **Inactive Master Gardener**

- Has not reported the minimum required volunteer and/or continuing education hours during the past calendar year(s).
- Years in inactive status do not count toward years of Master Gardener service awards.

### **Lifetime Master Gardener**

- Considered in good standing with the program at the time of such designation.
- Has accrued 10 or more years and 1,500 or more volunteer hours as an active Master Gardener.
- May continue to volunteer and report hours as able, but is not required to report volunteer hours or meet minimum hours requirements.
- Has access to all program and extension resources, staff, website, education, events, etc.

### **Honorary Master Gardener**

Someone who has contributed significantly to the local or statewide Iowa Master Gardener program, but who is not an active Master Gardener and may not have taken the Master Gardener core course.

### **Communications and statewide volunteer opportunities**

With thousands of Master Gardeners in Iowa and approximately 100,000 around the world, strong communication skills are important. Technology provides many tools for keeping volunteers informed and in touch with the program and each other while creating a supportive and helpful network.

### **Websites, Listservs, and Social Media**

- [Iowa Master Gardener website](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener) - www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener
- [Master Gardener News and Views newsletter](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/newsletter) – Sign up to receive the monthly Iowa Master Gardener newsletter to stay up to date on what is going on around the state. www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/newsletter-archive
- [Iowa Master Gardener Twitter](https://twitter.com/mgardener_ia): twitter.com/mgardener\_ia
- [Iowa Master Gardener Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/mgardener_ia): @mgardener\_ia
- [Iowa Master Gardener Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/iamastergardeners): www.facebook.com/iamastergardeners

### **Answering horticulture questions**

When seeking information or answers to horticulture questions:

- Search through materials from core course training or other extension resources.
- Search extension's websites, national Cooperative extension online databases, or other states' extension websites.
- Use the county office horticulture reference library.
- Seek assistance from local extension educators.

- Seek assistance from regional or state extension specialists when you've exhausted other sources.
- It is okay to say, "I don't know, but I will find out."

## State volunteer recognition

Master Gardener volunteers are recognized with certificates, name badges, and pins to reflect their commitment and service. Milestones of recognition include total hours (100, 500, 1,000, 2,000, and 3,000 hours), and years of service. These awards are determined by the hours reported online by volunteers for each calendar year. Local Master Gardener coordinators are responsible for tracking and requesting the recognition certificates and pins for presentation to individuals from the state Master Gardener office.

## Volunteer service and continuing education hours

Ultimately, what counts as volunteer time is a decision made by the local coordinator, county extension director, and/or local advisory committee. However, Master Gardener activities should include an educational component, as opposed to activities that involve only garden labor or community beautification. Local coordinators should share local guidelines with volunteers as a way to clarify expectations and ensure consistency in recordkeeping.

Many horticulture associations, clubs, and societies can be educational and enriching for Master Gardener volunteers. Master Gardeners may volunteer for these other organizations and count these as volunteer service hours providing the following criteria are met:

- The individual is clearly identified and volunteering primarily as an Iowa Master Gardener.
- The activity is educational and not for profit.

## How is volunteer service defined?

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Master Gardener volunteer service is:

- Unpaid.

- Voluntary service.
- With an emphasis on gardening or horticulture.
- In public spaces.
- Has an educational focus.

## What counts as volunteer service?

Volunteer service is not limited to physically laborious tasks. Below is a broad list of allowable types of volunteer service.

- Maintain a public garden (city park, county fairgrounds, healthcare grounds).
- Answer garden questions for the public (farmer's market booth, ISU Extension and Outreach county office).
- Create community connections (collect excess produce from farmer's market for donation to food pantry, build partnerships to increase pollinator habitat).
- Support garden design for a community space (e.g. school garden, Main Street plantings, Community Visioning program).
- Teach a gardening lesson (demonstration at a community garden, present at school, community presentations/lectures).
- Coordinate a volunteer event (street tree planting, invasive species removal from park).
- Create communication materials about gardening (e.g. write newspaper article, create content for county administered MG social accounts).
- Plan a public event (plant sale, garden tour, garden symposium)
- Participate in MG management (attend monthly MG meetings, lead local MG team, serve on Iowa MG advisory committee).

See [Master Gardener Volunteer Guidelines: www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/files/page/files/2021\\_mg\\_volunteer\\_and\\_continuing\\_education\\_hours\\_0.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/files/page/files/2021_mg_volunteer_and_continuing_education_hours_0.pdf)

## Things that do not count as volunteer service

- Maintaining private gardens (volunteering in a neighbor's yard, gardening at a family member's house).
- Answering private garden questions (giving garden advice to a neighbor, friend, or family member).

Volunteer questions about whether an activity may be counted toward Master Gardener hours should be directed to the local coordinator.

## What counts as continuing education?

- Webinars (live IA MG webinars, recordings of webinars, and webinars from peer institutions).
- Videos from ISU Extension and Outreach (Iowa MG YouTube channel).
- Workshops (hands-on tree pruning event).
- Docent or staff guided garden tours.

As the world moves in a more digital direction, extra care is being taken to make sure Master Gardeners are actively engaged in continuing education offerings. To help with this issue, **it is now recommended that half of a Master Gardener's continuing education hours come from interactive sources**, such as live webinars or in-person trainings. These opportunities allow for communication with peers and experts, networking opportunities, and provide a more engaging experience for learning to be achieved.

See [Master Gardener Volunteer Guidelines](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/files/page/files/2021_mg_volunteer_and_continuing_education_hours_0.pdf), [www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/files/page/files/2021\\_mg\\_volunteer\\_and\\_continuing\\_education\\_hours\\_0.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/files/page/files/2021_mg_volunteer_and_continuing_education_hours_0.pdf), for more information.

Ultimately, which activities count as continuing education is a local decision made by the extension county coordinator or local advisory committee. Sharing local guidelines with volunteers will help clarify expectations and ensure consistency in recordkeeping.

Continuing education is expected to advance the Master Gardener's knowledge and understanding of horticulture. It must be factual, accurate, and provided by a source

generally recognized as research based. Most training opportunities offered by educational institutions, public gardens, and education-focused gardening organizations meet this requirement. Sessions offered by entertainers, mass media and sales people are less likely to do so. Listening to radio programs, watching television programs, and reading books do not count as continuing education.

## Reporting volunteer hours online

Records of Master Gardener volunteer and continuing education hours are important for documenting volunteer status, recognizing milestones in a volunteer's history, reporting impact to extension stakeholders including to federal and state funding agencies (see [yearly reports](#) here, [www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/about-master-gardener-program](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mastergardener/about-master-gardener-program)). Data collected from online reporting is used to generate reports about Master Gardener impact and help illustrate the value of the program.

The Iowa Master Gardener program uses [an online hours reporting system](#). It can be found at [mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/](http://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/). After setting up an account, volunteers use this tool to enter their hours by selecting from the drop down menu and specific volunteer activities. The volunteer year follows the calendar year; volunteer and continuing education hours are due by December 31 of each year. Volunteers are encouraged to report their hours throughout the year on an ongoing basis. Late submission of hours may not be included in state or federal reports about the Master Gardener program or count towards county volunteer hour summaries.

Please watch the [how-to videos on using the Volunteer Reporting System](#) here: [mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/videos/](http://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/videos/).

Email and internet access is required of all volunteers to report their volunteer service hours. If a volunteer does not have a computer or internet access at home, it is their

responsibility to work with the local county Master Gardener coordinator to receive in-person assistance in reporting hours at the county office or other site such as a public library.

### **My hours report**

The My Hours tab provides each Master Gardener with a list of logged Master Gardener volunteer and continuing education hours. It provides a summary of all hours volunteered over the Master Gardener's years of service.

#### **Vol Hrs**

Volunteer Hours – Number of volunteer hours entered for each date of service.

#### **Hrs Value**

Hours Value – The dollar value of those volunteer hours (\$22.25 for each hour).

#### **Edu Hrs**

Continuing Education Hours – The number of continuing education hours.

#### **Contacts**

Contacts – The number of people interacted with during the volunteer service hours.

#### **VER?**

Verified? – Have the volunteer or continuing education hours been verified by the ISU Extension and Outreach county staff. County staff are required to verify hours in January of each year. This provides local oversight to make sure that entries logged by Master Gardeners are correct.

### **Reporting contacts**

The goal of asking volunteers to report contacts they make is to gain an accurate picture of the effectiveness of the program. Volunteers report the number of people they interact with as a Master Gardener, NOT the number of questions they answer. When several volunteers interact with an individual at an event such as a county fair, only one contact should be reported for all. While each volunteer reports his or her own volunteer hours for the event, the contact number should be reported only once.

### **Examples**

A local Master Gardener Horticulture Day draws a total of 320 people. This is the number of people that this program event reaches. Although people attend various classes taught by several volunteers throughout the day, only the total number of people attending the event should be reported. The local coordinator/leader or a designated volunteer reports the 320 people online when they report volunteer hours for the event.

Two volunteers answer questions at a plant clinic. During the day, 40 people bring plant samples and questions and both Master Gardeners work together to help the 40 people. The plant clinic is the Master Gardener service that reached 40 people. One Master Gardener may be responsible to report all 40 contacts or each Master Gardener may report 20 contacts. In the end, only the number of people who attended the clinic should be reported, in this case 40.

Three Master Gardener volunteers team up to teach a community education class on vegetable gardening. Twenty-four people attend the class. Only 24 total people should be reported. This can be done by one of the Master Gardener volunteers reporting 24 contacts, or each Master Gardener may report one-third of the attendees, in this case, eight people.

TV, radio, newspaper, and magazine articles written by Master Gardeners: When volunteer activities involve the media, report the number of articles/broadcasts produced for a given media outlet. Then report the circulation or audience of that media outlet.

### **Examples**

A volunteer writes a monthly gardening column for a local newspaper. The circulation of the paper is 15,000, so report this one time as twelve articles with a circulation of 15,000.

A volunteer hosts a weekly one-hour-long radio show for eight weeks during the summer on a local station. The station has a listening audience of 45,000, so in this situation, report eight one-hour radio shows on a station with an audience of 45,000.

## **Volunteers transferring between states**

### **Transferring to Iowa from another state**

Active Master Gardeners trained in other states are welcome to become active volunteers in Iowa. There are two categories for active MGs wishing to transfer into the state of Iowa. See below for requirements of each category.

### **Midwest neighboring states; Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wisconsin:**

**Intent:** Contact the local county ISU Extension and Outreach staff to communicate interest.

**Recommendation:** Forward an email to the ISU Extension and Outreach county staff from your previous Master Gardener program coordinator. The email should include the following:

- Confirmation that the individual has been an active Master Gardener in good standing to-date.
- The year the individual completed training and internship.
- Total years in the former program.
- Any additional information about the individual's volunteer history such as special certifications, skills, or leadership positions.

**Background check:** Submit payment to the ISU Extension and Outreach county office to complete the volunteer background check and order an Iowa Master Gardener name badge.

**Assessment:** Complete the 100 question Iowa Master Gardener open-book assessment with a passing score of 70/100.

### **Non-neighboring states (any states not listed in category 1)**

**Intent:** Contact the local county ISU Extension and Outreach staff to communicate interest.

**MG Training:** Pay a discounted fee (\$75) to take the Iowa Master Gardener training.

The MG training fee includes the following:

- Background check: complete the volunteer background check.
- Assessment: complete the 100 question Iowa Master Gardener open-book assessment with a passing score of 70/100.

- Book: Resource Guide for Iowa Master Gardeners.
- Internship: 40 hours of volunteer service to be completed by the end of the following calendar year.

\*These categories apply only to active Master Gardeners in other states. Inactive Master Gardeners from other states will be treated as first-time Master Gardener applicants and will need to complete training at the full price, complete internship, pass a background check, and pass the final exam with a passing score of 70/100.

### **Transferring between Iowa counties**

An active Master Gardener in good standing may transfer to another county in Iowa. The process to do so is as follows:

**Intent:** Contact the local county ISU Extension and Outreach staff to communicate their interest.

**Share:** Forward an email to the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach county staff from your previous Master Gardener program coordinator. The email should include the following:

- Confirm that the individual has been an active Master Gardener in good standing to-date.
- The year the individual completed training and internship.
- Total years in the former program.
- Any additional information about the individual's volunteer history such as special certifications or leadership positions.

**Background Check:** Make sure background check information is up to date in the Volunteer Reporting System.

**Current county coordinator:** Contact state coordinator to request to update volunteer record in the Volunteer Reporting System to change the county.

## **lowans training in other states**

Some Master Gardeners live part of the year in another state and participate at some level in that state's Master Gardener program. The following addresses some common situations.

Volunteers active in two states: Master Gardener volunteers may belong to more than one state program. However, they must fulfill all volunteer and education requirements in both state programs. Volunteer hours in one state cannot be counted toward the volunteer hours in the other state without special approval from one or both state coordinators.

### **An Iowa Master Gardener volunteer who volunteers in another state:**

Iowa Master Gardeners may count a portion of out-of-state hours toward their progress in the program as described in the following guidelines. It is the main intent of the Iowa Master Gardener program to serve lowans, but we understand volunteers may have special opportunities out-of-state that they desire to add to their portfolio of service as a Master Gardener. During an internship period, no more than 25% of an intern's hours may be completed out-of-state. In subsequent "active" years, a Master Gardener may only count hours out-of-state above and beyond their 20 hours required in-state.

Depending on the topic and possible application toward Master Gardener volunteer activity, continuing education hours earned in states other than Iowa may fulfill requirements in both states with permission from the local county coordinator or the state coordinator.

## **Reinstating Master Gardeners who have been inactive**

Former Iowa Master Gardeners who have been inactive or out of the program may be reinstated as Iowa Master Gardeners by following the procedures below:

### **Inactive for two years or fewer.**

**Hours:** Complete 24 volunteer hours and 12 hours of continuing education during the first calendar year of reactivation.

### **Inactive between two and four years.**

**Hours:** Complete 24 volunteer hours and 12 hours of continuing education during the first calendar year of reactivation.

**Intent:** Contact the local county ISU Extension and Outreach staff to communicate interest.

**Background Check:** Submit payment to the ISU Extension and Outreach county office to complete or renew the volunteer background check.

**Assessment:** Complete the 100 question Iowa Master Gardener open-book assessment with a passing score of 70/100.

**Optional:** Purchase the Resource Guide for Iowa Master Gardeners (MG 15) from the Iowa State University Extension Store.

### **Inactive for four or more years.**

**Intent:** Contact the local county ISU Extension and Outreach staff to communicate interest.

**Training:** Pay a discounted fee (\$75) to retake the Iowa Master Gardener Training.

The training fee includes the following:

- Background check: complete the volunteer background check.
- Assessment: complete the 100 question Iowa Master Gardener open-book assessment with a passing score of 70/100.
- Book: Resource Guide for Iowa Master Gardeners.
- Internship: 40 hours of volunteer service to be completed by the end of the following calendar year.

Once an individual completes the requirements, they may assume the title, benefits and responsibilities of an active Iowa Master Gardener volunteer.

## Using Iowa State University Extension and Outreach branding

Iowa State University claims the right and ownership to the names, symbols, graphics, logos, trademarks, and service marks associated with the university. Most of Iowa State University's marks are federally registered and all are monitored to ensure proper use and protection. Generally, external use of the logos must be licensed except for use by news media, supportive messages, printed publications for event promotion, or materials for [internal or educational use](#). ([www.trademark.iastate.edu/policies-guidelines](http://www.trademark.iastate.edu/policies-guidelines)).

The most recent Iowa Master Gardener logo may be used in promotional materials, brochures and program materials directly associated with events managed by local Master Gardener groups. Use of previous Master Gardener logos is not allowed. However, use of the current logo on clothing, nametags, awards, or other similar items requires prior approval from the Iowa State University [Trademark Licensing office](#) and use of a University approved vendor. [www.trademark.iastate.edu/policies-guidelines](http://www.trademark.iastate.edu/policies-guidelines)

## Extension nondiscrimination statement

The following nondiscrimination statement (also known as the justice statement) is required on all print materials created by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach staff.

### Nondiscrimination statement - full version

In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, and American Sign Language) should contact the responsible State or local Agency that



administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad-3027>, from any USDA office, by calling 866-632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by: (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or (2) Fax: 833-256-1665 or 202-690-7442; or (3) Email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov). This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext).

## Media release

Images, video, film or other media used for ISU Extension and Outreach programs requires a signed media release to be on file. The release should list all identifiable individuals (including other Extension employees) who are principal players in the media and include a description of how the signer's image will be used. Also use the release when private property is recognizable. A [model release form](#), accessible by extension staff, is located at [www.extension.iastate.edu/Documents/Playbook/PhotoRecordingReleaseForm.pdf](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Documents/Playbook/PhotoRecordingReleaseForm.pdf).

Signed media release forms must be held on file at the appropriate local ISU Extension and Outreach program office. As part of their application process Master Gardener trainees are asked to sign a blanket media release. Here are additional guidelines regarding release forms:

Individuals under the age of 18 need the signature of a parent or guardian. The names and addresses for minors should be obtained and releases sent to parents/guardians before the photos are taken; otherwise, obtain signatures before the images are used in ISU Extension and Outreach materials.

Individuals who are identifiable in a group should sign releases whenever possible. This includes individuals visible in the foreground of large groups being photographed or videotaped in a public place (outside on the sidewalk or street) or in a public building (a big meeting).

When photographing personal or private property (a garden, house, place of business, a commercial building, etc.), ask the owner to sign the release. If you are shooting images of public property, there is no need to obtain written consent.

### Some examples

A photo of a plant sale on a public street may require a release from people in the crowd if they are recognizable, but does not require a release from the owners of the businesses in the background.

A photo of a mother and child in a garden center requires one release from the mother for herself and the child, and another from the storeowner or manager.

## Copyright

Copyright is a form of protection provided by the laws of the United States (title 17, US Code) to the authors of "original works of authorship." It gives ISU Extension and Outreach the right to say how others use extension materials. It provides legal recourse if the materials are used in unintended or unendorsed ways. It discourages copying in lieu of purchasing which helps recover production costs and produces income to fund future material development.

Many publications and resources that volunteers may want to use to create teaching materials such as presentations, articles and handouts, may have a copyright. Copyright can pertain to written material, photographs, website content, and music whether in hard copy or found online. Materials authored or created by the United States Government are by law in the public domain, and therefore, not copyrighted.

Before using materials in creating a document, make certain that the references have no copyright protection. If they are copyrighted, get permission from the author(s) or creator(s) prior to using them. Check with your county coordinator for more details about copyright requirements from the university, fair use of copyrighted materials, and acquiring copyright permission. It is always important to acknowledge authors, photographers, and musicians when quoting them or using their work in finished materials.

Plagiarism is a separate issue from copyright infringement, but the two may overlap. Plagiarism is copying someone else's work and passing it off as your own. Copyright infringement means the illegal use of a work. If a photo or article is in the public domain, it is not copyrighted, but using it without attribution certainly is plagiarism.

## **Liability and accident coverage as a volunteer**

As an agency of the State of Iowa, Iowa State University is self-insured for liability. Claims against the State of Iowa are handled according to provisions in the Iowa Tort Claims Act (Iowa Code, Chapter 669), which also sets forth the procedures by which tort claims may be filed.

In general, Iowa State University does not purchase commercial liability insurance. The majority of liability issues for the university are covered under Chapter 669 of the Code of Iowa. However, unique circumstances may warrant the purchase of commercial liability insurance.

## **Policy statement**

Claims Against the State (Chapter 669). Claims may be filed against the State on account of wrongful death, personal injury or property damage (including reasonable attorney fees) incurred by reason of the negligence of the university or its employees while acting within the scope of employment. The state will defend, indemnify, and hold the University or its employees harmless against any and all tort claims under the U.S. Constitution, statutes or rules of the United States and/or any other state, but will not cover willful or wanton acts, omissions, or malfeasance in office.

The above provisions apply to all employees of Iowa State University including faculty, staff, and graduate assistants on appointment, or any other individual full- or part-time, including students, volunteers, and agents acting in a temporary or permanent capacity on behalf of the institution.

## **Commercial liability insurance**

The University may purchase liability insurance or participate in self-insured liability pooling or other arrangements for professional liability, motor vehicle liability, or other liabilities if required by statute, contract, or special circumstance. Purchases must be made through the Office of Risk Management.

## **Volunteer reimbursements for Master Gardener program expenses**

The Iowa Master Gardener program is voluntary, and thus participants receive no money for their services. If an individual does collect a stipend for something they do, they are no longer considered a volunteer and thus are not covered for liability purposes for that activity. ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardeners may submit and be reimbursed by their local county programs and the state office, as appropriate, for actual out-of-pocket expenses supporting Master Gardener activities. A fee or donation can be paid to the extension Master Gardener program in exchange for the services of Master Gardener volunteer; however, no individual may personally receive financial gain as an Iowa Master Gardener volunteer.

# Fundraising and Financial Management

The Iowa Master Gardener program is a branch of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. As such, local Master Gardener groups are closely tied to the mission and goals of ISU Extension and Outreach. Local Master Gardeners function as an arm of the local extension office and report to the local Extension Council.

As part of the local extension office, Master Gardener groups are subject to the policies and procedures of ISU Extension and Outreach. Money is handled through the extension office according to University accounting and audit policies (similar to other extension programs). The Master Gardener board or steering committee is fiscally responsible to the local Extension Council. All financial records shall be kept by the local extension bookkeeper.

## Fundraising by ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardeners

While the primary role of an ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener is to provide horticulture education, it is becoming increasingly necessary for state and local programs to generate funds from private sector donations and fundraising. Local county Master Gardener programs need to generate and manage financial resources to supplement group activities, support local projects, and meet program needs. Most often revenues are generated through fees for services (class fees, event admission for horticulture days, garden tours) and sales of products (plants, calendars). Because the Iowa Master Gardener program is under the umbrella of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and is not a separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, programs are prohibited from conducting fundraisers using games of chance such as raffles or bingo where a gambling license is required by Iowa law.

As part of the local extension office program, local Master Gardeners groups are expected to follow county extension fiscal policies.



## Financial stewardship

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach policies and procedures provide the basis for Iowa Master Gardener program financial stewardship guidelines. As a public program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, it is important that money raised to support local county extension Master Gardener programs is handled with the greatest stewardship. Procedures for handling Master Gardener funds should be transparent and follow sound financial management practices.

## Tax deductible donations

The Iowa Master Gardener program is not an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, therefore, it does not qualify to receive donations as tax-deductible charitable gifts. For the purpose of receiving such gifts, the Iowa State University Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, can serve as a fiscal agent for this purpose at the statewide level.

Please reach out to your local Agricultural Extension Districts for more information about tax-deductible contributions to an Agricultural Extension District.

## **Use of university sales tax exemption**

Even though part of the Iowa State University community, county ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener programs are not typically eligible to use the university tax-exempt status to avoid having to pay sales tax on purchases for the program. In order to use Iowa State University's sales tax exempt status when purchasing items, the university must pay directly for the items using (1) a university purchasing card, (2) payment by university check whether at the time of purchase or on an invoice. (Note: the state Master Gardener office does not have the capacity to place orders and process invoices on the behalf of the many county Master Gardener programs.) However, County Agricultural Extension Districts do have tax-exempt status through the state of Iowa. When Master Gardener finances are run through the local County Extension Council, as they should be, tax-exempt status on purchases may be possible if certain criteria are met.

# Appendix A: Master Gardener Advisory Committee

## Purpose

The State Master Gardener Advisory Committee advises the state coordinator on policies for the program and assists with planning state and regional conferences. This group meets at least twice per year.

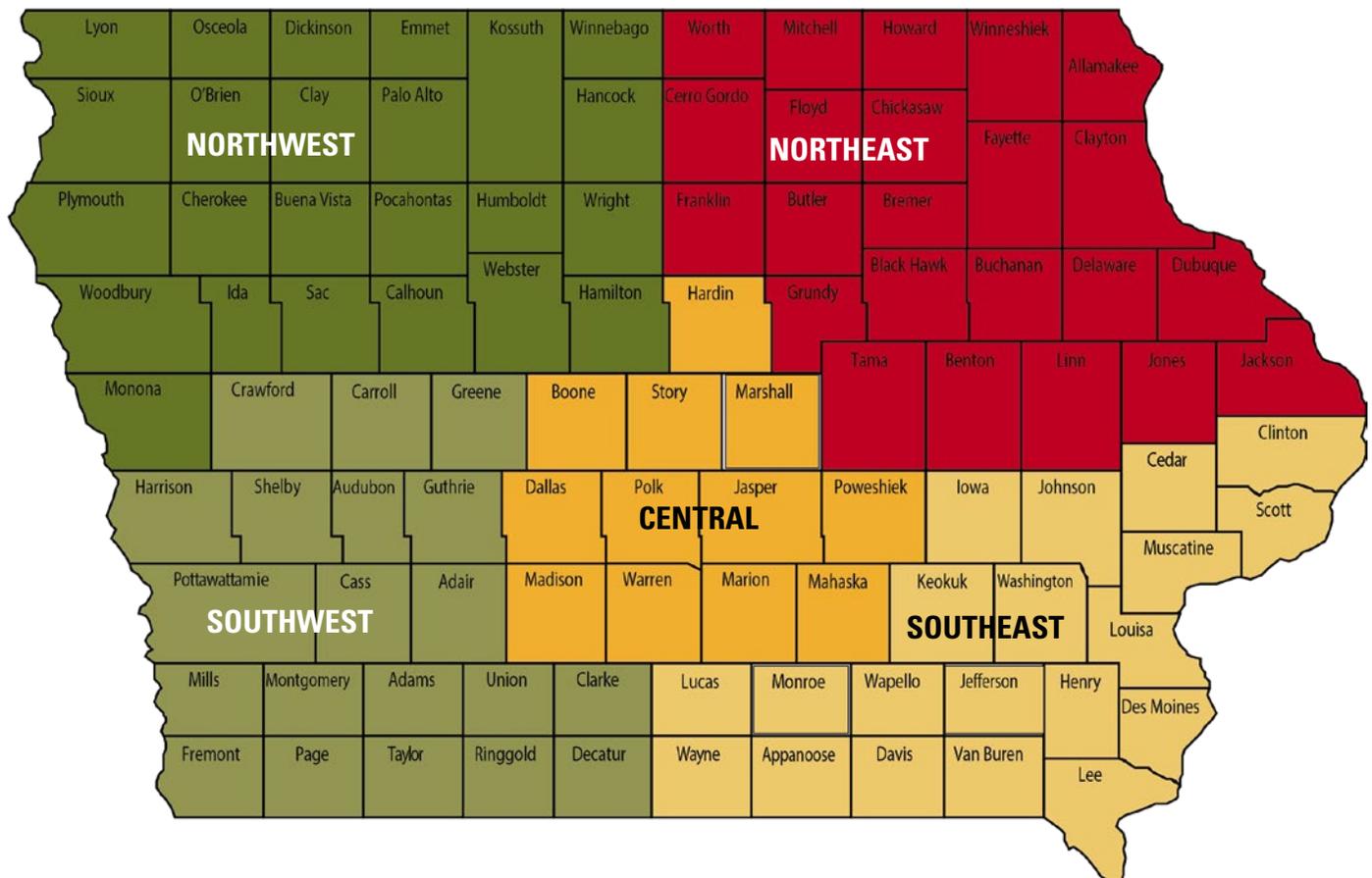
The mission of the ISU Master Gardener Advisory Committee is to unify, strengthen, and support the Iowa Master Gardener program. The Advisory Committee has the following purposes:

- Serve as advisory council to state Master Gardener staff.
- Encourage equitable distribution of state Master Gardener resources.
- Recommend minimum standards for the core course training.
- Strengthen state Master Gardener education and training.

- Increase awareness of Master Gardener programs.
- Support an annual Master Gardener conference or educational update.
- Recommend policies and guidelines for Iowa programs while recognizing local needs.

The Master Gardener Advisory Committee consists of representatives from the five areas of Iowa represented on the map below: central, southeast, southwest, northwest, and northeast. These representatives include one Master Gardener and one extension staff member from each area. A number of campus staff members are also included on the Advisory Committee.

**Iowa Master Gardener Advisory Committee Areas**



# Appendix B: Position Description: ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener Volunteer

## Purpose

To provide public education with research-based information from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, or appropriate Cooperative Extension institutions, on best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship.

**Nature and Scope:** Iowa Master Gardener volunteers expand the ability of ISU Extension and Outreach faculty and staff to provide public value and meet the needs of Iowa citizens in the areas of consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship.

Trained Iowa Master Gardener interns and active Master Gardener volunteers provide educational programs, interpret extension recommendations for consumers, and give advice and answers to questions on a broad range of gardening and landscape topics, including plant culture, plant pathology, entomology, soils, and environmentally sound best practices. This is accomplished through formal and informal activities that include plant clinics, telephone consultations, classes, written materials, demonstration gardens, public meetings, and one-on-one consultations. Master Gardeners may provide educational programs to adult or youth audiences through extension partnerships with schools, institutions, or other organizations such as Conservation Districts and city park departments. Master Gardener volunteers may also serve in program leadership roles at local, regional or state levels as assigned or as elected according to program bylaws.

## Iowa Master Gardener Requirements:

Must participate fully in and complete core course training; fulfill annual continuing education requirement predetermined by county extension master gardener program (minimum 10 hours annually to remain an active Iowa Master Gardener).

Annually complete and report via the online hours reporting system at least 20 hours of public education volunteer service hours

(minimum of 40 hours during the intern year).

Follow ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener policies and procedures, including responsibility for reporting and responding to reasonable requests for volunteer service.

Follow Iowa State University and Iowa Master Gardener codes of conduct.

Follow policies and procedures established by the local Master Gardener program.

Follow Iowa Master Gardener policies pertaining to use of research-based information and making recommendations, especially in relation to pesticides and other pest control measures.

Be able to communicate effectively with the public by telephone, personal contact, group presentation and/or through written language.

Be able to work with adults and/or youth, and be willing to share horticulture knowledge with others.

Exhibit an interest in or have knowledge of gardening or other horticulture-related area.

**Supervision:** Iowa Master Gardener volunteers are supervised by and accountable to county or area Iowa State University Extension and Outreach staff in charge of the county program.

## Benefits for Iowa Master Gardeners:

Gain knowledge and skills in horticultural science and gardening.

Stimulate a love of gardening.

Experience personal satisfaction from helping others.

Contribute public benefit to the community.

Receive encouragement and recognition for volunteer activities.

Increase leadership, organizational, decision-making and problem-solving skills.

Gain experience and skills transferable to new employment and volunteer opportunities.

Establish friendships with fellow garden enthusiasts and develop useful contacts through networking.

# Appendix C: Netiquette: Etiquette for the Internet, Email, Social Media and Listservs

---

## Reasons for using electronic communication technologies:

- To share horticultural knowledge.
- To build community.
- To support each other as volunteers and gardeners.

## Dealing with technical problems

- For questions about personal computer equipment, Internet access, connection speed, or personal software, contact your Internet provider or software company help desk.
- For questions regarding the Iowa Master Gardener website email: [mgardener@iastate.edu](mailto:mgardener@iastate.edu).
- For help with the online hours reporting system, complete the [online hours reporting help link form](#): [mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/contact.php](http://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/contact.php).

## Content

Show respect for clients and other volunteers. Any Iowa Master Gardener who makes derogatory or inappropriate comments regarding race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, or does not show respect for others are subject to immediate removal and/or disciplinary action at the discretion of the state program coordinator in accordance with Master Gardener program policies.

Agree to disagree. If you disagree with what someone has said online, put diplomatic communication skills into practice as you express that disagreement.

Ranting online is unacceptable. It's the equivalent of having a tantrum, something most of us wouldn't do face to face.

Avoid typing all in capital letters. It's hard to read completely capitalized messages and IT IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING in the online community. If you need to emphasize a word

or two, use asterisks, underline, boldface, or italicize the words.

Avoid confidential, personal, or legally sensitive information. When posting as an Iowa Master Gardener, you are representing Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Messages should be businesslike, and reflect the organization and its policies.

Avoid sarcasm, teasing or joking comments. Readers cannot readily determine that you are kidding, and your comments could be misconstrued. If you are not sure how your ideas and comments will be taken, ask someone to read them before sending them.

Refrain from sending spam, chain letters, or spreading hoaxes. Never pass along warnings about internet viruses or any other threat without first checking with the supposed source. When in doubt, throw it out. A good source to check for authenticity of internet rumors is [snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) ([www.snopes.com/info/whatsnew.asp](http://www.snopes.com/info/whatsnew.asp))

## Write well online

Use proper grammar and punctuation, and spell correctly. Poorly written emails are a bad reflection on you. Pay attention to style, spelling, grammar, syntax, and all the other rules of written communication. It will make a difference how your message is perceived.

Explain things completely. Electronic communication tends to be brief. Make certain that you include enough information to tell the whole story or answer the question adequately.

On the other hand, be concise. Keep your email short, brief, and to the point. Make sure it clearly expresses your thoughts and ideas. Delete the irrelevant portions of the original message; just leave the portion that you are replying to. Put your reply at the top of the message, so the recipient doesn't have to scroll to the bottom to find it.

Read your message before you send it. Double-check before you click the send button.

Fill in the subject line. Many people who receive dozens of emails a day appreciate seeing something in the subject line because it helps them prioritize the email and find it after it's been filed. Keep the subject line short. If you don't fill in the subject line, many people will think that your message is either a virus or spam.

Sign your email. Email addresses are not always comprised of people's names. The receiver may not be familiar with your email address and thus many choose not to respond.

(Adapted from "[Email Netiquette](http://mmlweb.rutgers.edu/music127/basic/email.htm)," by Mathew Riedel, Rutgers University. [mmlweb.rutgers.edu/music127/basic/email.htm](http://mmlweb.rutgers.edu/music127/basic/email.htm))

# Appendix D: Diagnosing Horticultural Problems: Tips For Master Gardeners

---

The following tips are intended to help you feel more confident about answering horticulture-related questions.

- Follow all procedures and policies as established by your local extension director or Master Gardener coordinator.
- Relax. Speak loudly and clearly. Don't rush the conversation.
- Listen carefully. Focus on the caller and don't be distracted by other office activities.
- Form your initial opinion, if you must, but keep it to yourself and try to eliminate everything else first. Don't jump at the obvious!
- If in doubt about any information, offer to call back. Don't be afraid to say you need to find the answer, and don't feel that you have to apologize.
- Allow wiggle room. Avoid giving an absolutely positive diagnosis—say what you think is the problem.
- Refer to the specialists listed on page 28, as well as the technical information in your workbook and resource guides. Contact Iowa State staff whenever you have questions.
- If someone asks your opinion about something they have read or heard, answer with your honest thoughts. Be respectful and polite—"Perhaps that's the experience of that person, but I feel (or the university feels) this \_\_\_\_\_." Never belittle others. NOTE: Quoting the university or a specialist and crediting them with the information gives you immediate credibility.
- Don't worry about telling a person what they don't want to hear. Tell them what you think; don't let them put words in your mouth!
- If you sense that a person is happy with the way they are doing something, no matter how foolish or wrong it might seem to you, be diplomatic. If their action could be dangerous to themselves or others you are right to warn them but only an open mind will accept suggestions to change.
- Refer all questions from commercial clients (pesticide companies, nurseries, lawn care companies, farmers, etc.) to the extension director or Iowa State specialists.
- Excuse yourself from calls that might involve a third party or that has a chance for legal repercussions. Do not get in the middle of a situation that might turn into a lawsuit. Take a message for the county extension director or refer the caller to the appropriate state specialist.
- Gently and politely, but firmly, excuse yourself from any harassing, threatening, or abusive calls. Report problems to office staff.
- Never make appointments for the extension director, or field and state specialists. Let the person or their designee make their own arrangements.
- Most of all, have fun helping others!

Prepared by Donald R. Lewis, former professor-in-charge, Iowa Master Gardener Program. Adapted from "Determining Problems on Woody Ornamentals over the Telephone" by Raymond H. Zerba, Horticulture Extension Agent, Clay County Extension Service, University of Florida.

In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, and American Sign Language) should contact the responsible State or local Agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad-3027>, from any USDA office, by calling 866-632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by: (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or (2) Fax: 833-256-1665 or 202-690-7442; or (3) Email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov). This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to [www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext).