

# Iowa\_Master\_Gardener\_Program

Tue, Dec 20, 2022 4:52PM 13:35

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

master gardener, master gardeners, county, master gardener program, program, horticulture, alicia, training, iowa, interested, trainees, extension, county master gardener, service, sessions, education, volunteer, communities, iowa state, small farms

## SPEAKERS

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Christa Hartsook, Alicia Herzog, Olivia Hanlon

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### Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

### Olivia Hanlon 00:28

In this episode, I interview Alicia Herzog. I will master gardener program coordinator for Iowa State University Extension and outreach. And today we are talking about the Master Gardener Program. I'm Olivia Hanlon, small farms education extension specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Alicia, welcome, we're glad to have you joining us.

### Alicia Herzog 00:48

Thank you. Glad to be here.


### Olivia Hanlon 00:50

So you are fairly new to your role, Alicia, and this is your first time on our podcast. So why don't we start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and what you do and your role for Iowa State.

### Alicia Herzog 01:01

I started with the Master Gardener program in August last year 2021 as the new statewide coordinator. My background is in earth science and nonprofit management and I went to school at the University of Northern Iowa go cats. Early in my career, I was a programs presenter at


at the University of Northern Iowa go cats. Early in my career, I was a programs presenter at the Science Center of Iowa for a number of years. So I have been involved in science education as it relates to a number of different topics. And I also was an intern at the Cedar Valley Arboretum and Botanic Gardens in Waterloo focused on youth education. When I'm not at work, I really enjoy being out in nature. I like knitting and traveling and just kind of getting out and having fun.

 Olivia Hanlon 01:41

That is awesome. Well, we're very glad to have you today, Alicia. So since we're talking about the Master Gardener Program, why don't we start with you giving us a quick overview on what this program is and what it's all about.

 01:52

The Master Gardener program it's actually a nationwide extension initiative. It was started in 1972. In Washington State, and the local Extension offices had recognized that they had a need for more extension agents that could help answer public horticulture questions. So they started training volunteers to deliver that content to the public. And in return, the volunteers received a specialized home horticulture training. And that was the beginning of the Master Gardener program. So today, the program has the same mission, which is to provide current research based consumer horticulture information and education to the citizens of Iowa. Nationally, in 2021, there were more than 84,000 Master Gardeners, and they provided over 3 million hours of service to the public. And in Iowa in 2021, we had 1730 Master Gardeners, and they provided over 97,000 hours of service here in our local communities.

 Olivia Hanlon 02:54

That's awesome. So talk to us a little bit, Alicia about how the Master Gardener program is set up. It's a little bit unique because it's not just a series of classes. So why don't you lay that out for our listeners.

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Right, so as we said, this is an extensive specialized home horticulture training. So it does take some time and it is a little bit involved. It's a 10 week Master Gardener training program that is hybrid. And so the majority of our content is delivered online through our Canvas platform, which is something that Iowa State uses. We have video lectures, assigned readings, supplemental resources, quizzes and tests that are housed in that platform to train Master Gardener trainees in a variety of horticulture topics. The other part of their training comes from in person interactions with their local extension office. So they have to attend at least four in person training sessions with their county extension office. And these sessions can range from live lectures to brainstorming and networking sessions with their active master gardeners, and many other different ways that they want to set those up. So these sessions are decided by the county and they often highlight local experts resources in the local area, areas of interest in the community. And then once a trainee completes their online training and their in person sessions, they take their post test, then they become a master gardener in turn. And during

their internship we asked them to complete 40 hours of volunteer service in their training County. They have until the end of the following year calendar year to complete those service hours. So our trainees who are training right now will become interns this fall and then they'll have until the end of 2023 to do their service hours. And the County Master Gardener coordinator helps those interns to find approved projects that they can dedicate their time to and identify opportunities that match their interests. So examples of Master Gardener projects that they might spend their time on include growing produce in a growing together Iowa donation garden, planning and attending garden displays at the county fairgrounds, community beautification, presenting public garden programs, writing newsletter or newspaper articles or leading a school or youth garden program. And then after completing their first 40 hours, the intern graduates to an acting Master Gardener, and at this point they continue on in our program by only having to do 20 hours of volunteer service a year and 10 hours of continuing education.

**O** Olivia Hanlon 05:30

Okay, so it's quite the process there, Alicia, and over 10 weeks, I imagine that you cover a lot of different topics, but could you hit on a few of the topics that people could expect to learn about throughout the program.

**A** Alicia Herzog 05:43

Throughout the program, we work to give trainees a broad overview of a wide range of horticulture topics. So there should be a little something for everyone in this course, and all the trainees should feel that they have a basic understanding of every aspect of horticulture by the end of the training. So throughout the 10 weeks, they'll learn about 17 different topics, including fruits, vegetables, ornamentals, turf grass, landscape design, house plants, integrated pest management, soils, compost, trees, entomology and a few other topics.

**O** Olivia Hanlon 06:20

Wonderful. So when we are looking at your target audience here, Alicia who can participate in the Master Gardener Program.

**A** Alicia Herzog 06:28

Anyone who's over the age of 18 can participate in this program. We're looking for service minded passionate individuals who want to make a difference in their communities, love learning and are interested in gardening and horticulture. They don't have to have a background in horticulture, they don't have to have any gardening experience to be accepted into the program.

**O** Olivia Hanlon 06:50

Okay, very good. Alicia, when is the next start term for folks who are interested, and is this program offered in all of Iowa counties

program offered in all of Iowa counties.

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Alicia Herzog 06:54

So the program is not offered in all of Iowa's counties, but it's offered in most of them. And it's offered at different times throughout the year, depending on the county, and when they need to and want to host it. So counties will choose this year from either summer or fall or both summer and fall as their two training timelines. So summer training is currently going on. It'll be ending at the end of July. And then fall training will start August 22. And will run through October 28. And we are still currently taking applications for that fall training until July 8. Next year, we're looking to probably offer training in winter and fall. And anyone who's interested in training can find a map on our website. It's [extension.ia.state.edu backslash Master Gardener](https://extension.ia.state.edu/backslash%20Master%20Gardener), on the become a master gardener tab and this map will show which counties are offering training and at what time of year they're offering it.

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Olivia Hanlon 08:00

If someone's county does not have a master gardener program, is it possible for them to go to a neighboring county for this?

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Alicia Herzog 08:07

Yeah, if they don't have a local master gardener program, they are definitely welcome to go to a neighboring county, we just asked that they make contact with that county coordinator and have that discussion with them at the local level of you know, I want to get involved in this program. My county doesn't have it, will I be required to do my first 40 hours of service in your county if I train in that county. So that is something that the counties have to decide individually if they're going to uphold that requirement or not. And so they just want to make sure that they have open lines of communication at the local level. And everyone knows what's expected of everyone before they sign up for the program.

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Olivia Hanlon 08:47


Okay, Alicia, I'm pretty sure people need to register for this program or apply, I guess, can they go to the same website to apply? And is there an application or registration fee for this program?

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09:02

Yes, that's true. So anyone interested in becoming a master gardener will need to apply. Each county has a different capacity for incoming trainees, and they'll make the choice on what best fits their county needs. So the application is available on our website, that same website on the become a master gardener webpage. And counties also have the registration link so that individuals can either visit their county office and find a flyer with QR code there that they can scan, or they can email their county coordinator to access that link. The fee to become a master gardener is \$150. And this includes the textbook, access to the online training platform


and all the in person materials and sessions. And if someone is interested in the information provided by the master gardener program, but they don't want to volunteer, we do have an option for that as well. They can take the program at its full price as a pro Hort student meaning that they will just take their final test and we've done they don't need a volunteer and the price for that option is \$550.

 Olivia Hanlon 10:06

Okay, Alicia, if people are looking for more information on this program where could they find that if you could share that link with us again? Or who should they reach out to?

 10:17

Yeah, once again, they can find any information about becoming a master gardener on our webpage [extension.iastate.edu backslash Master Gardener](http://extension.iastate.edu/backslash%20Master%20Gardener). And you can also follow us on Facebook at IA master gardeners or Instagram and Twitter at mgardener underscore IA. The best place to connect with someone about master gardener is at the local level 79% of Iowa counties have a master gardener program. So interested parties can reach out to their active master gardeners to answer their horticulture questions, or to learn more about the program. They can also connect with the county extension office to speak with the County Master Gardener coordinator about training questions, specific dates and times for in person meetings and ways they can get involved in their local communities. We also have a list on our website on the staff page of all the county coordinators around the state and their contact information.


 Olivia Hanlon 11:15

Okay, so our last question today, Alicia, if you could choose one thing, what is your favorite part about the Master Gardener Program?

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This was a hard question. So I actually chose two favorite parts. So my first is obviously the impact that Master Gardeners have on our state. As you remember I said in 2021 Master Gardeners provided over 97,000 hours of volunteer service in our state. And they made over 117,000 contacts in the public. So those that were involved in growing together Island projects also helped to grow and distribute over 91,000 pounds of food that ended up in our local food pantries. And Master Gardeners are uniquely positioned to help solve social issues that our communities are dealing with by providing connection, research based information and food to some of our most vulnerable populations. My second favorite part of the program is the passion of those that are involved. So when you meet master gardeners and you see the projects that they're working on, their dedication and passion speaks for itself. This program does ask a lot of the volunteers, but they do it because they love it. Master Gardeners are a wealth of information. And I learned something new from them every time that I interact with them, even though they only have to do 10 hours of continuing education a year, a lot of them will go down rabbit holes because they're interested in these subjects. And they will end up being experts on the most random things like we have one in Sioux county who's an expert on tulips now


because he was so interested in them and he wanted to be prepared to lead public programs during their local tulip time. So they really love learning. They love helping their communities and what's not to like about that.

 Olivia Hanlon 13:01


Absolutely. Is there anything that we didn't get covered today that you want to add in here, Alicia?

 Alicia Herzog 13:06

I don't think so.

 Olivia Hanlon 13:10

All right. Well, thank you again for joining us today, Alicia and we hope to have you back in the future.

 Alicia Herzog 13:17

Thank you.

 Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 13:18

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