

The Master Gardener Program and You

It is often said that the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Master Gardener Program is more than 'just a horticulture class'—and it is. As a Master Gardener you are afforded many of the resources of the University of Arkansas; in turn, you, as a Master Gardener, become a resource of the University of Arkansas through the Cooperative Extension Service. Your commitment to the program serves your community in a variety of ways.

Certain policies and guidelines have been established on a statewide basis to provide uniformity to the program and credibility to the designation, University of Arkansas Master Gardener. More specific rules may apply on a local basis and are addressed in the individual county's by-laws or policies.

The Name:

The official name is 'University of Arkansas, Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener-(your county) County'. This title applies to one who has successfully completed the 40-hour training class and is actively pursuing 'working' hours (40) and 'learning' hours (20-in addition to the training class) as part of the payback commitment of the first year. To maintain the designation in subsequent years, an individual must provide 20 'working' hours and accrue 20 'learning' hours per year.

The Master Gardener name is used only while participating in Master Gardener programs and not to be used in relation to any commercial venture. When individuals cease active participation, their designation as Master Gardener is void.

A 'leave of absence' is at the discretion of the County Agent or Master Gardener Executive Committee.

Transfers from other state Master Gardener programs may begin participation immediately but must take the training classes as soon as they are available.

Recordkeeping:

The recording, maintenance and determination of working and learning hours are a small but important part of a Master Gardener's commitment. The recording of hours is not just proof of one's payback obligation. These figures are crucial to justify programs and procure funding on many levels. According to Arkansas DHS Division of Community Service and Nonprofit Support volunteer time is valued at \$20.85 per hour which, given the number of Master Gardener projects, provides significant financial benefit to the taxpayer.

Each county has its own timesheet for record keeping. The general guidelines apply:

- The commitment the first year is: 40 working hours and 20 learning hours (over and above the training class).
- The commitment for subsequent years in order to maintain the MG designation is: 20 working hours and 20 learning hours.
- At least one half (50%) of all required working hours must be earned while participating in a county sanctioned project in the county in which you are a Master Gardener:

What is a 'county sanctioned project'? It is one that has gone through a specific proposal procedure, been accepted by the Master Gardener membership as one of the group's official projects and has been approved by the County Agent. Your local county will provide you with a list of sanctioned projects.

What constitutes 'other' working hours? All services other than the sanctioned projects that a Master Gardener performs as an arm of the Extension Office count as 'other working hours.' Some examples are: answering questions and providing horticultural advice, committee work, public workshops, lectures, newsletter contributions, etc. In addition, some Master Gardeners take on individual community service projects such as: landscaping their church or a local public area in their specific community. Executive officers count meetings as working hours.

- Learning hours are those activities which contribute to the individual's knowledge base. They include: monthly business meetings, workshops, seminars, public garden tours, some educational TV shows, etc.
- Since all working hours are, in essence, a learning experience, a Master Gardener may choose to count some of the working hours as learning hours if credit is needed in that category. **However**, learning hours are not to be counted as working hours and the same hours are not to be counted in both categories.
- Travel time is not counted for either learning or working hours except when picking up project supplies.

Each county organization makes the effort to ensure adequate opportunities are provided for the volunteer to fulfill his commitment.

At the annual Master Gardener State Meeting, volunteers are recognized individually for their commitment to the program. Five and ten year pins are awarded to qualifying individuals. In addition, recognition is made for county projects, newsletters, Master Gardener of the Year and other special awards.