

Delaware Cooperative Extension



Delaware Cooperative Extension is charged with meeting the educational needs of thousands of citizens in many areas, including home horticulture. This requires the dedication, creativity, and hard work of many volunteers. The goal of the Delaware Cooperative Extension Master Gardener training is to prepare volunteer educators to enhance the ability of Cooperative Extension to provide science-based educational programs in home horticulture and environmental science to the citizens of Delaware.

Master Gardeners are vital links in an educational chain that begins with research from the University of Delaware, Delaware State University, and the horticultural industry. Delaware Cooperative Extension specialists translate this research into practical, usable methods that can be used by Delaware home gardeners. Master Gardeners then play a key role in distributing this information about environmentally friendly practices for the home gardener. Topics include integrated pest and disease management, plant cultivation, landscape design, establishment and maintenance, and wildlife habitat development. Education is at the heart of all Master Gardener activities, which can take many forms, including teaching by example and demonstration.

Master Gardener volunteer educators have undergone training in a wide variety of horticultural and environmental topics coupled with training in educational methods and program evaluation. Monthly meetings bring all volunteers together to continue the learning process. The result is volunteers committed to reaching out to help county residents—adults and children alike—improve the quality of their lives.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Cooperative Extension? It is the educational arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Its job is to provide non-biased, research based information to the public from the Land Grant College System, of which the University of Delaware and Delaware State University are members.

Becoming a Delaware Master Gardener

How do I become a Master Gardener? Master Gardener candidates are selected based upon program capacity, county needs, and the completion of an application and background check. To become a Delaware Master Gardener, you must first complete an application to be accepted into the program. Once accepted, you will begin your training to be a Master Gardener intern. After completing the intern requirements, you will then complete your volunteer service and advanced training requirements to become a certified Master Gardener.

To become a Master Gardener Intern, you must:

- Complete and pass the University of Delaware background check
- Attend all training sessions and complete the required homework and activities of your county throughout the September through November training.
- Sign the Delaware Master Gardener Code of Conduct, and agree to follow all guidelines as set forth by Delaware Cooperative Extension.

To become a Master Gardener, you must:

- Complete the requirements of the intern, plus 40 hours of required community service. Service hours must be approved by the Horticulture Educator and reported to the Volunteer Management System.
- Complete 5 hours of approved advanced training. Advanced training hours must be approved by the Horticulture Educator and reported to the VMS.

What kind of people train to become Master Gardeners? Our group is composed of people from all walks of life, all educational levels and all sorts of backgrounds. One thing we all have in common, though, is a love of plants and nature, and a desire to “help others put knowledge to work.”

Do I have to be a resident of the county to which I'm applying to participate in Master Gardener training? No. Master Gardeners reside in Delaware, as well as our neighboring states, Maryland and Pennsylvania. However, Master Gardeners are required to volunteer in the county in which they trained.

Can I get involved in volunteering while I am in training? Most definitely! Throughout training, educators and Master Gardeners will be available to discuss current projects and volunteer opportunities. If their projects interest you, be sure to contact them to see how you can become involved.

At any time you may contact the Horticulture Educator, a committee chair, a project leader, or a Master Gardener officer to learn more about volunteer opportunities.

What volunteering could I do if I work full-time? We have several Master Gardeners who work full-time and still find ways to volunteer for projects. There are many volunteer opportunities for evenings and weekends. There are even some activities that you may be able to do from home. Projects also have clerical, administrative, or reporting components that Master Gardeners do at the times that are most convenient for them.

What do Master Gardeners do together for fun? Volunteering is not *all* work—we do manage to schedule trips, socializing, and other special events.

What technical support will I have after I become a Master Gardener? Extension Educators whom you meet during training as well as Extension Specialists in the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources provide educational resources and information and are valuable resources to Master Gardeners. The Horticulture Educator (Master Gardener Coordinator) organizes training and continues to provide daily support and guidance.

Selection Process

How are the class members chosen? It is the policy of Delaware Cooperative Extension that no person shall be subject to discrimination based on race, color, sex, age, disability, or national origin. The selection committee weighs a candidate's experience, skills, and desire to commit to volunteer educational service against Cooperative Extension's programmatic and organizational goals and needs.

What is the cost of the training program? There are specific costs per county (see application). A limited number of need-based scholarships are available. Contact the Horticulture Educator in your county for more information.

Course Content and Evaluation

Will I do OK if I've never taken a gardening course before? It is normal to be a little anxious about being in class, especially if it has been a while since you were in school. Nearly all our trainees, however, go through training without a hitch. It just takes commitment to reading and doing the homework, participating in class discussions and projects, and asking for help or clarification when you need it.

Who are the instructors? Delaware Cooperative Extension professionals, University of Delaware and Delaware State University faculty, community educators, and Master Gardener volunteers participate in training. A diverse curriculum and set of instructors delivers a wide range of horticultural topics. A complete curriculum and class schedule will be made available online and in the classroom on the first day of training.

How hard is the material to learn? Some of the material may be review, and some may be unfamiliar. Again, keeping up with assigned readings and homework and asking questions will help make things as easy and rewarding as possible. Throughout the training period, you will have take-home exams to help us gauge your understanding and application of the material we cover.

Are there commitments outside of the formal classroom training? Yes. In addition to formal training on Mondays and Wednesdays, there may be additional commitments outside the formal training schedule. This will consist of working with experienced Master Gardeners in providing educational programs and services. You will be provided with a list of required tasks for each assignment; this may include learning how to prepare handouts, assembling materials, using equipment, completing reports, etc.

Training Logistics

Where are classes held? Most of the classes will meet at your county office. Some classes will be held in other locations with your peers from the other counties.

When will classes meet? Classes will meet Mondays and Wednesdays.
Kent & Sussex County – 9:00am. to 12:30pm.

What if I am sick or away and cannot make classes? Of course, illness and other last minute obligations do happen. One or two sessions missed will not set you back. However, you must arrange for class material with the Horticulture Educator and copies of class notes and assignments from your classmates. Absences due to preplanned trips, medical procedures, or other business exceeding two sessions will, however, become problematic. If you expect to miss more than two sessions, you should notify the Horticulture Educator, or train another year.