



## **RECRUITMENT, MENTORING AND RETENTION OF VOLUNTEERS**

Revised 06-08

The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener Program is dependent upon volunteers. It is critical that recruitment be focused on prospective members who will complete their “working commitment” to the county. By making the program rewarding to its members, experienced volunteers will be retained for many years. Remember, diversity strengthens the group – a variety of genders, races, ages, backgrounds, etc. makes a more interesting group.

### **RECRUITMENT**

#### **Brochure**

The development of a colorful, informative brochure, which describes an individual county Master Gardener program, is a good start. Include in this brochure self-assessment questions for the prospective member aimed at volunteerism (i.e. Do you like to garden? Do you have 4-6 hours per month to volunteer to work on Master Gardener projects?)

These brochures should be placed in the Cooperative Extension office as well as in local nurseries. They can also be made available at county fairs, horticulture events, plant sales, and other events that prospective members might attend. If the production of a county-specific brochure is not possible, a “generic” form is available from the state extension office that includes in it an application-to-join form. This “Do you want to be a MG” brochure can also be used in conjunction with county program information.

#### **Advertising**

Advertise the Master Gardener program by every available avenue:

- Consider using some of the following tools: posters, pamphlets, news releases, informational cards, and copies of the Master Gardener newsletter.
- Chamber of Commerce
- Newspapers
- Garden clubs
- Radio and television
- County fairs
- Senior citizens’ organizations (AARP, RSVP)
- Welcome Wagon and Newcomers
- Other extension groups such as Extension Homemaker Clubs and 4-H clubs

Make sure the local newspaper photographer is notified of club events and special projects. Special publicity is helpful announcing basic training. Information on press releases is found in the chapter on Training.

## **Members-Recruiting-Members**

Members-recruiting-members is an effective method of finding new Master Gardeners. Members should invite prospective candidates to meetings, special events, workdays or tours. When possible, encourage active members to speak about the Master Gardener program to civic organizations, schools, garden clubs and church groups. Brochures should be available to all members of the audience. Visibility is the key.

## **The Interview**

Candidates who apply for admission into a Master Gardener class should be interviewed by a selection committee. This committee should include the county agent and may include Master Gardener representatives from various areas of the county. Their collective knowledge and specific interview of the prospective member will provide a base of information for candidate selection. Volunteerism should be stressed during the interview process. The applicant should be given a clear overview of the policies and expectations of the Master Gardener program, especially the required working and learning hours. **Sample interview questions are included in the section on Training.**

## **MENTORING**

Mentoring is designed to pair new members with existing members to integrate the new members into the County Master Gardener Program. New members may feel lost after graduation, and mentoring will help their transition into the group. The following are suggested strategies for implementation of mentoring in the County Program. \*The word "mentee" does not appear in the dictionary. However, we have chosen to adopt the word and believe it accurately reflects the new member in that relationship.

1. A Mentoring Chairman and/or Co-Chairman will be appointed to facilitate the mentoring process.
2. Each new Master Gardener will be paired with an active Master Gardener. The mentor-mentee\* relationship is expected to last one (1) year.
3. Mentors can be solicited by newsletter, e-mail, telephone, or other appropriate means. **A sample solicitation letter is attached.**
4. A graduation party or potluck meal is recommended at the end of the training course to enable new and active Master Gardeners to become acquainted.
5. Time spent in mentoring activities should be counted and turned in as part of work hours.
6. It is recommended that mentors carry out the following functions:
  - Meet the mentee during the Master Gardener training. It is suggested that the initial contact occur the first day of class, if possible.
  - Read the new member bio sheet to become familiar with the information provided by the mentee. **A sample bio sheet is attached.**
  - Inform the mentee of the time, date and location of lectures, gardening seminars and other garden-related events. Encourage attendance.
  - Wear name badge at all functions. When possible, also wear Master Gardener attire.
  - Seek out mentees at the monthly meetings to make them feel welcome and included. Introduce the mentee to other members. Ask the mentee to sit with you and your friends at the meeting.
  - Be certain the mentee is knowledgeable about each project. A tour of projects may be helpful.
  - Help the mentee select a project on which to work. Introduce mentee to project chair.
  - If possible, accompany the mentee on the first project workday.

- Be certain the mentee is receiving e-mails or messages from the organization about local, regional and statewide Master Gardener meetings.
- Telephone the mentee at least monthly to answer any questions.

Having a mentoring process in place has proven to be an excellent way to retain members. Each county is encouraged to develop such a process. County 76 members are available to answer each county's questions about creating a mentoring process.

### **Sample Mentor Solicitation Letter**

A communication similar to the following can be sent to all county members to solicit their participation as mentors. It can be tailored to the county's needs and sent by newsletter, e-mail or postal mail.

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### **Mentors are needed for the new class**

Remember when you were a new MG and felt left out or lost the first time you came to a meeting?

Remember all the questions you had but were afraid to ask? The mentor program will keep others from feeling as you did. A mentor helps a new MG by being a "buddy," by helping the "mentee" feel welcome in the group, and by answering questions about how to report hours, how to get involved in various work projects—any question pertaining to being a MG. A mentor's purpose is to answer questions about the MG program rather than to answer questions about horticulture.

Mentors are needed to work with the new MGs! Because the training of brand-new MGs is going to begin soon, mentors are needed to 'adopt' a new member. You will be a mentor until the new MG feels "at home" with the group—maximum length of time is one year.

If you are interested in spending some time and effort to help a new MG feel welcome and part of the

\_\_\_\_\_ Master Gardener Program, please contact \_\_\_\_\_,

Mentor Chairman (phone # \_\_\_\_\_, e-mail address

\_\_\_\_\_).

You must be an active \_\_\_\_\_ County Master Gardener (not on leave or a sustainer) and must be in good standing with your hours to be a mentor.

# Sample New Member Bio Sheet

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOME PHONE NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_

**CELL PHONE NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-MAIL** \_\_\_\_\_

**AREAS OF GARDENING INTEREST** \_\_\_\_\_

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**HOBBIES** \_\_\_\_\_

**PAST RESIDENCES (City and State)** \_\_\_\_\_

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## **RETENTION**

### **Know Your Members**

In order to retain good members, consider their interests and abilities when assigning work duties. Some people will not speak in front of a group, or write, or chair a committee. Some just want to dig in the dirt. Keep in mind age and physical limitations and offer those “faithfuls” less active roles. Keep records of attendance and follow-up with those members who seem to be losing interest.

Always be careful to recognize that Master Gardeners are individuals. They come from all walks of life and religions. When celebrating holidays, be careful to make the parties interdenominational in nature. Consider having a Winterfest, Spring Festival or Harvest Party. Be considerate.

### **Sanctioned Projects**

Annually review sanctioned projects for meaningfulness. Make sure that the projects provide enough work for all members to meet their “work hour” requirements. The work will be more rewarding if members feel they are instrumental in the success of a worthwhile project. Be sure there is as much variety as possible in project assignments. Allow members to change projects to maintain interest. Perhaps do a mid-year review of hours to remind members where they stand. Think of and share with members additional ways they can gain hours if they are unable to fulfill regular requirements.

### **The Reward**

Make Master Gardener meetings and workdays fun and rewarding.

- Have informative programs at scheduled meetings.
- Have potluck dinners and social get-togethers.
- Have brown-bag lunches or refreshments at workdays.
- Consider rewards for members at five-year intervals.
- Recognize all new members at their inaugural meeting with a party.
- Select a Master Gardener of the Year.
- Select a Project of the Year.
- Recognize all officers and chairpersons in newsletter biographical sketches.
- Honor any Master Gardener for all of his/her personal achievements.

An active Social Committee could be responsible for these activities and other special events throughout the year.

### **Newsletter**

Keep all members and other county programs informed by publishing a newsletter. Be as people-and project-oriented as possible. Take and publish photographs that recognize special members and projects. Be sure to include a calendar of events, which includes information about major workdays, tours and educational opportunities. Provide pertinent local gardening information and list new horticulture books and articles.

## **Field Trips – Educational Events**

Select a Field Trip Committee which plans and executes tours to local gardens or other places of gardening interest. Consider day trips to nurseries or weekend trips to major points of interest. Encourage Master Gardeners to interact with each other. Field trips can also be educational opportunities (learning hours) when coupled with a speaker. Consider hands-on demonstrations – perhaps a plant swap or a tour of local MG gardens.

## **E-mail**

**The majority of MG members have e-mail and it makes communicating so much easier. However, there are still a few who do not have computers. It is very important to include all members in the communications network. Some ideas include showing members how to use their local library to access mail; establishing a buddy to call each member without e-mail when workdays, meetings or other interesting events are taking place; and having the county extension office secretary keep a notebook with all e-mails so that anyone can visit the extension office to check out the happenings.**

## **Be Friendly**

Encourage friendliness among members:

- Provide incentives for wearing name tags.
- Encourage visiting among members at meetings.
- Use a “We Care Committee” to phone absentees and send cards.
- Use a “buddy system” between project committee members.
- Consider the “secret pal” concept for birthday recognition.
- Promote comradeship among members by joining together to prepare for and attend state, regional, and national Master Gardener functions.
- BE A FAMILY!

Master Gardeners are fine, hardworking people. For more information on finding and keeping good members, call other counties to see what they do successfully. Also, seek information from the website and use e-mail to communicate with county contacts. Make use of statewide get-togethers such as state meetings and leadership training to network, network, network.

## **GUIDELINES FOR RETENTION OF ESTABLISHED MEMBERS**

Retention of seasoned members has proven to be a concern in some counties. It is important to find out why members leave the program and to develop strategies to retain members.

1. Find out why members are leaving. Implement an “exit interview” to find out the reason for the member’s departure. **(See example of Exit Interview Questionnaire.)**
2. Some people leave because they have no input into county MG activities. Create a membership survey. Survey the members to get input about how they feel about various aspects of the organization, including ideas for programs, topics and speakers. **(See example of Membership Survey.)**
3. Include members in decision-making by having the membership vote on issues. Devise ways for members to give input concerning their organization so that members feel part of the organization.
4. Provide meaningful monthly programs and speakers.
5. Review the work hours of established members and see where their interests lie. Pair members up with projects in which they are interested.
6. Recognize accomplishments of established members, such as ribbon winners at garden clubs and county fairs, and newspaper or garden magazine articles.
7. Create a “Sunshine Committee,” which remembers the sick and troubled by mailing cards and letters.
8. Provide a printed roster of all Master Gardeners in the county. Include names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Include photographs, if possible.
9. Plan garden tours of local and statewide gardens. Have a committee for planning and organizing tours.
10. Encourage members to wear name badges at all functions; give token rewards, such as Hershey Kisses candy, to those who wear their name badge.
11. Encourage members to be mentors to new members.
12. Contact members unable to do physical labor to interest them in helping with once-a-year events such as plant sales, seminars, or county fairs.
13. Provide the membership with a list of non-labor-intensive activities for those members unable to do physical work. Include activities such as making plant labels for the plants in landscape projects; making lists of the plants in the various projects (to be updated annually); making landscape drawings of projects; helping in the county extension office; helping with clerical work such as putting volunteer manuals together; or helping educate 4-H, Brownie or Scout youth about gardening.
14. Promote having fun at work projects, committee meetings and monthly meetings. People want to stay part of the group when they’re having fun.
15. Use each workday to educate the participants about different gardening skills or gardening knowledge. Explain skills such as how to prune, how to plant a shrub or how to put in a drip-irrigation system used in the project. Explain why certain plants were selected for the project.
16. Strive to make each member feel as if he/she has something to contribute to the organization. Know members’ strengths and interests.

## Sample Membership Survey

Please circle the answer to the following questions that best reflects your feelings. It is not necessary to sign your name.

1. What do you enjoy most in the Master Gardener program?  
Programs   People   Learning opportunities   Social activities
2. Are the monthly programs what you expected and are they meeting your educational needs?   Yes   No
3. Are the programs: Too short   Too long   About the right length
4. Do you have suggestions for additional programs?   Yes   No  
If yes, please list suggestions:
5. Is there effective communication?   Yes   No
6. Is there effective leadership?   Yes   No
7. Is there an effective mentoring program?   Yes   No  
How can the mentoring program be improved?
8. Is there a friendly atmosphere?   Yes   No
9. Are there enough diversified working opportunities available, i.e. clerical work rather than hauling mulch, pruning, etc.?   Yes   No
10. Do you have a committee to recognize accomplishments of members, such as ribbon winners at garden clubs or county fairs, newspaper or magazine articles?   Yes   No
11. Do you have input in the programs?   Yes   No
12. Do the members meet the organization's requirements, i.e. meeting the required hours by working on sanctioned projects?   Yes   No
13. Some people feel they are being watched and their efforts reported. Is there an honor system?   Yes   No
14. Last but not least, how can we improve our Master Gardener program?

Use the reverse side to make any additional comments about the program.



## Sample Exit Interview Questionnaire

Dear Master Gardener (insert name),

We are saddened that you are leaving our MG program. You will be missed. Please help us by completing this questionnaire. Please circle all numbers that apply and comment when requested.

I must leave the Master Gardener Program because:

1. I am relocating.
2. I can no longer fulfill the working requirements of MG.
3. I have health or personal reasons for leaving.
4. The MG work did not meet my expectations.  
Please explain:
  
5. Meeting/educational opportunities did not meet my expectations.  
Please explain:
  
6. I found there were personality conflicts that made me uncomfortable.
7. There was a lack of effective leadership.
8. There was a lack of effective communication.

Other comments:

9. Is there anything that can be done to keep you in the MG program?  
Yes (if so, what)  
No
  
10. If you are relocating, would you like help in moving your MG membership?  
Yes  
No

Use the remaining space or reverse side to make any additional comments or suggestions.  
Thanks for your help and for being part of our MG program.

## **Guidelines for Statewide County Support System**

Members of the County 76 Mentoring and Retention Project will be available to assist in implementation of the Mentoring and Retention Guidelines on the county level.

Master Gardener counties will be divided into four (4) Arkansas Master Gardener Regions. Mentoring and Retention Project team members will be assigned to the region where they live. Team members will be available to present the Mentoring and Retention Guidelines to other MG organizations in their districts or statewide.

To reach members of the Mentoring and Retention Project, please contact Janet Carson at the state extension office to reach the project chair.

The new guidelines on Mentoring and Retention were adopted by the County 76 Mentoring and Retention Committee on May 21, 2006 and approved for use statewide in July, 2006.