

Policies Regarding Florida Master Gardener Volunteers

Within the state of Florida, 58 counties currently maintain active Master Gardener Volunteer programs. This being the case, a need exists for the establishment of standards for all Florida Master Gardener Volunteers to represent their county in a manner consistent with exemplary citizenship and leadership.

To become a certified Florida Master Gardener Volunteer, one is required to attend the prescribed hours of instruction and pass an examination administered by the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service. This certification is restrictive in nature and is valid only for one year and when the individual is participating in the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Program. New certifications will be issued each year only to those individuals who make a commitment for participation in the coming year.

As a certified Florida Master Gardener Volunteer, you will be eligible to attend educational programs such as the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer Continued Training Conference offered by the University of Florida, as well as local educational programs and field trips provided by the county agent. Master Gardener Volunteers are also provided with the most recent information available on environmental horticulture issues and related topics by the County Master Gardener Coordinator and State Extension Specialists.

Florida Master Gardener Volunteers train and volunteer in their home county; this is so they serve the people of their county where they reside when they volunteer. It is left to the individual Master Gardener Volunteer coordinators in each county to discuss and decide with the volunteer or potential volunteer if they will make exceptions to the understanding that they will only train and retain Master Gardener Volunteers from their home county. If the volunteer would still prefer to train or volunteer outside their county of residence, they have that option.

Master Gardener Volunteers are encouraged to participate in all components of the planned program (including record keeping), be responsive to the reasonable requests of the county agent in charge, and be respectful of the need for personal safety and the safety of others. Whenever injuries do occur, they should be reported to the County Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator immediately. Along with active participation, Master Gardener Volunteers are expected to uphold a professional

demeanor. The University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service functions without regard to race, sex, or national origin and does not tolerate:

- ❖ Possession of alcohol or drugs in the workplace;
- ❖ Abuse or theft of public or personal property;
- ❖ Sexual harassment or misconduct;
- ❖ Verbal abuse or failure to cooperate with other Master Gardeners, staff members, and/or the public;
- ❖ Possession or use of weapons or fireworks in the workplace;
- ❖ Defamation of the organization;
- ❖ Creating an implied or outright University or Extension Service endorsement of any product or place of business;
- ❖ Misrepresentation of sources of information;
- ❖ Consistently giving out incorrect information;
- ❖ Use of state and/or county equipment without authorization.

Master Gardener Volunteer Certification may become void when an individual ceases active participation in the program or dismissal may result from violations described above. Illegal activities will be referred to law enforcement. Those individuals not continuing in the program should be aware if they represent themselves as Florida Master Gardener Volunteers, they are violating their original commitment to the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service.

The training and experience gained by participation in the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer program are valuable and may rightly be listed and featured as qualifications when seeking employment. Once employed, and while serving as a paid employee, or if self-employed, Master Gardener Volunteers shall not display credentials or give the appearance of being a Florida Master Gardener Volunteer at the place of business.

Experienced Florida Master Gardener Volunteers may be invited to speak before various community groups. Please do not seek payment for such speaking appearances. Gratuitous personal payments (i.e., in the form of cash or gifts) for such presentations are not encouraged.

The title “Florida Master Gardener Volunteer” is to be used only and exclusively in the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service Master Gardener Volunteer Program in which trained and certified Florida Master Gardener Volunteers answer gardening questions. Master Gardener Volunteers are expected to use the title only when doing unpaid volunteer educational work on the behalf of the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service. Florida Master Gardener Volunteers shall not use the Florida Master Gardener Volunteer title in

any advertisements or activities not related to University of Florida/IFAS Master Gardener Volunteer activities. The Florida Master Gardener Volunteer program represents a University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service public education program and one should avoid having association with commercial products or implying University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service endorsements of any product or place of business.

In making recommendations, which include the use of chemicals (i.e., insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides), Florida Master Gardener Volunteer **MUST FOLLOW PUBLISHED** University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension recommendations. Cultural problems that are not specially covered by University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service recommendations may be handled by suggesting treatments, which an experienced Master Gardener Volunteer considers appropriate. If you are making a recommendation based on personal experience, state clearly that you are speaking for yourself and not the Extension Service. Questions concerning any commercial horticultural enterprise (i.e., vegetable production, fruit crops production, landscape maintenance of golf course, recreational park, school grounds or commercial nursery production) are to be referred to the local Horticulture Extension Agent.

Special Note:

Individuals who are not acting on behalf of the University of Florida/IFAS Cooperative Extension Service are strongly urged to make every effort to minimize the appearance of being on duty before making any recommendations in the area of horticulture. Speaking “off the record” is your right; however, make sure everyone knows you are speaking for yourself and not the Extension Service.