



EM 8749

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An introduction to being a **MASTER GARDENER** VOLUNTEER



**Oregon State** | Extension Service  
UNIVERSITY

# NOTES

Dear OSU Extension Service Master Gardener Volunteer:

Welcome to Oregon State University Extension Service! OSU Extension is charged with providing informal educational programs for all Oregonians, by delivering objective, research-based information to help solve problems, develop leadership, and manage resources wisely. You are key to helping us achieve that mission.

In your role as a Master Gardener, you join more than 23,000 volunteers working in Extension's five major program areas. OSU Extension volunteers contribute about 1.5 million hours annually, helping Extension reach nearly 2 million Oregonians. That is equivalent to more than 700 full-time employees! Extension volunteers have tremendous impact in their state and communities. It is important to us that you directly benefit from your voluntary association with the OSU Extension Service. These benefits may include improved personal skills, increased self-confidence, community recognition, and direct access to a variety of educational opportunities.

We welcome you with enthusiasm and appreciation, knowing from past experience that volunteers help us do a better job.

Sincerely,



A. Scott Reed  
*Vice Provost, University Outreach & Engagement  
Director, OSU Extension Service*



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“*The most important thing to know is that you don’t have to ‘know’ everything. You just need to know where and how to find good information. Also, it is helpful to know at the beginning that the whole Master Gardener experience is one of continuous learning. No matter how hard everyone tries, you can’t get it all at the beginning but can absorb it as the years go by.*”

— **Response from a current Master Gardener, to the question**

*“What do you wish you had known when you started your Master Gardener training?”*

**Cover photo:** Master Gardeners (l-r) Nakisha Nathan, Brynna McCarter, and John Jordan. Photo by Gillian Carson. Used with permission.



# An introduction to being a **MASTER GARDENER** VOLUNTEER



Photo by Ryan Creason, © Oregon State University

**Figure 1.** Benton County Master Gardeners at work in the garden.

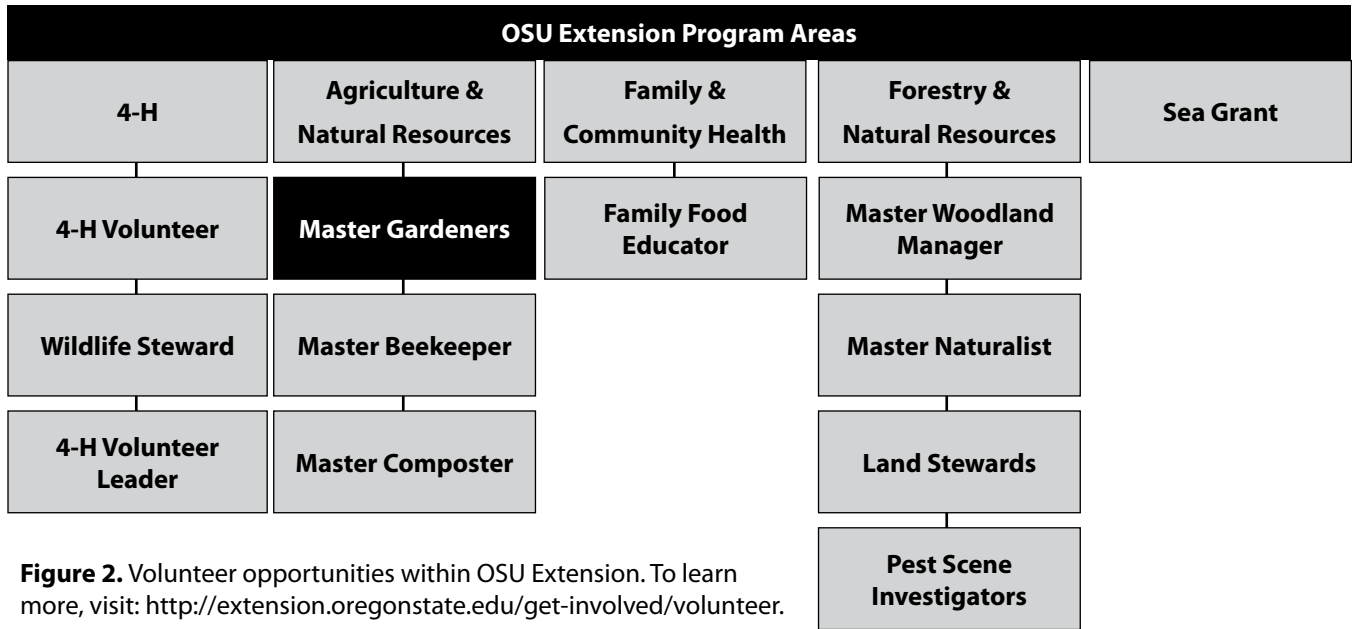
**G**ardening is one of the most popular recreational activities in the United States, with over 80% of households participating in some sort of gardening—whether it be a window herb garden, pots on the patio, a raised bed vegetable garden, an ornamental cutting garden, a formal English garden, or a full-scale urban farm. Although some individuals seem to be born with a ‘green thumb,’ many more learn what works best in their garden through trial and error. In today’s world, many learn how to garden from the Internet.

Although there is a wealth of useful information about gardening on the Internet, it can be difficult for novice gardeners to separate good advice from questionable recommendations. Even advice that is generally good is not universally appropriate for all gardening situations.

Luckily, Extension Master Gardener programs are available to serve the needs of home and community gardeners. The Oregon State University (OSU)

Extension Master Gardener Program educates Oregonians about the art and science of growing and caring for plants. This program also facilitates the training of a highly educated corps of volunteers who have earned the title “Master Gardener” by:

1. Completing Master Gardener classes consisting of at least 40 hours—but sometimes up to 70 hours—of coursework in home and community horticulture
2. Passing a comprehensive final examination with a score of 70% or higher
3. Completing a volunteer service practicum equal to the amount of time they spent completing the Master Gardener classes. In Oregon, most Master Gardener programs require between 60 to 70 hours of volunteer service to be completed during your initial training year.



**Figure 2.** Volunteer opportunities within OSU Extension. To learn more, visit: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/get-involved/volunteer>.

Master Gardener volunteers provide a valuable public service by sharing sustainable gardening information with their communities through a variety of education and outreach programs. Master Gardeners strive to ensure that the information they provide is:

- **Reliable:** our gardening advice and education is research-based.
- **Relevant:** our gardening advice can be customized to accommodate individual gardening situations.
- **Reachable:** folks can call us on the phone, email them a question, or visit with them at Extension offices, markets or gardens in their communities.

If you're reading this, you're probably curious about the Master Gardener program, or perhaps you've already signed up for the annual Master Gardener training. This publication will provide basic information on the history, activities, policies, and procedures associated with the Extension Master Gardener Program in Oregon.

### Oregon Master Gardeners are part of the OSU Extension Service

The Oregon State University Extension Service is a partnership involving OSU, local partners (typically county governments), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These partners extend research-based information beyond university walls and into the community so all Oregonians can benefit from the knowledge and discoveries developed by faculty at OSU and other land-grant universities.

OSU Extension is made up of five program areas:

- 4-H Youth Development
- Agriculture & Natural Resources
- Family & Community Health
- Forestry & Natural Resources
- Sea Grant

The Master Gardener Program is part of the Agriculture and Natural Resources program area (Figure 2).



OSU Extension can be found in each of Oregon's 36 counties, where over 20,000 volunteers annually donate countless hours to support more than 2.3 million educational interactions. These educational interactions occur when a 4-H Youth Leader teaches a class on animal husbandry, a Master Gardener works with a homeowner to solve a plant problem, or a Family Food Educator (formerly called a Master Food Preserver) teaches a class on canning. In addition to these in-person educational opportunities, OSU Extension offers a variety of information and resources online (<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/>).

### A brief history of our national Extension system

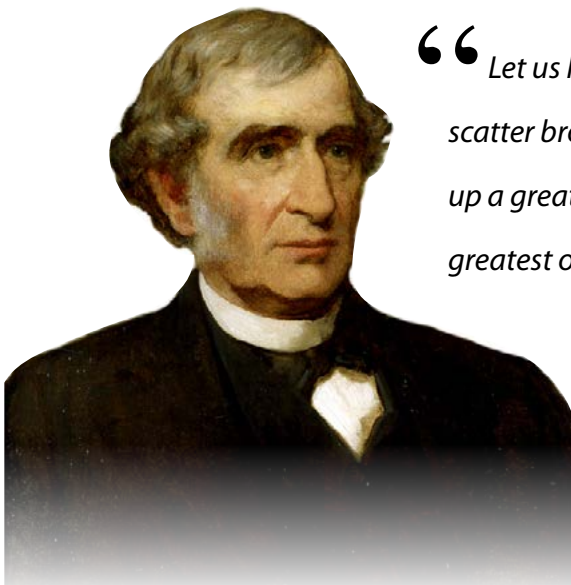
When Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862, and Grover Cleveland signed the Hatch Act in 1887, the land-grant university system was created. The Morrill Act provided states with land that could be used to establish an educational institution to teach agriculture and the mechanical arts, as well as more traditional university subjects. The Hatch Act provided funds to establish a national system of Agricultural Experiment Stations that were associated with the land-grant universities. These actions helped to transform our nation into an agricultural, industrial, and social powerhouse.

The nation's Cooperative Extension Service was established in 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act. The creation of Extension formalized the public distribution and dissemination of science-based information developed by land-grant universities and agricultural experiment stations. Oregon State is the land-grant university in Oregon.

The land-grant universities differ from other colleges and universities. Whereas most universities concentrate on teaching and research, land grants such as OSU have a three-pronged approach to the development and dissemination of knowledge. These three components are:

- Teaching (including the teaching and training of degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students)
- Research (including research on the OSU campus and at the 13 agricultural experiment stations around the state)
- Extension (including the OSU Extension Service programs that can be found in each of Oregon's 36 counties)

These three land-grant missions provide a basis for discovering, developing, and disseminating knowledge beyond the ivory tower and into our communities.



“Let us have colleges as might rightfully claim the authority to scatter broadcast that knowledge which will prove useful in building up a great nation — great in its resources of wealth and power, but greatest of all in the aggregate of its intelligence and virtue.”

— **Representative Justin Smith Morrill,**  
pleading for passage of the Morrill Act of 1862



Although the original intent of the Cooperative Extension Service was to improve agricultural practices, the scope and function of Extension is now much broader. Across the country, in classrooms, fields, gardens, and greenhouses, on paper, online, over the phone, and in person, Extension faculty and volunteers teach and distribute information that supports sustainable environments, healthy communities, and robust economies.

## History of the Master Gardener Program

Prior to the 1970s, University Extension horticulture programs were focused on crop production. However, in the early 1970s, Washington State University Extension, in response to increased public demand for gardening information, began a program in urban horticulture. Initially, David Gibby (then a WSU Extension agent in King County, Wash.), delivered research-based gardening information via mass media, including radio broadcasts and newspaper articles. This approach was effective at reaching the general public, but it increased public demand for gardening information, resources, and programs, making it more difficult for Gibby to answer gardening questions.

As a result, Gibby and Bill Scheer, then a WSU Extension agent in Pierce County, Wash., met to discuss ways to serve the needs of home and community gardeners. One option was to recruit and train volunteers who could respond to gardeners' questions. Although this idea was initially met with skepticism by some, the first Master Gardener training classes were offered to about 200 people in King and Pierce counties in 1973.

The program was an immediate success, with the newly trained Master Gardeners putting in far more hours answering other gardeners' questions than anyone could have anticipated. Since that time, the program has both endured and expanded. Today, Master Gardener programs are active in all 50 states, nine Canadian provinces, and South Korea. As of 2009, when the last national census of Master

Gardener volunteers was taken, there were 94,865 certified Master Gardeners in the United States.

## The Oregon Master Gardener Program

Oregon State's Master Gardener Program is one of the oldest in the nation. After Washington State started its program in 1973, Nevada and Ohio (1974) and then Colorado and Illinois (1975) followed. Duane Hatch and Gray Thompson started Oregon's Master Gardener Program in 1976, when they were Extension agents in Lane and Clackamas counties, respectively. Duane and Gray delivered the first training classes in Lane and Clackamas counties to about 36 people. Upon their retirement, both Duane and Gray remained active with the Oregon Master Gardener Program. For many years, Duane hosted

### Mission, vision and strategies of the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program

**Mission statement:** We educate people about sustainable gardening in the Pacific Northwest via annual Master Gardener trainings, educational opportunities for the general public, and recommendations and advice delivered by trained volunteers.

**Vision:** We endeavor to establish Oregon State University Extension as an authoritative voice and the first choice for people seeking research-based, objective information and education on sustainable gardening in the Pacific Northwest.

**Action items:** Towards this end, we work to:

- Ensure that our information is accurate, up to date, and focused on sustainable approaches and methods
- Keep an up-to-date online presence so that more of our information is easily accessible to a broad audience
- Market our services to the general public to increase awareness of Extension Master Gardener resources and opportunities, and to build public support for the Oregon State University Extension Master Gardener Program.





## Assessing the benefits: What's the best part of becoming a Master Gardener?



**Figure 3.** A survey of more than 700 Oregon Master Gardeners found that the highest-ranking benefit (on a scale of 0 to 5) of the program was the opportunity to learn horticulture. Chart adapted from “Demographics and perceptions of Master Gardener volunteers in Oregon,” by G.A. Langellotto-Rhodaback and W. Miller. *International Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Vol. XXIV, No. 2. Used with permission.

a popular gardening show called “The Hatch Patch” on a Eugene radio station—even though he retired to Utah! Gray, meanwhile, was an active Clackamas County Master Gardener for many years, until his death in 2010. Duane passed away in 2012.

The Oregon Master Gardener Program has grown from two counties in 1976 to 28 counties. The first training class of 36 volunteers has grown to well over 4,000 active Master Gardeners.

OSU Extension receives thousands upon thousands of gardening questions each year, and our Master Gardener volunteers play a major role in helping local Extension offices field and answer them. Literally, there is no way that we could serve the public's appetite for gardening information without the assistance of our Master Gardener volunteers.

Today's Master Gardener volunteers have expanded roles beyond the Extension office. Master Gardeners teach classes in school gardens, provide advice and education in community gardens, maintain demonstration gardens that illustrate a variety of gardening methods, deliver gardening information on local television and radio shows, and host popular gardening fairs and seminars for the public. For more insight into the breadth of the Master Gardener Program, visit the statewide

program website at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg>.

An OSU Extension faculty or staff member manages the Master Gardener program in each of the 28 counties. Their jobs are varied and challenging, and require in-depth knowledge across a broad number of horticulture topics. These jobs also require the people skills needed to work with a diverse array of volunteers and members of the general public. Some days, faculty and staff are in the office fielding questions and serving as local experts. Other days, they're teaching a class in a garden, at a school, or at another Extension office. Or they could be on the OSU campus attending a meeting or researching a paper in the library. They make sure that decision-makers in their community and on the OSU campus know about the great work that Master Gardeners do in local counties by submitting annual reports, nominating volunteers for awards, and simply bragging to anyone and everyone who will listen.

### Why Become a Master Gardener?

Even though Master Gardener trainees learn quite a bit about how to care for their own yards and gardens from their training, the Master Gardener Program, at its core, is a public service program. The best reason to become a Master Gardener is



Photo by Tiffany Woods, © Oregon State University

**Figure 4.** Master Gardener volunteers Beth Rose (left) and Cindy von Ofenheim (right) answering gardening questions at the Washington County Extension office.

so you can help others learn about sustainable gardening methods. It's also an opportunity to learn horticulture, receive practical classroom instruction from OSU professors and other experts, and meet and work with like-minded individuals (Figure 3, page 9).

If you are interested in learning more about sustainable gardening, but are not interested in or able to volunteer, you may want to attend one of the many community classes that Master Gardeners provide to the general public. Or, you may want to inquire about the Certificate option that many Master Gardener Programs offer. With the Certificate option, you participate in Master Gardener training classes but are not obligated to volunteer. Tuition for the Certificate option costs more than tuition for those working towards their Master Gardener badge.

### **Who uses the services of the Master Gardener Program?**

The people who are served by Master Gardener programs are referred to many ways—as clients,

customers, the public, homeowners, taxpayers, walk-ins, or phone callers. What these folks have in common is a need for clear, straightforward information. The people served by Extension faculty and staff and Master Gardener volunteers trust us to give them straight answers that are customized to their specific gardening question or circumstances, and that are supported by the University's research-based work. In this way, Master Gardeners provide an essential and objective service that is difficult to find from other sources.

People who seek assistance from Master Gardeners include beginning and experienced home gardeners, teachers looking for help with a school garden, and neighborhood groups wanting advice on a community garden.

The questions are unique to each person's gardening situation and experience, and are often challenging and entertaining. Mothers call to ask how to eliminate wasps from the lawn where their children play. Frantic boyfriends call for advice on how to resuscitate a houseplant they got from a girlfriend. Newcomers to Oregon call about the



Photo by Denise Ruttan, © Oregon State University

**Figure 5.** A cabbage grows at the La Clinica community garden coordinated by Master Gardeners in Hood River. It's one of many community projects organized by Hood River Master Gardeners through Oregon State University Extension.

green stuff (moss) growing on their big leaf maple tree. One western Oregon gardener, after learning about the different components in soil, asked if they should buy some clay for their soil (um, probably not).

Whatever their question or issue, clients look to us for help. Sometimes, a client contacts us with an extreme sense of urgency or frustration. From his point of view, his question or issue is extremely important, and he may have already tried several outlets to get an answer. Dealing with these and all clients requires many of the same skills as other service-oriented jobs. Offering good service is the best way to get repeat customers and foster public support for the Master Gardener Program.

Are clients always right? Of course not, but they always have rights. Our clients have the right to courteous treatment, a response based on respect, and an honest answer, even if the answer is, "I don't know." It is reasonable for them to expect us to research the question and formulate the best research-based, objective answer in a timely manner. Clients do not have a right to abuse Master Gardener

volunteers or to be discourteous. If you feel uncomfortable handling a question, refer the client to your local faculty or staff.

Oregon State University does not discriminate. We offer services without regard to age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status.

### **Master Gardener Program policies and guidelines**

Master Gardener volunteers are agents of Oregon State University who give time and expertise without receiving or expecting payment. When you put on your Master Gardener badge, you are representing Oregon State University, and must adhere to OSU policies and guidelines.

At some point before or during your training, you will be asked to fill out a series of forms and turn them in to the faculty or staff member who coordinates your Master Gardener program. The forms help all trainees understand the guidelines under which we operate. Unfortunately, for liability



PLEASE SIGN HERE

## To participate in Master Gardeners, you will need to fill out these forms

To access current forms, please visit: [Extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/forms](http://Extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/forms).

- ❑ **Pest Control Agreement Form:** Master Gardeners provide science-based, objective advice to clients. Master Gardeners cannot introduce their personal bias into recommendations. For example, a Master Gardener who does not use any pesticides in their home cannot allow their personal preference to bias their recommendation to clients. Even if you don't use pesticides in your own home or garden, you cannot exclude a pesticide from your summary of recommendations to clients, if a pesticide (used according to label directions and current regulatory guidance) is a legal management option. Likewise, a Master Gardener who has not had success using a research-based, nontoxic pest management method cannot exclude this option from their recommendations. Our job is to be descriptive, rather than prescriptive. Master Gardeners educate others about their sustainable gardening options, rather than legislating what others should do.
- ❑ **Use of the title 'Master Gardener':** The title Master Gardener and the flower-shaped logo are registered as trademarks of Oregon State University. Also trademarked are the following terms:
  - Oregon Master Gardener
  - Master Gardener (when used in Oregon)
  - Oregon State University Master Gardener
  - Oregon State University Extension Service Master Gardener
  - Oregon State University Master Gardener Mini-College

The Oregon State University Extension Master Gardener title is to be used exclusively in the Extension Master Gardener Program and not for commercial purposes. The training, experience, and certification gained in the Master Gardener Program may be listed as a qualification (together with any other educational degrees and certifications) on a resume, application or website. However, you cannot represent yourself as a Master Gardener unless you are performing volunteer work in conjunction with the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program. For example, if you work as a garden consultant or have a career in landscape design, you cannot say 'Certified Master Gardener can help you in your garden' because the work you do as a Master Gardener is unpaid, volunteer service. But you could display your Master Gardener certificate at your place of business, and you can list your Master Gardener certification with your other professional credentials.

Master Gardener certification is only good for one year. You must recertify annually to keep your certification current. Once your certification expires, you may no longer list your Master Gardener certification as a professional credential. (See 'Certification' on page 16.)

- ❑ **Code of Conduct:** The Master Gardener Code of Conduct describes the expectations of Master Gardener trainees and volunteers. As an OSU Extension Service Master Gardener volunteer, you are expected to follow the same personnel rules that all Extension employees follow. Oregon State University and the OSU Master Gardener Program do not tolerate discriminatory behavior; sexual, verbal, or other forms of harassment; or alcohol or drug use on the job. While working as a Master Gardener volunteer, you are expected to conduct yourself in a professional and courteous manner, to use tools and garden equipment safely, and to learn about and recommend research-based sustainable gardening practices. If a problem arises with a volunteer, we owe it to our clients, other volunteers, faculty, and staff to remind the volunteer of the Master Gardener Code of Conduct. We will do all we can to provide you



with an enjoyable volunteer experience, but sometimes we must “deselect” folks who cannot follow the basic rules of Oregon State University or who do not conduct themselves appropriately when working as a Master Gardener volunteer. Local Master Gardener faculty and staff, in conjunction with their regional administrator and the statewide coordinator of the Master Gardener Program, usually make such decisions.

❑ **Conditions of Volunteer Service:** All OSU volunteers, not just Master Gardeners, must complete this form **on an annual basis** to be a registered university volunteer. Doing so not only recognizes the volunteer as an official agent of OSU, it allows the university to extend coverage for tort liability (civil liability for injuries or damages to person or property of others) subject to the following general conditions:

- You are working on an OSU task assigned by an authorized OSU supervisor;
- You limit your actions to the duties assigned (defined in the assigned duties section below); and
- You perform your assigned duties in good faith, and do not act in a manner that is reckless or with the intent to unlawfully inflict harm to others.

❑ **Position Description form:** This form describes the duties, responsibilities, position requirements, and supervision of Master Gardener volunteers. Volunteers who elect to work with children or drive on behalf of OSU, as part of their assigned duties, must pass a criminal history check and/or motor vehicle history check prior to volunteering in these capacities. If your position duties ever change (i.e., you later opt to work on a youth project), you must fill out and file a new Position Description form.

■ **Criminal History Check Disclosure Notice and Release Authorization:** This form is mandatory for all Master Gardener trainees

and volunteers who work with youth as part of their Extension duties. The form must be resubmitted every two years to maintain a volunteer’s eligibility to work with youth on behalf of OSU as part of his or her volunteer duties. Master Gardeners who do not work with youth on behalf of OSU, or who do not perform other ‘security sensitive’ duties (e.g., handle money, have access to restricted chemicals, etc.) do not have to fill out this form.

■ **Motor Vehicle Check:** Master Gardener trainees and volunteers who drive a motor vehicle on behalf of OSU are required to submit a copy of their driving history to the OSU Office of Risk Management.



**Figure 6.** A Master Gardener volunteer reaches for a reference book to answer a question.

Photo by Lynn Ketchum, © Oregon State University



**Figure 7.** The Master Gardener flower logo.

reasons, individuals who are not willing or able to fill out and file these forms are ineligible to participate in the OSU Master Gardener Program.

### **Volunteer rights and responsibilities**

Volunteers working in any OSU Extension program have certain rights and responsibilities.

As a Master Gardener volunteer, you have the right to:

- Have rewarding, suitable volunteer work assignments with clear expectations and support
- Be provided orientation, training, support, supervision, and evaluation
- Be kept informed and be listened to by Extension faculty and staff
- Be trusted and respected by Extension faculty, staff, and coworkers
- Be recognized appropriately for your efforts
- Be treated as a coworker
- Be valued as a person capable of unique contributions

As a Master Gardener volunteer, you have the responsibility to:

- Uphold the policies of the OSU Extension Service
- Learn about current Extension policies, programs, and staff

- Participate in orientation and training programs
- Accept assignments suited to your personal interests and skills
- Act in a professional manner
- Be accountable to and supportive of OSU Extension when involved in Extension work
- Complete volunteer work assignments
- Participate in staff and program evaluations
- Be willing to use and teach research-based practices and concepts in an objective manner

### **Master Gardener trainee classes**

Master Gardener trainees must complete at least 40 hours of coursework in home and community horticulture as part of their training. Although 40 hours is the minimum requirement, most Master Gardener programs consist of 60 to 70 hours of coursework. A typical training schedule is six hours of coursework a day, one day a week, for 11 to 12 weeks.

Formal training is provided by the Extension Service. Instructors include faculty; experienced Master Gardeners; professionals in the fields of nursery production, landscaping, or general horticulture; and knowledgeable volunteers. Each Master Gardener trainee is expected to participate in every session. If you must miss a class, please arrange to make up the class you missed. If you miss three or more classes, your local Master Gardener coordinator will work with you to determine how to handle the missed classes. You may need to retake the training another year.

### **Final examination**

In order to become a Master Gardener, each trainee must pass a comprehensive final examination, with a grade of 70% or higher. Examinations are prepared by the local faculty in collaboration with class instructors. The test is typically distributed to trainees at the next-to-last class, completed at home, and reviewed at the final class. Examinations are open-book and are designed



Photo by Bob Rost, © Oregon State University



**Figure 8.** Lincoln County Master Gardener volunteer Liz Olsen harvests vegetables from the Yaquina Bay Lighthouse Garden with Newport Elementary School students. With the help of Master Gardener volunteers, these students tended the plants from seed to harvest.

to test trainees' ability to retrieve information from class notes, the Master Gardener handbook, and other horticultural resources.

### **Volunteer commitment and projects**

Master Gardener trainees are expected to volunteer at least 40 hours, but more typically between 60 to 70 hours, in the first year that they complete their training. A trainee is typically expected to volunteer for as many hours as they received in training.

In most counties, trainees may begin volunteering before they have completed classes and passed their final examination, provided their volunteer paperwork (page 12–13) is complete and on file with their local Extension office. They may continue to fulfill the volunteer service practicum after they complete training and pass the examination. In other counties, trainees may not begin fulfilling their volunteer service requirement until they have completed their coursework and passed their final exam.

You will collaborate with faculty and staff to identify specific volunteer activities. Many options are available, and the goal is for each Master Gardener's talents to be used effectively to benefit the gardening community. Some of your volunteer service hours will be spent responding to public gardening questions; this essential activity remains a cornerstone of the Master Gardener Program. Fielding and answering gardening questions challenges you to apply what you have learned in your Master Gardener training.

Other volunteer activities may include:

- Teaching a class at a public venue
- Helping to plan a public gardening fair or conference
- Appearing as a guest gardening expert on a local radio or television show

After your trainee year, you may want to consider service as a mentor to the next group of Master Gardener trainees.



Efforts that support the overall administration of the Master Gardener Program may also qualify for volunteer service hours. These include:

- Managing the social media efforts of your local Master Gardener program
- Updating an online calendar or website
- Publicizing Master Gardener activities
- Helping with general office tasks

Your local faculty and staff will help you learn more about opportunities in your area.

Master Gardener trainees sometimes have ideas for new volunteer activities. These ideas have resulted in new and innovative Master Gardener partnerships and projects. However, it is important to realize that not every project idea can be accommodated, and especially not on a short time frame. When considering a new project idea, discuss it with your local faculty and staff member. You may be asked to provide more details in writing, including:

- How the project supports the Master Gardener mission
- The benefits of the project to the community
- The benefits of the project to the Master Gardener program
- Partners in the project (if any) and their roles
- Funds required (if any)
- Master Gardener volunteer hours needed
- The time frame of the project

Faculty, staff, and/or volunteers review new project proposals.

Sometimes, projects are rejected because they don't meet the mission of the Master Gardener Program. An example of an inappropriate project would be a landscaping request from a private apartment community. This project is inappropriate in two ways. First, the project requires Master Gardener labor, rather than focusing on educational

outreach. Second, the beneficiary of the project is a private company, rather than the public good.

Other times, projects are put 'on hold' until time and resources are more readily available. Do not be discouraged! It's nothing personal. It's simply difficult to allocate limited time, volunteers, and resources towards all worthy project requests that are received.

## Certification

After completing the training program, passing the final examination, and completing your volunteer service requirement, you will be awarded a Master Gardener badge and certificate. These are usually distributed at a graduation ceremony within the county where your volunteer practicum was completed. The Master Gardener badge should be worn whenever you are volunteering as an OSU Extension Master Gardener.

**Certification as a Master Gardener is valid for one year.** Keeping your certification current requires that you annually complete at least 10 continuing education hours and at least 20 hours of volunteer service.

The primary purpose of recertification is to ensure that Master Gardener volunteers are up to date and apprised of the latest information on sustainable gardening. Topics such as integrated pest management and pesticide safety are constantly refined and revised as we learn more about proper control of pests in home gardens. In addition, the identity of particular pests within gardens is not constant over time. Some years, gardeners will see more of one particular pest, and none of a pest that gave them serious problems just a few years ago. Keeping on top of the latest research findings is essential to maintaining the ability of OSU Master Gardeners to deliver objective, research-based information to the public.

If you do not keep your certification current, you will not be allowed to provide gardening advice, recommendations, or other direct education to the public as a Master Gardener volunteer.





## Can you be paid for volunteer service?

By definition, a Master Gardener is a volunteer, unpaid agent of Oregon State University. Thus, Master Gardeners cannot receive payment for their services. However, you may accept a per diem or honoraria to cover your expenses, if offered. For example, an organization may offer to pay your mileage, hotel, photocopy, or other associated expenses if you travel to present a talk or class in your capacity as a Master Gardener volunteer. However, the work you perform for the OSU Extension Service is free and voluntary. If you write a column for the local newspaper and get paid for it, you cannot identify yourself in the column as a Master Gardener. You can, however, donate a column to your local newspaper and identify yourself as a Master Gardener. Resort hotels or restaurants cannot hire a Master Gardener to manage an on-site vegetable garden. These businesses can hire you as an individual, who has a Master Gardener credential. However, when working at a commercial business, you are not acting as a Master Gardener volunteer, and your employment should not be billed or advertised as that of a Master Gardener.

When you work as a Master Gardener, you may begin to notice some of the “pay” that volunteers traditionally enjoy. These include, but are not limited to:

- Direct access to the horticulture expertise and educational opportunities of OSU
- Opportunities to develop your practical horticulture skills
- The satisfaction that comes from knowing that your work benefits your community

Because of your volunteer efforts, community members may be better able to grow their own food, choose plants that will perform well in their gardens, or reduce their pesticide use. Where someone might have seen a native pollinator in the garden and thought “insects in the garden must be pests,” they now know that many insects play beneficial roles in garden ecosystems. By providing recommendations for waterwise or firewise plants, you may have helped a family save on their water bill or reduce their risk of wildfire damage.

You are, after all, a Master Gardener, and your horticultural and communication skills qualify you to do interesting work.

## Guarding against volunteer burnout

Being a Master Gardener volunteer is similar to any other job, hobby, or avocation. Just because you are volunteering doesn’t mean you can’t burn out. Definitions of burnout typically involve feelings of emotional or physical fatigue, or reduced levels of personal accomplishment and satisfaction on the job, brought about by prolonged periods of stress or a heavy workload. In volunteer work, burnout often



“ I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver. ”

— **Maya Angelou**



occurs because of a lack of volunteer support or recognition.

If you feel you are approaching burnout, talk with the faculty and/or staff who manage the Master Gardener program in your area. You may gain a renewed sense of satisfaction with your involvement in the Master Gardener program simply by changing your volunteer work assignment.

Being a Master Gardener volunteer should be an enjoyable and rewarding experience that provides the opportunity to further your horticultural knowledge, enhances others' understanding of horticulture, and creates a network with like-minded individuals. If you're not having fun, please re-evaluate your commitment to a particular project or to the Master Gardener Program in general.

## Providing gardening recommendations for the general public

When performing Master Gardener activities, you may make recommendations only in the areas of home horticulture, home vegetable and fruit gardening, and home yard and landscape care. **Do not** make recommendations in other areas for which you are not qualified. Refer questions concerning commercial crops and nurseries to your local faculty or staff. If a client has a question that requires medical diagnosis or advice, suggest that they seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional. For example, Master Gardener volunteers may be called upon to identify a spider, but they should refer clients to a medical professional for treatment of a spider bite.

Master Gardeners rely on research-based, objective resources when diagnosing plant

### Recommendations to the public

**Master Gardeners can provide recommendations for:**

- Homeowners
- Community gardeners
- School gardens
- Others, with noncommercial gardening questions.

**Master Gardeners CANNOT provide recommendations for:**

- Commercial growers
- Farmers
- Professional landscapers
- Nurseries
- Public facilities groundskeepers
- Public rights-of-way groundskeepers
- Other commercial or professional operations.

**In addition, Master Gardeners CANNOT:**

- Identify mushrooms
- Provide medical advice for an insect or spider bite

- Provide medical advice for pesticide exposure
- Provide medical advice for toxic plant ingestion
- Provide medical advice of any kind.

**Our federal funding prohibits providing advice and recommendations for:**

- The cultivation and care of marijuana, including medical marijuana or hemp.

**But, Master Gardeners CAN:**

- Identify plants and their pests (with the exception of mushrooms)
- Identify beneficial garden organisms (with the exception of mushrooms)
- Identify spiders, lice, bedbugs or other arthropods of importance to personal and public health
- Provide a summary of research-based recommendations—including notes on the pros and cons associated with each approach
- Provide referrals to poison-control centers
- Provide referrals to the National Pesticide Information Center.



Photo © Oregon State University

**Figure 9.** Central Oregon Master Gardener Liz Douville at work on a waterwise demonstration garden at the OSU Extension office in Deschutes County.

problems and making recommendations. In this way, Master Gardeners provide high-quality solutions to home gardening and plant problems. Examples of research-based resources include OSU Extension publications, Extension publications from other areas of the Pacific Northwest, Extension publications from other states, and articles from scientific journals.

OSU Extension advocates a **least toxic** approach to pest control that will result in safe, effective management. Master Gardeners should not prescribe a specific solution to a particular problem, but instead should provide clients with a summary of those actions that are legal, safe, and effective. As a Master Gardener, you should provide references to research-based materials that support your recommendations so clients can make the best decision for their particular situation. Master Gardeners may also note the pros and cons of using various approaches, so long as they do so in a way that is objective and doesn't expose a personal bias towards one approach or against another approach.

If you include a pesticide (e.g., insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides) in your summary of management options, make sure the pesticide is registered and can be legally used by the public in Oregon for the specific purpose being considered. Any recommendations that include the use of

pesticides must follow the directions on the pesticide label, as well as published OSU recommendations.

OSU's cultural, physical, biological, and chemical-control recommendations can be found in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) insect, plant disease, and weed management handbooks, which are available at [pnwhandbooks.org/](http://pnwhandbooks.org/) and are updated at least annually. Remember, however, that the PNW handbooks have no legal status, whereas the pesticide label is a legal document. Recommendations that include the use of pesticides must not conflict with information on the pesticide label. Clients who are considering pesticides as a management option should be strongly encouraged to carefully read product labels before purchase and use. Master Gardeners can help educate clients about safe and effective pesticide use by pointing out directions for use, precautionary statements, information on storage and disposal, the signal word, and first-aid instructions.

**Do not** calculate application rates for clients. Instead, direct them to sources of information so that they can calculate the rates on their own.

If you have any questions about a landscape issue, plant problem or recommendation that you are researching, please talk to your local Extension faculty and staff.

## The Oregon Master Gardener Association and its chapters

The Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA), a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was formed in 1982 to enhance and support the activities of Oregon's Extension Master Gardener Program. Today, most counties that have an active Master Gardener program also have a chapter of the OMGA. Each chapter has a governing board and officers, including an elected representative who works with the OMGA at the state level. You can learn more about the OMGA by visiting <http://www.oregonmastergardeners.org/>.

OMGA and its chapters enhance and support the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program by



Photo by Lynn Ketchum, © Oregon State University



**Figure 10.** An OSU Master Gardener volunteer in Clackamas County examines a preserved specimen of a spider while researching an answer to a client's question.

assisting in the continuing education of Master Gardeners, providing educational programs to members at monthly meetings, and organizing other education events such as educational symposia, garden tours, and nursery visits. OMGA chapters also serve as a social center for Master Gardeners, and as a clearinghouse for projects and planning of OSU-sanctioned educational outreach programs.

During your first year as a Master Gardener trainee, you are given free membership into OMGA and your local chapter. After that, you must pay dues to remain a member. Joining OMGA and your local chapter is not required to be an OSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer. However, joining OMGA, and your local OMGA chapter is one way to support the efforts of your local Master Gardener program, and to stay better connected to the Master Gardener events and activities in your area. It is important to note that paying your dues to OMGA and your local OMGA chapter does **not** certify you as a Master Gardener volunteer. The requirements for Master Gardener certification and recertification are detailed on page 16.

The different roles of the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program, OMGA and your local

OMGA chapter can be difficult to categorize and distinctly define. This is because OMGA and your local OMGA chapter work closely with the OSU Extension Master Gardener program to develop and deliver gardening information. Yet, even if an OMGA chapter is hosting an educational gardening conference, OSU is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the information delivered is up to date and valid. Table 1 (page 21) provides a list of the key roles and responsibilities of each organization.

### Concluding thoughts

We're so excited that you are thinking about or have started the journey to becoming a Master Gardener volunteer. Although the coursework may at times be challenging and overwhelming (and other times, it may be material that is old hat to you!), we are confident that you will gain valuable and practical knowledge and skills in home horticulture as a result of completing the coursework, final exam, and volunteer practicum.

Gardening is both a simple and a radical activity. Gardening is a way to relax, be physically active, and, in a small way, reconnect with nature. But gardening can also help us change the world for the better!



**Table 1. The roles and responsibilities of the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program, the Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA), and OMGA chapters.**

OSU Extension Master Gardener Program	OMGA (statewide 501 (c)(3))	Chapter (Local OMGA affiliate)
<p>Develops and disseminates research-based and objective information/programs/curricula on sustainable gardening and community food production, via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Extension publications</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plant clinics at Extension offices, fairs, farmers markets, etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> School/demonstration/community gardens</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Youth garden programs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Annual Master Gardener training and recertification</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other means</li> </ul>	<p>Supports the OSU Home Horticulture (Master Gardener) Program at the statewide and county level by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making endowment gifts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Awarding McNeilan Scholarship and other scholarships to OSU students</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organizing Mini-College</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Purchasing PNW handbooks for Oregon counties with a MG program</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Awarding Extension educator grant</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Providing political support for the statewide and county Master Gardener programs.</li> </ul>	<p>Supports the OSU Home Horticulture (Master Gardener) Program at the statewide and county level by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making endowment gifts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Providing political support for the statewide and county Master Gardener programs.</li> </ul>
<p>Administers the training and supervision of Master Gardener volunteers, providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Insurance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Background checks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reporting</li> </ul>	<p>Raises funds through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Silent auction at Mini-College</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> OSU Bookstore sales commission at Mini-College</li> </ul>	<p>Raises funds through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plant sales</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Garden tours.</li> </ul>
	<p>Supports OMGA members and chapters by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Providing skills development (Leadership Day at Mini-College)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fostering dialogue/idea exchange at OMGA meetings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Filing IRS paperwork, financial reporting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Satisfying regulatory requirements for corporate documents &amp; records such as bylaws and Articles of Incorporation.</li> </ul>	<p>Organizes educational and social events locally, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Speakers at monthly chapter meetings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tours and outings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Potlucks</li> </ul>
<p>An individual becomes a Master Gardener through satisfactory completion of the training course and volunteer internship. In subsequent years, individuals retain their Master Gardener certification by completing required continuing education and volunteer service hours.</p>	<p>An individual becomes an OMGA member by paying dues to the OMGA and to the local chapter.</p>	<p>An individual is a member of an OMGA chapter by paying dues to the OMGA and to the local chapter.</p>



When we teach others how to grow their own food, we support efforts to build a vibrant and productive local food system.

When we teach someone that ladybug and lacewing larvae are beneficial insects to embrace in the garden, we reduce the careless use of insecticides. By introducing folks to waterwise plants, we are helping to conserve water resources. By teaching children how to compost, we are keeping food and garden waste out of landfills for generations to come.

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## Glossary of Master Gardener terms

**Advanced training**—Classes conducted by community horticulture teachers and others who are considered experts in a particular field. These classes are offered to Master Gardeners to maintain and update their knowledge of horticulture and to learn about recent advances in the field. Advanced training classes often count toward recertification.

**County Master Gardener chapter**—Most counties with a Master Gardener program also have a Master Gardener chapter. The chapter is affiliated with, and in most cases is a subsidiary of, the Oregon Master Gardener Association (OMGA). County Master Gardener chapters support their local Master Gardener program by promoting educational programs for the local gardening public in the form of seminars, community classes, spring fairs, harvest fairs, and other special events. The chapter also raises funds via plant sales and other fundraising activities, and serves as a social hub for Master Gardeners in the county. Also see OMGA.

**Experiment station**—See OSU Agricultural Experiment Station.

**Extension agent**—See OSU faculty.

**Extension office**—Each county or group of counties has an Extension office staffed by agents, support staff, and volunteers. In most county Extension offices, the funding for staff comes from a combination of funds from Oregon State University and the local county. The partnership between the

A long-time volunteer once said she was a social justice activist in the 1960s; today, she feels she accomplishes the same goals through her Master Gardener work. It may seem grandiose to proclaim that you can change the world through gardening, but it's not grandiose when we consider that several research studies support the multi-faceted benefits of gardening to individual, family, community, and ecological health. We thank you for contributing to the good of your community and hope that you will find it a rewarding experience.

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county and the University makes the Extension Service possible. In most counties, a portion of Master Gardener payback time is spent in the local Extension office answering gardening questions.

**Extension Service**—See OSU Extension Service.

**Gardener's Mini-College**—An annual multiday conference cosponsored by the OSU Extension Service and OMGA. It includes classes, workshops, and seminars on horticultural topics, a quarterly meeting, and an annual awards banquet. It is an opportunity to receive advanced training and to enjoy meeting and learning from Master Gardeners from around the state. It also is open to the gardening public.

**Master Gardener**—See OSU Extension Service Master Gardener.

**Master Gardener handbook**—Textbook used in Master Gardener training and as a reference for answering gardening questions.

**Master Gardener Program**—A teaching and management program for volunteers who want to expand their home horticulture skills and who agree to give of their time to extend gardening knowledge to others. Its purpose is to provide OSU Extension Service educational programs in home horticulture to community members through trained and certified Master Gardener volunteers. Direct questions regarding the Master Gardener Program to your county Extension agent or program assistant or, if there is no county agent, to the Master Gardener Program state coordinator.



**Master Gardener training**—A series of weekly, daylong training classes in community horticulture taught by Extension personnel and other experienced teachers. Training is typically held every year during the winter. Trainees agree to volunteer a comparable number of payback hours during the following year based on how many hours of training they receive.

**Mentor**—A veteran Master Gardener who agrees to support one or more new Master Gardeners during training and the volunteer service practicum. A mentor also helps volunteers progress from new Master Gardener to active chapter member.

**Mini-College**—see Gardener’s Mini-College

**MG**—Abbreviation often used for Master Gardener.

#### **Oregon Master Gardener Association**

**(OMGA)**—A separate organization from the OSU Master Gardener Program. The purpose of this statewide, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization is to enhance and supplement the OSU Master Gardener Program. The county chapters together make up the state association. OMGA is financed by dues contributed at the county chapter level. Representatives from each chapter meet with OMGA state officers at quarterly meetings held in various locations around the state. These meetings provide a networking opportunity and a forum for chapters to share ideas and activities. OMGA cosponsors the annual Gardener’s Mini-College with OSU. Also see County Master Gardener Chapter.

**Oregon State University**—The main campus is located in Corvallis, and each county office is an extension of the university. The university has three missions: teaching, research, and Extension. You now are part of OSU’s volunteer staff. Congratulations! (School colors are orange and black; the school mascot is the ferocious beaver.)

**OSU Agricultural Experiment Station**—The principal agricultural research agency in Oregon, headquartered at Oregon State University. Experiment stations are located in several areas around the state, and each one typically specializes in research relevant to commercial agriculture in

that area. In some cases, commercial horticulture Extension agents are housed at experiment stations.

**OSU Faculty**—A person employed by Oregon State University to extend information and services to the citizens of Oregon. Each faculty member has a particular area of expertise and an assigned geographic area (one or more counties) and is a faculty member in an OSU department. Most, but not all, OSU faculty with Master Gardener responsibilities are members of the OSU Department of Horticulture.

**OSU Extension Service**—The educational outreach arm of Oregon State University that “extends” the research and services of Oregon State University to the citizens of Oregon. As part of the land-grant university system, the OSU Extension Service serves both rural and urban dwellers. Extension Service personnel include Extension faculty program assistants, specialists, support staff, and a large number of volunteers like yourself. Extension works in five program areas: 4-H Youth Development, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Community Health, Forestry and Natural Resources, and Sea Grant. The OSU Extension Master Gardener Program is part of the Agriculture and Natural Resources program area.

**OSU Extension Service Master Gardener**—Person who has completed the Master Gardener training offered by the OSU Extension Service, as well as the volunteer service practicum, and performs volunteer activities in the Extension office and the local community. Master Gardeners who provide direct advice and education to the general public must recertify annually. See Recertification.

**Plant Clinic**—In most counties, Master Gardeners set up Plant Clinics at the Extension office or at various locations in the county on a specific day, usually for several hours, and answer gardening questions from the public.

**Pacific Northwest (PNW) handbooks**—Reference books updated at least annually that specify control methods for insects, diseases, and weeds. There are three handbooks: the PNW



*Plant Disease Management Handbook*, the PNW *Insect Management Handbook*, and the PNW *Weed Management Handbook*. The handbooks are available online or printed copies can be ordered at [pnwhandbooks.org/](http://pnwhandbooks.org/).

**Recertification**—A program to ensure that veteran Master Gardeners keep their knowledge and skills up to date. Recertification annually requires at least 20 hours of volunteer service and at least 10 hours of continuing education.

**State Program Coordinator**—Person who is responsible for supporting and coordinating the activities of the Master Gardener Program across Oregon. The State Program Coordinator represents Oregon at National Extension Master Gardener meetings, develops resources for statewide use, and supports the efforts of county Master Gardener faculty and staff.

**Trainee**—An individual who has not yet completed all of the requirements to become a certified Master Gardener. These requirements include completing the coursework, passing a final exam, and completing a volunteer service practicum.

**Volunteer Service Practicum**—Master Gardener trainees volunteer their time in a service practicum, where they put the knowledge learned during training classes to practical use. The specific content of this practicum varies from county to county, but often includes work at the Plant Clinic desk or in a Master Gardener demonstration garden.

**Veteran MG**—A Master Gardener who has completed the initial year of training and volunteer service hour payback, and whose certification is current. See Recertification.



**Figure 11.** Yamhill County Master Gardener volunteers Cathy Burdett (left) and Marcia Sherry (second from right), together with Statewide Program Coordinator Gail Langellotto (second from left) and Central Oregon Master Gardener volunteer Betty Faller (right) at Gardener’s Mini-College. Mini-College is an annual multi-day event planned and sponsored by the Oregon Master Gardener Association, in cooperation with the OSU Extension Master Gardener Program.





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