

UF/IFAS Marion County Master Gardener Volunteer Frequently Asked Questions

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- 1. What is a Master Gardener Volunteer?** The Master Gardener Volunteer Program's roots go all the way back to Washington State in 1972 when the local Extension horticulture agent was inundated with clients trying to receive educational information and resources on urban gardening. To help all these clients, the agent created the first Master Gardener Program, where he trained a group of individual volunteers to assist him in providing horticultural education to their constituents. Since then, the Master Gardener Volunteer Program has spread all over the nation, accounting for more than 5,000,000 volunteer hours annually. Master Gardener Volunteers come from all different backgrounds, many having no horticulture experience at all. The Master Gardener Volunteer Program teaches you everything you need to know.
- 2. What do Master Gardener Volunteers do?** Our Master Gardener Volunteers are very active and there's something for everyone to do! Want to learn how to propagate plants? You can volunteer in our Propagation and Greenhouse area where we grow and sell Florida-Friendly plants. Do you like to get your hands dirty? Volunteer in our Demonstration Gardens where there are always weeds to be pulled, new vegetables or herbs that need planting, and new educational materials and signs that need to be made and maintained. Do you like to help people? Our Master Gardener Volunteers answer phone calls, emails, and in-person client questions Monday – Friday in the Plant Clinic at the Extension office and at multiple satellite Plant Clinics around the county. We also have Master Gardener Volunteers that work with our Speaker's Bureau providing educational programs to the public, coordinating special events, or manning tables at public events. Other opportunities include conducting Florida-Friendly Landscaping yard evaluations, testing soil-pH, working with youth in school gardens, and many other options!
- 3. Do I have to be a plant expert to be a Master Gardener Volunteer?** Absolutely not! The only thing required of all Master Gardener Volunteers is that they have a willingness and passion to learn. During your 15-week training, you'll be given a great foundational knowledge to help you be a successful Master Gardener Volunteer, but the best way to learn is through experience, which you'll gain during your internship

year and the many years that follow. You will never stop learning as a Master Gardener Volunteer and you will have many educational opportunities that are unique to our program.

4. **What do I have to do to become a Master Gardener Volunteer?** Once you are accepted into the new class, you'll need to complete 15-weeks of trainings and assignments. There are a few educational field excursions, which are fun and a great way to supplement what you're learning in the class. An exam is given at the end of the training. After you pass your exam, you're an official Master Gardener Volunteer Intern! The internship period starts after the training and during that time you'll be exposed to every aspect of the Marion County Master Gardener Volunteer Program. If you fulfill the hours required during your internship, you and your other classmates will be celebrated as new Master Gardener Volunteers at our Master Gardener Volunteer monthly meeting.

5. **What are the Master Gardener Volunteer Hour Requirements?** The Master Gardener Volunteer Program requires participants to gain 75-hours in designated areas and 10-Continuing Education Hours (CEUs) the year following completion of the Master Gardener Volunteer training. This year is known as your internship year. After the internship, each Master Gardener Volunteer is required to maintain 50-hours and 10-CEU hours annually to remain active.

6. **How can I apply to become a Marion County Master Gardener Volunteer?** First, you will need to fill out a Master Gardener Volunteer application, which is usually available in May of the training year. The Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator will then review the applications and run background checks to select individuals to interview. After your interviews, you will be notified if you've been selected to be in the next Master Gardener Volunteer class.

If you have further questions, please feel free to reach out to the Marion County Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator – Jeremy Rhoden, jeremy.k.rhoden@ufl.edu

