

Frequently Asked Questions about Master Gardener Training

What is Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE)? What does it mean to be an Extension Master Gardener (EMG)? VCE is an educational program designed to help people use research-based knowledge to improve their lives and serve their community. In Virginia, the Cooperative Extension Service Program is operated cooperatively by Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. An EMG is a volunteer educator who received specialized training in environmental horticulture through VCE. EMG volunteers have completed the classroom instruction portion of the training program as well as fulfilled the 50 hours of volunteer hours. Each year after their initial training period, EMGs are required to complete 20 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education to remain active.

Why do I need a Background check and what does it entail? As an Extension Master Gardener volunteer, you are in a position of trust and are required to be screened every three years. A volunteer in a position of trust may work with youth, seniors, those with disabilities, handle funds, or have unsupervised access to facilities. The Master Gardener Training team will initiate your Background screen through Better Impact. You will then receive an email entitled "Invitation from Volunteer Master Program." You will need to open and respond to the survey within 72 hours. Your social security number is required in order to run a background check. This is a criminal background check only.

When and where do classes meet? The classroom/hands-on training runs from Mar 1, 2022 until May 19, 2022. Classes will be held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9 am until noon at the James City County Recreation Center on Longhill Road or at other local horticultural-related venues.

What COVID requirements will you have in place?

We are limiting our class size to 20 students to facilitate social distancing. We also shifted our class to occur Mar – May to take advantage of warmer weather and outdoor venues. We will adhere to the COVID safety requirements established by VCE. VCE guidelines can change at any time and must be followed. Current guidelines as of October, 1 dictate masks to be worn indoors, social distancing and while vaccines are not required, they are recommended.

Who teaches the Training Classes? Classes are taught by experts in their field. For instance, Landscape is taught by a certified Landscape Designer and Pathology and Plant Damage is taught by the Director of Virginia Tech's Tidewater Agricultural Research and Extension Center and Professor of Plant Pathology and Entomology. Additionally, we take advantage of our own Master Gardeners who will guide you through classes such as Pruning and Herbs.

What computer skills do I need? Students need to have access to a computer and the internet and know how to use email, search the internet, and navigate Better Impact. At times, you may require online training through Zoom or CANVAS (online training platform). We will train and assist you with our training platforms.

What does it take to complete the classroom portion of the course? Attend weekly classes and receive at least a 70% on coursework. Coursework consists of open book assignments.

What happens if I can't attend all of the classes? We request students miss no more than three classes. We ask you check your calendar and advise your class advisor ahead of time if you will need to miss any sessions so they can schedule make-up training for mandatory/core classes.

Do you offer Tuition Assistance? A limited amount of financial assistance is available. To request financial assistance, please send an email to jccmgardener@yahoo.com stating your need and the portion of the course fee you can pay.

What is the refund policy? If a student withdraws before the first class, tuition will be refunded. No refunds are given after that time.

When do we start volunteering for Projects? Our goal is to get students out working on Approved Master Gardener Projects sooner than previous years. You will be cleared to work on Projects once you receive two core training classes and undergo mandatory briefs on Risk Management and Working with Children. We anticipate this to be about mid-March.

Do I need any special tools or resources? You will not need anything extra for class other than access to a computer/internet. Once you start volunteering on Projects, you will require some of your own gardening tools. These tools are generally basic in nature such as gloves, trowel or hand pruners.

When do I need to get my 50 volunteer hours and what happens if I don't meet the requirement? You will need to acquire your 50 volunteer hours by Feb 28, 2023. Upon request and extenuating circumstances, the VCE Agent can extend the time.

Can I volunteer on Master Gardening Projects without taking this course? No, as a state-sponsored organization, training is required before someone can volunteer. However, there are other gardening-related volunteer opportunities in our community, such as the Williamsburg Botanical Garden.

What are the requirements after graduation? To remain active, Master Gardener require 20 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education each year. There are numerous projects and opportunities through which to earn volunteer hours and continuing education credit within our unit.

Where can I find more information about the Master Gardening projects and activities?

[JCCWilliamsburg Master Gardener Association - Neighbors Helping \(jccwmg.org\)](http://JCCWilliamsburgMasterGardenerAssociation-NeighborsHelping(jccwmg.org))