

# Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program FAQ

Thank you for your interest and participation in the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener program. The following FAQ is intended to answer some of the most frequently asked questions from existing participants in the program. If you cannot find your question or are interested in joining the program please contact us at [wimastergardener@extension.wisc.edu](mailto:wimastergardener@extension.wisc.edu)

The Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program implemented a revision of the program on January 1, 2022.

Benefits of the revision:

- Accomplished statewide uniform policies and guidelines aligned with UW-Madison Policy and Procedures.
- Addressed program accessibility and staffing capabilities.
- Added freedom and flexibility in volunteer activities for participants in the program.
- Defined that a Master Gardener volunteers through other organization(s). This recognizes best practices in volunteer development and helps individuals understand their responsibilities for each organization they volunteer for. (You are not a volunteer of the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program. You are credentialed through the program.)

## ***The Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program Model***



There are a lot of other details to the program, but this is the most basic aspect of volunteering your time. Details are available in the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program: Canvas classroom [UW NetID required].

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## Do I need to complete annual enrollment?

There will be no Annual Enrollment Period like in the old model (2021 or earlier), however, you still need to acknowledge the terms acceptance and profile update each calendar year, by [logging into the Online Reporting System \(ORS\)](#).

## What is the difference between Onboarding and Onboarding-Lite?

Please think of “Onboarding” and “Onboarding-Lite” as the Handbook for being a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener.

**Onboarding** is intended for new participants entering the program and individuals wishing to return to the program after an extended leave of absence (see [How do individuals reenter the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener program?](#) For more information).

Onboarding provides:

- An orientation to Extension and the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program.
- An explanation of what counts for continuing education and volunteer activities.
- Guidelines on eligible organizations where volunteer activities may be conducted.
- Creation of an account in the online reporting system (ORS).
- The state-wide horticulture exam.

Individuals who register and successfully complete Onboarding may report 10 hours of continuing education. There is a fee for Onboarding.

**Onboarding-Lite** is intended for current Master Gardeners and individuals wishing to return to the program after a short leave of absence (see [How do individuals reenter the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener program?](#) For more information).

The content is the same as Onboarding but the following are removed:

- Creation of an account in the online reporting system.
- The state-wide horticulture exam.

Individuals completing Onboarding-Lite may report 5 hours of continuing education. There is no fee for Onboarding-Lite.

## Is Onboarding-Lite required?

Due to significant updates to the program, as a current participant **you are required** to complete Onboarding-Lite before you start volunteering or obtaining continuing education. There are no exceptions. Upon completion, you can claim 5 hours of continuing education in the ORS. We estimate that it may take you less time than this.

- Onboarding-Lite is available in the Master Gardener Program: Canvas Classroom.

## What is the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program: Canvas Classroom?

The Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program: Canvas Classroom is where we keep many learning resources for Master Gardeners. You will find Onboarding-Lite, archives of the Vibe newsletter, citizen science directions, and Plants Plus (continuing education opportunities).

## Do you need help with Canvas (NetID)?

The username and password is different from the username and password for the Online Reporting System (ORS).

- A NetID is required to access Canvas (where the Master Gardener Program: Canvas Classroom is, as well as other Extension Horticulture Program courses and information).
- If you are a current Master Gardener and don't know your NetID, use [this form to request it to be resent to you](#).
- [Help with Canvas can be found here](#) or in our [FAQs](#).

## Do you need help with the Online Reporting System (ORS)

The Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program online reporting system (ORS) is not only where you report your continuing education and volunteer hours. You can also access your participation card, milestone certificates, and see your lifetime hours. In addition, this is where you update your contact information (address, phone number, and email address).

Keep in mind your username and password is different from the NetID (username) and password for the Master Gardener Program: Canvas Classroom.

[Help with the ORS can be found here](#).

## How do I enter my hours in the Online Reporting System (ORS)?

- Master Gardeners record their time in the ORS by organization and activity, not by project. The ORS will no longer list projects.
- For help understanding what you can count, please refer to Onboarding-Lite inside the Master Gardener Program: Canvas Classroom
- For help navigating the ORS, see this [FAQ](#).

## What is an appropriate organization to volunteer for?

- More information on appropriate organizations is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## Are associations considered an appropriate organization?

- If they meet the criteria of an appropriate organization.
- More information on appropriate organizations is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## Is Extension an appropriate organization that I can volunteer for?

- Yes, but Extension opportunities are very specific. Extension staff will communicate when these are available. Otherwise, you will need to assume you are a volunteer of another organization.
- The Extension Volunteer Enrollment process must be completed prior to volunteering for any Extension activities.
  - This is not the same as acknowledging the terms acceptance and profile update for the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program. Any questions regarding this process should be directed to [horticulture.volunteers@extension.wisc.edu](mailto:horticulture.volunteers@extension.wisc.edu).
- Extension staff must request the addition of any UW-Madison, Division of Extension entity to be added to the ORS. Master Gardeners cannot make these requests.

## How will organizations be published in the ORS?

- There is no formal approval process. You will need to use the criteria provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required], to determine if the organization you are volunteering for is appropriate.
- You may request organizations to be published by [logging into the ORS](#) and submitting the required information. Requests are not automatic and require staff review. Please allow time for them to be published in the system.
- The following information is required:
  - Organization name, mailing address, and website address.
  - Organization staff contact name, title, phone number, and email address.

## Are criminal background checks (CBC) and mandated reporter training required?

- Master Gardeners must follow the requirements of the organization they choose to volunteer for. This may include a CBC or mandated reporter training through that organization.

## How are projects led in the future?

- The program no longer recognizes “projects”(where you volunteer), nor will they be listed in the ORS. Hours need to be entered based on the organization(s) (who you volunteer for).
- By adopting this position, Extension no longer has the requirement of Master Gardener-only projects. Starting January 1, 2022, volunteer service is conducted through other organizations. It will be up to the organization which you volunteer for to determine who can volunteer and who may be overseeing the activities.

- Please remember that you must follow the requirements of the organization you choose to volunteer for. This may include behavior agreements, assumptions of risk, and other conditions of service for those organizations
- More information is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## Do associations need to coordinate projects?

- No, this was never an Extension requirement.
- In the new model, volunteer service is conducted through other organizations and the staff of that organization managing the volunteer activity.
- The program no longer recognizes “projects”(where you volunteer). Hours need to be entered based on the organization(s) (who you volunteer for).
- The scope of what can count and be recorded in the ORS is in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required]. You will record your hours by organization and activity, not by project.

## What activities count for volunteer hours?

Your volunteer service is how you apply what you learn in the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program. We ask that you report your hours to demonstrate how you apply your knowledge and talents in your community.

- More information on appropriate activities is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## How can you count volunteer time for managing online communications (webpages and social media), and editing and formatting newsletters for other organizations?

- More information on this topic can be found in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required]

## What counts for continuing education?

Continuing education keeps Master Gardeners informed, involved, and learning about unbiased University research-based horticultural and volunteer topics. We ask that you report your hours to demonstrate your personal development.

- More information on appropriate continuing education is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## Will I be limited to where I can volunteer in the state?

You can count your volunteer service throughout the state of Wisconsin as long as the organization and activity meet the requirements in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required]. You now have opportunities to volunteer across the state. We no longer require you to be connected to a specific county.

## How does someone become a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener?

- Steps for becoming a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener are [posted on our website](#).

## How do individuals reenter the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener program?

General guidance is provided in the section “Participating in the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program”, “Participation Levels” in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas netID required].

Individuals who have been absent from the program (have deactivated accounts in the Online Reporting System (ORS)) and wish to return must follow the guidance below.

For 2024

- You must contact the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program at [wimastergardener@extension.wisc.edu](mailto:wimastergardener@extension.wisc.edu) to determine eligibility.
  - Individuals who have reported hours in the last 5 years (2019-present) may return to the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program anytime on or after March 1, 2024 and through November 15, 2024.
    - They will be required to complete the Onboarding-Lite course (no exam, no registration fee). The course is held in Canvas, our online classroom. Individuals will move through the course independently and at their own pace. There are no scheduled classes or webinars. You must have access to a computer and internet to complete the course.
    - The course must be successfully passed to reactivate participation in the program. Volunteer hours conducted prior to reactivation are not eligible for reporting.
  - Individuals who have NOT reported hours in the last 5 years (2018 and before) are required to register for Onboarding (includes an exam, registration fee) in order to re-enter the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program.
    - Registration begins in late Fall/early Winter. Please see, <https://mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu/onboarding-registration/> for the most current information.

## How do I become a Certified Master Gardener?

To become Certified for the following year:

- You report at least 24 hours of volunteer service and at least 10 hours of continuing education into the ORS by December 31.
- You acknowledge the terms acceptance and profile update.
- We have introduced a range of hour reporting options to increase program flexibility. There are different designations, besides “Certified”, that we use to help explain the level of participation you have in the program. More information on participation levels is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## How Do I Maintain the Honored Participation Level?

- We encourage you to report volunteer and continuing education hours in the Online Reporting System (ORS). You may report less than the required hours with no penalty.
- You must complete ALL other requirements of the program, including accepting and fulfilling the terms and conditions for the program on a yearly basis. (This includes, but is not limited to, the acceptance of any terms in the ORS.)
- Failure to do so will result in loss of the Honored participation level.

- “Emeritus” status is a term used by third parties (associations). The program does not recognize this term and it has no bearing on your participation in the program.

## How do Master Gardeners represent themselves in the community?

For information on using the Master Gardener title see [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required]

## Can Master Gardeners be guest speakers/presenters for local groups such as local libraries, senior centers, etc?

- Yes, as long as you give the presentation as a volunteer of another organization, such as the organization that is requesting the presentation OR your local association.
- You CANNOT conduct volunteer service as an independent person (at large).
- You may identify yourself as someone credentialed by the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program and you’re volunteering on behalf of a specific organization. More information on using the Master Gardener title is provided in [Onboarding-Lite](#) [Canvas NetID required].

## Should I wear my Master Gardener name badge?

Wear your name badge whenever you are volunteering and want to signal you are a credentialed Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener. When doing so make sure you are following the guidelines and policies (including identification guidelines) of the organization you are volunteering for.

## Can I use the UW Logo?

UW–Madison takes the protection of its trademarks seriously to maintain the university’s reputation. The university works with independent licensing agencies and lawyers to ensure legal compliance with its trademarks. For a full list of UW–Madison logos and names with active trademarks—including the UW crest, Motion W, and Bucky Badger—visit the [Office of Trademark Licensing website](#). Individuals and companies that produce promotional goods and apparel using these logos or graphically represented names must comply with [trademark policies](#), including licensing agreements and royalty payments.

## Does the University provide liability protection to Master Gardeners?

No. Master Gardeners are considered the volunteers of the organization for which they provide volunteer service. University liability protection is not attached to an individual’s participation as a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener or the title of Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener. Liability protection provided by the University does not extend to volunteer service performed for any other groups or organizations with which Wisconsin Extension Master Gardeners may volunteer.

- You may read [our liability policy](#).

## Can the Growing and Caring for Plants in Wisconsin: Foundations in Gardening Class be audited?

- No. This is not an option.



## Will we notify associations of individuals who participated in Growing and Caring for Plants in Wisconsin: Foundations in Gardening or Onboarding?

- No. The Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program does not keep a list of associations and their contact information. Participants of Onboarding will be provided information about associations and will be encouraged to visit the WIMGA website to learn more about associations in their area. Please make sure your association information is updated on the [WIMGA website](#).

## Do you have to be a member of an association?

You do not need to be a member of an association to be a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener.

## Is there an annual dues requirement?

The Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener program has never collected dues and will continue to not collect dues. Dues are collected by the Wisconsin Master Gardeners Association, <https://www.wimga.org/> and its local associations.

## Do associations need to limit membership?

- Membership is up to your association and its bylaws to determine who can be a member of the association. [WIMGA](#) has their own policies regarding association membership.
- Membership in an association is not synonymous with being a Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener. Individuals who are not current participants in the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program cannot use the title.

## Is Inactive Level Bad?

Inactive participation level is not bad. All it means is you did not report the minimum requirements last year. There is no penalty for having this participation level other than not being able to say you are "Certified". You still have access to everything so you can report volunteer hours and do your continuing education.

At the barest of minimums, please report at least 1 hour of CE and 1 hour of volunteer service each year to be "Active" the following year. You achieve Certified level when you report the minimum of 24 hours of volunteer service and 10 hours CE. If you report 0 hours of CE or volunteer service three years in a row, we then interpret that as you no longer wish to continue in the program and we deactivate your accounts.

Our hope is this introduces more flexibility for us to roll with the punches that life throws at us. The table in [Onboarding-Lite](#) explains the different participation levels.

## Can I use Extension factsheets when I am volunteering for another organization?

Yes. We highly recommend using research based factsheets such as the ones that can be found on the Wisconsin Extension Horticulture Program's website <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/>. Even in cases where you're volunteering for another organization, please use Extension resources. These materials are vetted, reliable and useful when Master Gardeners work in their communities, educating others.

## Is the State office still doing Lifetime Milestone Recognition?

Yes, your Lifetime Milestone Certificates can be found and printed in your ORS dashboard. Please see this [FAQ](#) for more information on how to print your certificates.

## Do you have additional questions?

If you have additional questions please contact the Wisconsin Extension Master Gardener Program at [wimastergardener@extension.wisc.edu](mailto:wimastergardener@extension.wisc.edu).

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