

WISCONSIN SCHOOL GARDEN INITIATIVE BRIEF

SUPPORTING YOUTH GARDENS WITH MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS



As youth gardens continue to gain widespread popularity, the need for knowledgeable, community-minded volunteers is also on the rise. Extension educators can play an important role by coordinating Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) to fill this need. The mission of Master Gardener Volunteer programs is to train MGVs to become community volunteers who help people understand horticulture and the environment and perform horticulture-related work for their communities. This publication provides Extension educators and school garden coordinators with tips for creating mutually beneficial relationships between MGVs and school gardens, so that both come away asking for more!

What MGVs Can Offer School & Youth Gardens

Master Gardener Volunteers come equipped with knowledge and resources to share. Specific talents differ from volunteer to volunteer, but overall, here are some of the things that MGVs can offer to school gardens.

- **Technical Assistance**—planting recommendations, soil testing, weed identification, insect/disease identification
- **Garden Expansion & Installation**—give assistance with garden design, planning, or construction
- **Summer Garden Maintenance**—provide extra support watering, weeding, or mulching
- **Class Time Support**—teach and guide children through garden lessons and activities
- **Find Curriculum**—provide teachers with garden-based curriculum to support educational goals

Tips for Volunteer Coordination

PRIOR TO MGV CLASSES

- Create a survey or application process for school gardens looking for support
- Incorporate time at youth gardens into mandatory MGV service hours to provide a consistent volunteer support team
- Hold an orientation for school gardens: introduce them to Extension & discuss best practices for coordinating volunteers

DURING MGV CLASSES

- Present the benefits of youth garden education during a class in the MGV training
- Use class time for volunteer teams to plan and get to know each other, share ideas, resources, and inspire
- Have volunteer teams select a primary contact to streamline communication with garden coordinators (Remind teams to include all members in emails)
- Direct volunteer teams to meet with garden coordinators in person for an introductory meeting, and continue regular communications & meetings throughout the season
- Use year-end surveys of volunteers and garden coordinators to improve the program





What Motivates Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs)

This list was created based on past feedback from MGVs serving their communities, and is intended to help schools and Extension offices create mutually beneficial volunteer relationships that will keep MGVs excited to come back year after year!

Altruism – Helping Others and Serving the Community

- Communicate youth garden goals so MGVs understand the impact their volunteer projects have on community members
- Invite volunteers to work directly with youth in the garden to see who their volunteer time is influencing
- Educate MGVs about the mission of Extension to increase awareness of how they contribute to the program's community impact

Affiliation – Establishing Relationships with Others

- Organize group work times or volunteer teams to create opportunities for socializing and building relationships
- Encourage school garden coordinators to meet and get to know volunteers at the beginning of the growing season or work day
- Treat MGVs like volunteers rather than employees; management should be friendly rather than authoritative

Achievement – Accomplishing Something Important

- Set a clear communication plan with volunteer teams so they see progress toward completion of projects
- Create opportunities for MGVs to gain knowledge by having them investigate & diagnose garden issues
- Allow MGVs to guide their work and set their own work goals that support the youth garden
- Recognize volunteers' contributions with awards, in a newsletter, or during a special event

Placing MGVs at School & Youth Gardens

Here are some tips to create the best school-MGV match!

Direct volunteers to choose gardens and projects based on their strengths & interests

Choose gardens that are balanced geographically so that MGVs are placed closest to where they live.

Allow MGVs to seek out or start their own youth garden projects as opportunities may be limited



For more information about the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative, visit us at WISchoolGardens.org

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