



Calculating Service Hours

Volunteering as a Master Gardener, you represent the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. As a representative, your goal is to help people improve their quality of life by sharing research-based, non-biased information. This might be done through Extension programs or through your own creative endeavors.

All volunteer service must be accepted or approved by the Local Master Gardener Coordinator. Using the on-line service report (<http://www.aces.edu/mg/>) makes annual reports easier to accomplish.

Four guidelines for validating volunteer work:

- Will it benefit the community?
- Is it associated with a non-commercial group?
- Is it related to gardening, the environment, or an Extension program?
- Are you helping people learn?

If you can answer yes to these four questions, then the activity meets the mission of the Master Gardener program and you should count it in your annual service report.

Hours should be done through a variety of activities. You more effectively represent the program and its mission when considering a variety of audiences to interact with during activities. Examples: All documented hours relate to business meetings, or all hours relate to writing a single article in the quarterly newsletter, or all hours are in an annual bed at the botanic garden – these are one sided and perhaps miss the mission of the MG Program.

Following are examples for activities that count toward Master Gardener service hours.

Intern Master Gardener Volunteers

- Any activity accepted or approved by the Local MG Coordinator counts as volunteer hours. An Extension agent may request some of the Intern's time be done on a specific project or type of volunteer service. Interns are required to participate in and report a minimum of 50 volunteer hours to accomplish certification (2009 new requirement).
- Attendance at extramural educational meetings counts as volunteer hours.
- Travel time to and from a volunteer activity counts toward volunteer hours.
- Participation in Alabama Master Gardener association meetings (local and/or state) counts as volunteer hours
- Drive time to monthly MG association meetings ONLY counts when you are involved with a committee or have a specific responsibility at the meeting
- Interns do not need CEUs. They are in the training classes this year

- Counting Volunteer Hours -

These guidelines were created by combining two organizational efforts: 1. The MG Steering Committee guidelines in 2005 and; 2. An HG Agents' committee, 2008, coordinating Intern training class requirements. These guidelines became active in 2009.

Certified Master Gardener Volunteers

- Any activity accepted or approved by the Local MG Coordinator counts as volunteer hours. To encourage Certified MG's to stay active in the program, we request that they report half the volunteer hours required of Intern MG's. This is now a minimum of 25 volunteer hours.
- Time spent in Master Gardener Association business meetings counts as volunteer hours.
- Drive time to monthly AMG association meetings ONLY counts when you are involved with a committee or have a specific responsibility at the meeting
- Travel time to and from ALL other educational or volunteer activities counts as volunteer time.
- Time spent listening to an educational speaker or topic should be counted as CEUs. Certificates stating the number of CEUs are strongly recommended when organizing such events, but are not required. Otherwise, a description of the location, speaker, topic presented, and amount of time can be included in the service report.
- Labor in your garden or someone else's in preparation for an **educational program** is volunteer time.

Using Volunteer Hours for Awards

To further give credit for volunteer time dedication, CEU hours and Volunteer hours should be combined for a gross total of volunteer time for the year (example: in 2007, Susie accomplished 20 CEU's and 180 volunteer hours for a total of 200 volunteer hours).

Guidelines from IRS

Drive time: All drive time still counts for any and all activities if using these numbers in an itemized IRS tax deduction. Mileage expense for volunteers, as defined by the IRS, is deducted as a direct expense OR at the mileage rate. Mileage is a deduction for the vehicle on the owner's itemized tax form (see IRS publication 526)

Defining CEU's

These guidelines will help you decide if an activity should count toward CEU's:

- Does the activity have a specific learning objective?
- Is the speaker at the activity a recognized authority in the subject presented?

If you answer yes to these two questions, then count the activity toward your CEU's. If you are still in doubt, ask an Extension agent.

You should also count CEU time spent researching a subject in preparation for teaching/presenting that subject to an audience.

Count CEU's by the number of hours present in the activity (example: you attend the Fall AMGA CEU workshop; there are three speakers giving a total of 3.5 hours of program; this equals 3.5 CEU's). Certified MGs should attend a minimum of 10 CEU's per year.