



“We improve the lives of Alabamians through research-based horticulture education delivered by a dedicated, trained, and involved Extension volunteer team.” (2024)

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Calculating Extension Master Gardener Service Hours

Volunteering as an Extension Master Gardener (EMG), you represent the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. You are collaborating with Extension and sharing research-based information to help people improve their quality of life. This might be done through Extension programs or through your own creative endeavors.

All volunteer service must be accepted or approved by the Local Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator. Report hours in the on-line service report (<https://www.acesagmg.site/>).

Four guidelines for validating volunteer activities and reports:

- Will it benefit the community?
- Is it associated with a non-commercial group or endeavor?
- 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 our mission and is validated. In summary – How is the volunteer activity illustrating and impacting the EMG Program’s mission?

Communicate for Success

Communication across our Program community is important to our overall success and survival. The Extension Master Gardener Program has greater impact when activities are a group effort.

Good ideas turn into GREAT ideas when projects have multiple people involved – the Extension Office, Extension Agents, the Master Gardener association, and other EMGs.

Represent Our Mission

Volunteer hours should support a variety of activities. You more effectively represent the program and its mission when volunteering with a variety of audiences and activity types. Comparative examples:

- If all annual hours are related to business meetings, this work is one-sided. Time spent implementing agreed upon projects will also need volunteers.
- If all hours are related to writing a single magazine or newsletter article, this is one-sided. Helping Extension with publications, making handouts for workshops, and related compositions also benefit the EMG Program.

- If all hours are spent in an annual bed at the botanical garden, this work is one-sided. Suggestions - Find one other garden project to give some time or consider how an annual bed might become a teaching opportunity.
- Volunteer activities that have a limited focus on singular interests miss the community-minded, educational mission of the Extension MG Program.

The following are general activity examples that count as Extension Master Gardener service hours.

Service Hours – Intern Extension Master Gardener Volunteers:

- Interns are required to participate in and report a minimum of 50 volunteer hours to accomplish certification. (established 2009)
- Any activity assigned or approved by the Extension agent counts as volunteer hours. The Agent will assign projects for Intern certification requirements.
- Intern training classes are one of the requirements for certification and do not count as volunteer hours.
- Extension MG Interns do not need CEUs but can attend these events as they choose. If reported, these hours will not count toward the 50 volunteer hours (minimum) required for certification. They will count toward their lifetime record of hours.
- Travel time, to and from a volunteer activity, counts along with the time in the volunteer activity.
- Participation in Master Gardener association meetings (local and state) counts as volunteer hours.

Service Hours – Certified Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

- Any activity requested or approved by the Local Extension MG Coordinator counts as volunteer hours.
- Certified Extension MG's should report a minimum of 25 volunteer hours each year.
 - Round trip drive time is counted along with the time in the volunteer activity.
- Round trip drive time counts along with the time spent in a Master Gardener association business meeting. The 2023 EMG Steering Committee changed this from the previous guideline.
- EMG's who are members of an herb society, garden club, tree board, beekeeper's association, wildlife trail, etc. (i.e., organizations external to our program but having a horticultural connection), can count the following activities as EMG hours.
 - Educational program time when the speaker is a recognized expert = CEU's
 - Serving as the guest speaker = "Ornamentals" or "Food plants", "Teaching adults"
 - Volunteering with these organizations to provide **education to the public** = "Community Partner Events"
- Hours must be entered by December 31 of each year to be eligible for awards and for inclusion in the annual federal report for the EMG Program.

Counting Contacts

Contacts are defined as the number of people who receive information or instruction from you, the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer. Count everyone who was present at the educational program you taught (in a classroom, garden, or other setting). A program can be in a group setting or one-on-one.

Your Extension Master Gardener Volunteer peers ARE counted as contacts when providing them with instruction; you are the educational speaker. Your Extension Master Gardener Volunteer peers are usually NOT counted as contacts when volunteering together or attending a meeting (e.g., working demo. garden, plant sale, flower bed maintenance, or attending a conference).

Defining Continuing Education

Extension MG Continuing Education Units (CEU's) may be obtained in-person, by webinars, meetings, or websites. All instructors must be recognized and respected experts in the topic presented, and relevant to southeastern horticulture.

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

- Does the activity have a specific horticulture-related learning objective?
- Is the speaker at the activity a recognized authority in the subject presented?
- Is the topic relevant to southeastern horticulture?

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.

CEU Hours – Certified Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

- All certified EMG's should report a minimum of 10 CEU's per year. "Units" = the number of hours in instruction.
- Report the round-trip mileage as a separate report entry. This prevents exaggeration of the statewide annual report of total CEU's.
- The report includes a field to enter the location and topic presented in the service report.
- Time spent researching a subject in preparation for teaching/presenting that subject, should be reported under the "Creating & Sharing Information" category in the Service Report.
- Certificates stating the number of CEU's are recommended when organizing such events, but are not required.

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 2021, Susie accomplished 20 CEU's and 180 volunteer hours for a gross total of 200 hours submitted for an award).