

## MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEERS

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It's time to think about becoming an Extension Master Gardener. If you enjoy spending time in the garden and landscape, learning new things, meeting people who also enjoy plants, and being involved in your community, consider becoming a Master Gardener.

Don't let the word Master Gardener deter you. The program is open to beginning and expert gardeners. While volunteers tend to have some experience and knowledge, this is not a requirement and should not stop you from exploring the program.

Master gardeners are volunteers of each state's land grant University. In Nebraska, it is the University of Nebraska at Lincoln where the program started 1976.

Our mission is to extend the outreach of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Volunteers help provide unbiased, science based horticulture information and volunteer in landscape and garden activities to enhance community green space.

Education and learning are key components of becoming a Master Gardener. Over one to two years, new volunteers attend 40 hours of local and virtual education and volunteer an equal number of hours.

Once the first 40 hours of training and volunteer time is completed, returning volunteers are asked to attend a minimum of 12 education hours and volunteer 20 hours to the program each year. In surveys of volunteers, it is the lifelong learning they most enjoy.

For training, topics range from plant identification to tree, fruit, vegetable, perennial flower and lawn care as well as pest identification and management. There may be classes on improving soil, attracting pollinators and learning how to prune or propagate plants. Topics vary each year.

Along with increasing plant knowledge, benefits include meeting people who have similar interests, sharing plants, discussing gardening successes and failures, and learning from one another.

Volunteer opportunities include sharing gardening knowledge with others, community and demonstration garden care, harvesting and donating fresh produce to local food pantries, citizen science projects, 4-H/youth garden and outdoor education, and more. Volunteers can create their own projects.

Across Nebraska, there are over 600 volunteers. Volunteers do not need to live in the county where their training takes place. They can be trained in one county and volunteer their time in the county they live in as needed.

In our general area, training programs take place in Columbus, Norfolk, Grand Island, Fremont, Sioux City and York. In Columbus, Master Gardener classes are held on Thursday mornings and Monday or Tuesday evenings in February and March.

There is a one-time fee to join the Extension Master Gardener program. While it varies some, it is usually around \$150. This fee covers training, a handbook, T-shirt and name tag. After the first year, there is a state fee of \$10 paid per year.

If you are interested in learning more about the Extension Master Gardener program in Nebraska, call me at 563-4901 or e-mail [kfeehan2@unl.edu](mailto:kfeehan2@unl.edu). Information can also be found at <https://mastergardener.unl.edu> if you prefer to explore the website first.