

August 14, 2024

Thank you for your interest in the VCE Loudoun Master Gardener Volunteer program (VCE MG). VCE MGs serve as volunteer educators assisting Loudoun County Extension in their mission to deliver a variety of educational programs. As VCE MGs, our educational programming focus is on safe, effective, and sustainable landscape management practices to support home food production as well as help conserve our natural resources. Our mission is to provide unbiased, research-based horticultural information to the community, delivered under the auspices of Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

The training period to attain certification in Loudoun as a VCE MG is divided into two phases. The first phase is comprised of **65+ hours** in classroom and lab learning to provide a thorough understanding of all areas in horticulture, to include topics such as botany, soils, plant disease, vegetables, turf grasses and water quality. Classes are taught by experienced industry professionals, advanced trained VCE educators, and university professors.

The classroom portion of the training is **Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. beginning late January**. We utilize a virtual classroom via zoom for real-time day classes and recorded sessions for those unable to attend day classes (titled evening class). Several labs are offsite and will be in evening or weekend hours for ALL students. In addition, several (optional) "Lunch N Learns" are at 12:30pm after a day class, where there is opportunity to learn additional material relevant to local projects.

Upon successful completion of the classroom phase, you become a VCE MG Intern. The internship period runs through mid-December and incorporates **75 hours of volunteering**. It is designed to provide practical hands-on learning under the guidance of experienced VCE MGs. The 75 hours are broken down into specific increments with approved projects to include:

- **Virtual Help Desk** - Plant diagnostic services are provided for residents who call, email or walk-in. **25 hours of internship required for all Interns.**
- **Garden Clinics** – Plant diagnostic services and educational information that are provided at various sites in the county. **Clinics operate on Saturdays and 25 hours are required for evening class, and highly encouraged for day class for "Other" hours.**
- **Demonstration Garden at Ida Lee** - A public garden space maintained by EMGs for hands-on application of topics learned in class and further serves as an outdoor classroom and lecture area for the VCE MGs as well as a resource for residents to witness sustainable landscape methods in practice. **Demo Garden hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m.- noon (8 to 11 in hotter months) and many Saturdays. 25 hours of internship required for daytime class students and 6 hours required for evening class.**
- **Other Project Areas** – Can include assisting speakers with presentations, Steward projects, writing articles of interest, children's education programming, community events and unit support tasks and projects. **Times vary. 25 hours of internship required.**
- **Healthy Virginia Lawns** – Homeowner visits, upon client request, to assess lawn health and further educate the homeowner on proper maintenance to avoid unnecessary runoff or use of fertilizers. **1 site visit is required in internship, counts toward the "Other Projects" and the 25-hour commitment.**

Many interns accrue far more than the minimum 75 hours required and become an integral part of the unit taking on key unit support tasks and leadership positions. All hours are an opportunity to serve the community, increase your horticultural knowledge and enjoy a shared passion among unit members. After successful completion of the class training and internship through December, a graduation bestows the title of **VCE Loudoun Master Gardener Volunteer**.

All interested applicants shall 1) complete the online EMG Volunteer Application, 2) secure two personal references, 3) interview, and 4) pass a background screening. Phone and/or in-person/zoom interviews commence in October after application and references are submitted. ***Applications will be considered in order of receipt. There is a maximum number of slots.*** Loudoun County residents have priority.

Tuition is charged after acceptance and upon registration. 2025 class fee is still TBD. The fee covers an electronic copy of the course textbook, "*Virginia Cooperative Extension Gardener Handbook*", the state program fee, t-shirts, instructor and lab fees as well as other training materials.

Important Dates to Note:

September 19, 2024, 7pm. Informational Meeting for those interested in the VCE Loudoun MG Volunteer program to get an overview and ask questions. ***This meeting will be virtual.*** ***Registration required to receive zoom link one week prior to event. See www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org under Become an EMG for registration link.***

September 20, 2024 – Application process opens. Note process will close when max capacity is met or on October 20, whichever comes first.

Late October/Early November 2024 – Applicant interviews.

Mid-December 2024 – Applicants will be notified if accepted. Tuition will be collected through an online system called Destiny One when registration is active.

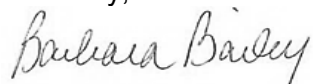
January 18 – in person Meet & Greet at 10:30 for accepted applicants.

January 21st through April 1st, 2025 – Classes held.

April 5th – Trainee graduation to Intern status.

Thank you for your interest in the VCE Loudoun MG Volunteer program. If you have further questions, please email LCMGtraining@gmail.com.

Sincerely,



Barbara Bailey
Master Gardener Coordinator
Community Engagement Coordinator
VCE Loudoun County