

Alabama Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program

2024–2028 Strategic Plan



Mission:

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

Vision:

As Alabama Extension Master Gardener volunteers and ambassadors, we **aspire** to

- **teach** all generations
- **inspire** a lifelong pursuit of research-based knowledge
- **serve** as environmental stewards
- **draw** all people to the joys of gardening



Guiding Principles:



Guiding Principle 1:

We value and encourage the teamwork of our program community.

We are Alabama A&M University, Auburn University, Alabama Extension, local Master Gardener associations, the Alabama Master Gardeners Association, and all Alabama Extension Master Gardener Volunteers.



Guiding Principle 2:

We are rooted in research-based knowledge.

It is the foundation of our volunteer training, community outreach, and activities. Research-based knowledge guides us through our personal gardening challenges and continues to feed our appetite for lifelong learning.



Guiding Principle 3:

We are advocates for knowledge in all Alabama communities.

We are dedicated to public programs that deliver trusted home horticulture information. We use demonstration gardens, educational programs, beautification projects, Ask-a-MG, and more to teach everyone to integrate research-based best practices into their joy of gardening.



Guiding Principle 4:

We are passionate about gardening.

We believe that horticulture is critical to everyone's daily life, no matter where it is found. Gardening benefits and sustains human health, celebrates nature's beauty, and is an asset to community well-being.



Guiding Principle 5:

We identify and implement projects that address local needs.

We are local, accessible, dedicated, and engaged volunteers. We seek to understand and address community needs through Extension programs, partnerships, philanthropy, information sharing, demonstration gardens, and mentoring.



Guiding Principle 6:

We are committed to environmental stewardship.

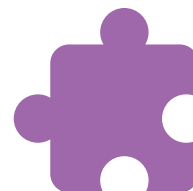
We are committed to protecting and supporting Alabama's natural resources. Our horticulture programs recognize and respect the connections between cultivated landscapes and surrounding native environments.



Guiding Principle 7:

We collaborate to ensure a vibrant future for the Extension Master Gardener program and its mission.

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5-Year Goals and Objectives:

1. Recruit New Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

- **Increase Awareness.** Use a standardized public message to connect with and educate future volunteers about the program, locally and statewide.
- **Network with Community Partners.** Target organizations and companies with a volunteer culture. These collaborations will educate their employees and members about our EMG program's mission and volunteer projects.
- **Increase Accessibility.** Create program materials, training, and events that accommodate different abilities and lifestyles.

2. Support Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

- **Enhance Professional Development.** Organize regular training that develops resources to enhance the skills and knowledge of EMG volunteers in areas such as evolving horticulture, annual leadership development, volunteer management, and Extension teamwork.
- **Establish Mentorship Guidance.** Develop flexible, local, and statewide mentorship processes that keep everyone engaged and support local leadership growth.
- **Increase Accessibility.** All reasonable efforts will be made to develop programs, resources, materials, and events that are accessible to all volunteers.

3. Ensure Extension Master Gardener Program Sustainability

- **Maintain Diverse Volunteer Groups.** Create outreach programs that will retain a diverse group of volunteers in terms of age, backgrounds, expertise, and interests.
- **Maintain Standard Training Programs.** Continue to provide consistent, relevant curricula that enhance unity across the Alabama EMG Program. Equip all EMGs interns and certified members with the tools to be successful Extension volunteers.
- **Expand Recognition System.** Create new and expand existing opportunities to recognize agent and volunteer contributions and their teamwork beyond hours-based awards. Incentives should foster a sense of everyone's value to the EMG program's mission.

- **Foster Sustainable Projects.** Extension agents and MGs will support sustainable gardening projects that contribute positively to the environment and lead to community ownership of projects.
- **Establish a Statewide Program Culture.** Use leadership, team-building, and internal communications to support and build unity across the Alabama EMG Program.
- **Create a Development Officer Position.** This position will raise funds to facilitate hiring additional personnel to achieve effective program management.
- **Expand Program Support and Collaborations.** Assess and define program management needs to request new personnel positions, such as agent assistants, for local program support. Plan for new alliances at Auburn University and Alabama A&M University.

4. Enhance Marketing & Communications

- **Standardize the Public Message.** Develop standardized marketing messages and branded materials that promote the EMG name as synonymous with research-based education. All marketing materials will be used by EMGs, agents, and Extension offices.
- **Establish Alabama Extension-EMG Web Page.** Develop a new Alabama Extension-EMG web page with updated information, resources, program links, and user-friendly navigation to promote the program, share success stories, and attract potential volunteers.
- **Increase Community Outreach.** Increase the program's visibility by participating in and hosting community events and projects with branded marketing materials.
- **Use a Variety of Media.** Connect with local newspapers, magazines, social media, TV, and other outlets to promote the program and its community impacts.

5. Support Extension Agents

- **Enhance Professional Development.** Organize regular training that develops resources to enhance the skills and knowledge of Extension agents in areas such as evolving horticulture, leadership development, volunteer management, and Extension teamwork. Advanced planning will coordinate around the agents' other commitments.
- **Support Collaborative Outreach.** Assist Extension agents in developing collaborative outreach plans that include local EMG expertise to address specific needs and challenges identified in their communities.
- **Support Applied Research.** Develop partnerships that support agent and EMG collaborations in current and future applied research and peer reviewed publications.

Thank you to the many voices that contributed to developing this plan—1,002 survey respondents and 106 attendees in focus groups and plan development retreats—Extension administrators, Home Horticulture team and county office employees, Extension Master Gardener volunteers, and members of the Alabama Master Gardeners Association board.



Kerry Smith

State Coordinator, Alabama Extension
Master Gardener Volunteer Program



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