



Connection Points

This publication is intended to support communication between the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers, and local Master Gardener Associations (MGA).

The Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program

The EMG Volunteer Program was developed by Washington State University Extension in 1973 and adopted by Alabama in 1981. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Home Horticulture agents lead the program with the primary purpose of building a team of collaborative educators.

This program attracts people who desire to grow their knowledge about horticulture, invest in volunteering, and share their knowledge with others. These volunteers have exciting potential to contribute to a variety of Extension activities.

Program Mission

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

Program Vision

As Alabama Extension Master Gardener volunteers and ambassadors, we aspire to accomplish the following:

- Teach all generations.
- Inspire a lifelong pursuit of research-based knowledge.
- Serve as environmental stewards.
- Draw all people to the joys of gardening.

Who Are We?



- **EMG volunteers** are trained and certified by the Alabama Extension Home Horticulture team and collaborate with their activities. When trained further, they can also contribute to activities related to food safety, forestry and wildlife, 4-H, and more.
- **Once certified**, volunteers join local MGAs and the Alabama Master Gardeners Association (AMGA). They have more than 1,500 members statewide. There are thirty-three counties with local MG associations. Ten other counties have small groups of or single EMG volunteers connected through their county Extension office.
- **Extension** transforms lives through science-based educational programs from Alabama A&M University and Auburn University. There are sixty-seven county Extension offices across Alabama, thirteen research centers, and seventeen program teams.

What Do We Do?



- **EMG volunteers extend the reach of Extension** through activities such as demonstration gardens, public educational events, and the Master Gardener Helpline. They do more than garden. They serve!
- **Alabama Extension educates residents** through a wide variety of relevant, timely program areas. These include Home Horticulture, Commercial Horticulture, Food Safety and Quality, Agronomic Crops, Alabama 4-H, Economic and Community Development, and others.

Connecting Everyone

Teamwork among volunteers, county associations, state associations, and Extension personnel is important to the EMG Volunteer Program mission and rewarding for everyone in the program. Page 8, Our Program Family, has a description of everyone connected to this program.

How do you rate your program's relationships?

- If volunteers and Extension are **DISCONNECTED** and rarely work together, these recommendations may help you start building or restart relationships.
- If volunteers and Extension are **SOMETIMES CONNECTED** and occasionally work together, these recommendations may help you expand your relationships.
- If volunteers and Extension are **CONNECTED** and often work together, thank you! You are all contributing team members. These recommendations may be helpful reminders or points to consider adding to your activities.

Need extra help? Past misunderstandings or difficult circumstances may influence the start of new relationships. A mediator may be helpful in this case. Contact the EMG Volunteer Program state coordinator to find options for connecting or reconnecting.

Make Connections



Find the point(s) of contact for local MGAs using the AMGA website, www.alabamamga.org, or asking the Extension Home Horticulture agent in your county. Find the county Extension

office and Extension agent contact information at aces.edu.



A variety of volunteer requests come from Extension offices through county Extension directors (CEDs), office admins, and Extension agents. Similarly, MGAs need volunteers for activities they organize. Effective communication between everyone needs to occur throughout the year.

Page 8, Our Program Family, has a description of everyone connected to this program.

Using Worksheets #1, #2, and #3

Find opportunities that can encourage Extension personnel, Master Gardener associations (MGA), and Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers to form new relationships and strengthen existing ones. Invite each other to meetings, programs, and other activities.

Introduce yourself and invite others to connect. Complete and exchange worksheets #1 and #2 on the following pages to help make introductions. Share fun information about yourself, the office, volunteers, and local association.

Worksheet #3 is for quick planning of ongoing activities or potentially as initial communication for planned activities. Mark the activities where Extension needs volunteer help or where volunteers want to help.

See worksheets #4 and #5 at the end of this publication to prepare information for more detailed program planning. Methods for using these are detailed on pages 6, 7, and 8.

Helping Extension

EMG volunteers have valuable experience and want to help. Extension values this support and has a variety of volunteer opportunities. Extension can grow volunteers' skills and knowledge so they can contribute even more. Through this combined effort, volunteers find enjoyable ways to expand their volunteerism and enrich their communities.

Meet the Volunteers



About Us

Contact Information

Our Favorite Volunteer Activities

We Can Help!

Plan ahead several months for large events
and 3 to 4 weeks for small-scale activities.

Extension
Volunteers



Alabama
**Master
Gardeners**
aces.edu

Meet the Team



About Us

Contact Information

Our Extension Events and Activities

Extension Needs Volunteers!

Our initial program planning season is in
November and December.

Extension
Volunteers



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Worksheet #3: Quick Planning



Extension Office Support Activity	Extension Needs Help	EMG/MGA Wants to Help
Prepare mailers or newsletters		
Organize event packets		
Organize office publications		
Assist the office administrator		
Help advertise programs/events		
(other)		

Extension Event Support Activity	Extension Needs Help	EMG/MGA Wants to Help
Event registration and check-in		
Event preparation		
Support during the event		
Tour guide		
Teaching		
(other)		

Agent Program Support	Extension Needs Help	EMG/MGA Wants to Help
Home Horticulture (event check-in or setup, hospitality, collaborate in planning, teach with agents, garden and other type demonstrations, other)		
Food Safety (event check-in or setup, produce pickup and preparation, workshop assistance, organize workshop materials, other)		
Forestry, Wildlife, & Natural Resources (event check-in or setup, workshop assistance, organize materials, other)		
4-H (judging, teaching, day camp support, logistics for trips, chaperone, and other)		
Human Sciences (food preparation, exhibit volunteer, prepare event packets and bags, and other)		
Other Program Teams		

When used by Extension personnel, mark the activities where you need volunteer help. When used by volunteers, mark the activities you want to help. Check all appropriate boxes that apply.

Connect With Programs: Plan as a Team

Each Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteer is a member of the Extension Home Horticulture team, the county Extension office, and the Master Gardener associations (local MGAs and AMGA) when membership dues are paid. This teamwork culture is reinforced when everyone collaborates in program planning. Together we educate Alabama.

Extension's initial planning period is November and December each year. Planning meetings can be scheduled throughout the year.

A planning process helps everyone recruit volunteers and balances support for both Extension and local MGA activities. Each county should identify a preferred communication process while maintaining the principles outlined in this publication.

- **A note for MGA Presidents or EMG points of contact** When planning association activities, copy the CED and Extension Home Horticulture agent on the initial emails. Include the proposed dates and locations of these activities to ensure accurate documentation and communication of volunteer activities.
- **A note for Extension personnel** When planning events and activities, copy the host county's CED, Home Horticulture agent, and MGA president (as available) in your initial planning phase with EMG volunteers. This ensures communication across the program.
- **Everyone** It is not usually necessary to copy each other after these initial planning emails. Each team member will follow up as needed.
- **Everyone** If you are new to Extension and the EMG Volunteer Program, ask the Home Horticulture agent and others about the history of events/activities offered in this county. Learn the agents who represent each program team. Is the EMG Volunteer Program new to this county or are there established activities?
 - Connecting everyone takes time. These are recommended lead times.
 - Multi-day events may need volunteers from multiple counties and several months' planning. This level of recruiting can start by contacting the MGA president in the event's host county.

- For most large-scale events, 6 weeks is a reasonable lead time needed to connect the activity, supporting personnel, and volunteers. Examples include single-day workshops or tours.
- Small-scale activities usually need 3 to 4 weeks lead time. An initial request for help should still be made 6 weeks in advance. Examples include mail-outs, event packet prep, and other Extension office help.

The county Extension office and its agents have diverse job responsibilities in serving the needs of each county's clients.

- Home Horticulture agents lead home horticulture programs and are the primary EMG Volunteer Program contacts. They are responsible for leading programs in multiple counties, some up to 10.
- Extension personnel will assist MGA activities when these align with other Extension job responsibilities and they are available.
- If the MGA plans to request assistance and availability from Extension, this is best done in November or December each year.



Preparing for Planning Meetings

Remember, no one has a permanent position in any role, Extension personnel or volunteers. This Connection Points publication intends to help everyone remain connected, regardless of change.

MGA president or other point of contact (See Worksheet #1)

- Decide who will be the primary point of contact for Extension. Is this the MGA president or another EMG volunteer?
- Review the online Extension directory for your county. Learn who are the CED, office admin, and Extension agents from each subject-matter discipline. Select a Program Area and Home Horticulture. Here you will see the Home Horticulture team's agents, specialists, and county directors.
- Poll your membership to learn the skills they can offer to support the county Extension office's and agent's programs.
 - Consider a simple email survey or sign-up sheet at a monthly meeting.

- Ask members to share information on their biographical page in the Service Report.
- Consider lead times you think are reasonable for various types of volunteer support to Extension. See recommendations on page 6.
 - What activities might the volunteers support on short notice? Who can assist with 2 to 3 days' notice? Who can assist with a few hours' notice?
- Use Worksheet #4 to prepare notes about current and proposed MGA activities expected for the year.
 - Include separate notes about these programs and their history. Share these during planning meetings and how they represent the EMG Program's mission.
- Help connect the volunteers' interests and skills with Extension activities. Please plan to meet each year and build these connections.

Extension personnel (See Worksheet #2)

- Decide who will be the primary point of contact for the MGA and EMG volunteers. Is this the CED, office admin, an Extension agent, or someone else?
- Learn who the MGA president and other points of contact are for the local association or EMG volunteers. Ask the Home Horticulture Extension agent for help if needed.
- Consider the various types of volunteer assistance that could support the county Extension office or Extension programs hosted in the county (see examples on Worksheet #3).
 - Each volunteer will have different interests and skills.
 - Make a concise list of volunteer opportunities that correlate Extension activities with volunteer recruitment.
 - Plan for reasonable lead times for volunteer support requests.
- Use Worksheet #5 to prepare notes about current and proposed Extension activities expected for the year.
 - Include separate notes about these programs and their history. Share these during planning meetings and how they represent the EMG Program's mission (page 1).

- Help connect Extension with volunteers' interests and skills. Plan to meet each year and build these connections.

Extension Planning Meetings



MGA president or other point of contact

- Contact the CED, office admin, or Home Horticulture Extension agent for your county.
 - Introduce yourself as the current or new MGA or EMG point of contact.
 - Ask if they have scheduled a planning meeting for EMG volunteer involvement yet.
 - If using email, copy the Home Horticulture agent in the initial email to keep all team members connected.
- Once a date is decided, ask what information you need to bring to the Extension planning meeting.
 - Begin making some notes using Worksheet #4 so Extension is aware of your projects.
 - Share other points of contact as needed. There might be a project chair or others involved in organizing programs.
 - MGA presidents: Regardless of the point of contact decided, the county office and Home Horticulture agent, need to have your information for future communications.
- For the Extension planning meeting, bring the information you have collected to date.
 - Double check that complete contact information has been exchanged between all points of contact (Worksheets #1 and #2).
 - Share the information you have prepared to date. Additional meetings might be needed.
 - Ask what EMG volunteers can do to help Extension.
- Invite Extension personnel to attend an MGA monthly meeting or other activity. Consider hosting an Extension meet and greet during a monthly meeting, Holiday luncheon, or another time.
- Communicate regularly to share the activities of your MGA. Consider how these can connect with Extension.

Extension Personnel

- Schedule a meeting with the MGA President or other points of contact where you expect to plan programs or projects.
 - Introduce yourself as the current or new Extension employee in your role.
 - Offer several dates/times for meeting. Everyone is busy.
 - If using email, copy the Home Horticulture Extension agent in the initial email to keep all team members connected.
- Once a date is decided, send a followup email.
 - Avoid overwhelming the process with excess email information if this is your first meeting.
 - Ask them to begin making some notes using the worksheets in this publication.
 - Share other points of contact as needed.
- Use Worksheet #5, or other planning tools, to begin making notes related to your program planning.
- At the meeting, start with friendly conversation before planning begins. Bring the information you have collected to date.
 - Double check that complete contact information has been exchanged between all points of contact (Worksheets #1 and #2).
 - Share program planning information prepared to date. Schedule additional meetings as needed.
 - Ask what types of programs and activities the EMG volunteers want to support.
- Invite the MGA president and other EMG volunteers to Extension meetings or events. Ask when the next monthly MGA meeting (or other activity) would allow time for connecting with volunteers.
- Communicate regularly to share Extension activities. Consider how these can connect with EMG volunteers.

Friendly Reminders



- Include all Extension personnel and EMG volunteers in catering counts for each event that includes food.
- Early collaborations lead to greater success. See recommended lead times on page 6.
- Extension personnel: Consider scheduling a preliminary planning meeting in November or December after the regional Plan of Work meeting.

- Regardless of the planning tools chosen, including volunteers in program/project planning grows valuable partnerships. Schedule these meetings as soon as possible, even if some of the details are not yet decided.

- The Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Volunteer Program is vitally important to Extension. We need trained volunteers to help deliver Extension programs. Likewise, Extension appreciates the Master Gardeners associations (local and state) for providing support and organizing educational projects in local communities.

Our program's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a unifying document for the Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program. It indicates the significance of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's relationship with all Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers. It outlines our expectations for all participants.

Our Program Family

We could not have a successful Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program without the following people and groups. Help each other connect across our program family.

EMG Volunteers and Affiliated Associations

- Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Volunteer: These volunteer educators are county-based representatives of Extension. They primarily volunteer with the Extension Home Horticulture team, but may be interested in volunteering with other Extension teams' programs.
- Master Gardener Association (MGA): These are single- or multi-county organizations whose purpose is to supplement Extension home horticulture activities. They invite all certified Alabama EMG volunteers to join with paid membership. They organize social and educational activities for their members and community projects rooted in the EMG Volunteer Program's mission.
- Alabama Master Gardeners Association (AMGA): This statewide organization invites all certified Alabama Extension Master Gardener volunteers to join. Its purposes are to enhance and supplement Extension Home Horticulture activities, support members with continuing education, and provide volunteer service through community projects.

- EMG Service Report definitions:
 - Intern: These are program volunteers during their first year. They have not yet completed the EMG Volunteer Program's training and volunteer activity requirements.
 - Intern Incomplete: These intern volunteers did not complete the EMG Volunteer Program's intern training and volunteer requirements within 12 months of starting the training.
 - Certified Active: These volunteers have maintained this status in the EMG Volunteer Program by (1) reporting a minimum of 25 volunteer hours and 10 CEUs in the previous year, (2) signing the current Memorandum of Understanding, and (3) paying current annual membership dues (local MGA, when applicable, and AMGA).
 - Alum: These volunteers are partially active in the EMG Volunteer Program. They have paid membership dues to the local MGA, when applicable, and AMGA, but are not volunteering. They only participate in the program's social activities.
 - Inactive: These volunteers are fully inactive in the EMG Volunteer Program. Their records do not show the three requirements for Certified Active status.
 - Certified Volunteer: These volunteers are active in the EMG Volunteer Program in one of two ways.
 1. They are interns who have completed the intern training course and volunteer hour requirements for EMG Volunteer Program certification but have not yet paid membership dues.
 2. Their records show a minimum of 25 volunteer hours and 10 CEUs in the previous year, and a signed Memorandum of Understanding. Membership in an association is highly encouraged. This increases the volunteer's access to valuable social and educational activities and retention in the program.

Extension Personnel

- The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (or Alabama Extension): With county, state, and USDA funding, this is the primary outreach organization for the land grant mission of Alabama A&M University and Auburn University. Its employees and volunteers deliver research-based education.
- County Administrative Support Associate (Office Admin): These employees are integral to all activities emanating from the county Extension office. They provide administrative support to the county office and the activities for delivering local programs.
- County Extension Director (CED): These employees lead a county Extension office and serve as local community liaisons. They can be Extension educators in one or more subject-matter disciplines (teams).
- Extension Agent (Agent): These employees lead regional Extension programs in specific subject-matter disciplines (teams). They are the primary Extension educators for their discipline within an assigned multi-county region.
- Extension Specialist (Specialist): These employees lead focused statewide Extension programs and research in specific subject-matter disciplines (teams). They can be full-time in Extension or have a combined Extension/research/teaching appointment at Alabama A&M University or Auburn University.

Authors: Lucy Ellington, Chilton County Extension Director and Home Horticulture team;
 Harriett Jackson, Chilton County EMG volunteer and Chilton County MGA member;
 Kerry Smith, EMG Volunteer Program State Coordinator

Worksheet #4 Planning Meeting Preparation for MGA or EMG Volunteer

Complete as much information as possible before the planning meeting. Extension needs to know your proposed events and activities.



Master Gardener Association or Other EMG Volunteer Event Planning Details (scheduled or proposed event/activity)

Calendar year:

Host county for planned event/activity:

Event/activity location with street address, if known:

Leading MGA:
(and other MGAs or other organizations if collaborating)

Scheduled or proposed event/activity description: (Include the activity title, if determined, and other information known at this time.)

Point of contact for this event/activity:

Point of contact information:

Phone:

Email:

Dates of Event/Activity # (use expected month if dates are unknown)		Days of Week (if known or preferred days)	Event Times per Date (start and end times each day)	Extension Collaboration Requested (Briefly describe how we might be able to help. Extension will assist MGA activities as available.)	Estimated Number of EMG Volunteers Needed Each Day	Estimated Number of Event Attendees Each Day
1						
2						
3						

Other notes to add as needed:

Worksheet #4 Planning Meeting Preparation for MGA or EMG Volunteer

Complete as much information as possible before the planning meeting. Extension needs to know your proposed events and activities.



Master Gardener Association or Other EMG Volunteer Event Planning Details (scheduled or proposed event/activity)

Calendar year: 2026

Host county for planned event/activity: Houston

Event/activity location with street address, if known: Dothan Area Botanical Gardens 5130 Headland Ave., Dothan, AL

Leading MGA: Wiregrass (lead), Claybank and Pike EMGs have educational tables too (and other MGAs or other organizations if collaborating)

Scheduled or proposed event/activity description: (Include the activity title, if determined, and other information known at this time.)
Go Public Gardens Day is a free, family-friendly event hosted by the Dothan Area Botanical Gardens and led by the Wiregrass Master Gardeners. As part of a nationwide initiative promoting public gardens and gardening, the event encourages the community to explore nature and support local green spaces. Visitors will enjoy access to the gardens and educational exhibits from the Extension Master Gardeners, Extension personnel, gardening experts and organizations throughout the Wiregrass.

Point of contact for this event/activity: Jan Shirley WMGA

Point of contact information:

Phone: 334-555-5555

Email: janwmga@email.com

#	Dates of Event/Activity (use expected month if dates are unknown)	Days of Week (if known or preferred days)	Event Times per Date (start and end times each day)	Extension Collaboration Requested (Briefly describe how we might be able to help. Extension will assist MGA activities as available.)	Estimated Number of EMG Volunteers Needed Each Day	Estimated Number of Event Attendees Each Day
1	5/15/26 set up day	Friday	setup time is TBD (tables & small tents)		10	0
2	5/16/26 event day	Saturday	set up 8:30-9:30 a.m.	set up displays and activities	50	350
3	5/16/26 event day	Saturday	10 a.m.-2 p.m.	promote event, be a vendor, share Extension pubs		

Other notes to add as needed:

Worksheet #5 Planning Meeting Preparation for Extension Personnel



Extension Event Planning Details (scheduled or proposed Extension activity where you will need volunteer help)

Calendar year:

Host county for planned event/activity:

Event/activity location with street address, if known:

Leading program team or county Extension office:
(and other Extension personnel if collaborating)

Scheduled or proposed event/activity description: (Include the activity title, if determined, and other information known at this time.)

Point of contact for this event/activity:

Point of contact's information:

Phone:

Email:

#	Dates of Event/Activity (use expected month if dates are unknown)	Days of Week (if known or preferred days)	Event Times per Date (start and end times each day)	EMG/MGA Collaboration Requested (see some examples on Worksheet #3)	Estimated Number of EMG Volunteers Needed Each Day	Estimated Number of Event Attendees Each Day
1						
2						
3						

Special experience or knowledge needed by volunteers that would be helpful at this event/activity:

Worksheet #5 Planning Meeting Preparation for Extension Personnel



Extension Event Planning Details (scheduled or proposed Extension activity where you will need volunteer help)

Calendar year: 2026

Host county for planned event/activity: Henry

Event/activity location with street address, if known: Henry County Groundwater Festival @ Landmark Park Dothan, AL

Leading program team or county Extension office: Henry County Extension Office 4-H
(and other Extension personnel if collaborating)

Scheduled or proposed event/activity description: (Include the activity title, if determined, and other information known at this time.)
The groundwater festival event is an educational field trip for the 4th-graders at Henry County Schools to educate students on the water cycle. The day is full of fun for the students, there are usually 8 different educational stations. 2 volunteers needed to lead the nature walk. 2 volunteers needed to help with registering teachers/classes, and 2 volunteers needed to teach about the water cycle and make bracelets.

Point of contact for this event/activity: Tawnya Kirkland 4-H Extension Agent

Point of contact's information:

Phone: 334-555-5555

Email: ttt0000@email.edu

#	Dates of Event/Activity (use expected month if dates are unknown)	Days of Week (if known or preferred days)	Event Times per Date (start and end times each day)	EMG/MGA Collaboration Requested (see some examples on Worksheet #3.	Estimated Number of EMG Volunteers Needed Each Day	Estimated Number of Event Attendees Each Day
1	9/17/26	Thursday	7:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m.	Wiregrass and Claybank	6	500
2						
3						

Special experience or knowledge needed by volunteers that would be helpful at this event/activity: There will be a lesson plan and supplies provided. EMGs need to be able to teach 4th-graders about the water cycle using the lesson plan, walk the nature trail, and teach about natural resources via the lesson plan.



For more information, contact your county Extension office. Visit www.aces.edu/directory.

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