



Master Gardener Volunteer Program: Maximizing Teamwork

The purpose of the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Volunteer Program is to create a team of collaborative educators. Extension agents and EMG volunteers work together to address local needs using research-based horticulture activities. This team's programs build and connect communities, increase everyone's access to reliable information, and initiate change to improve quality of life. Explore the many ways you can participate, beginning with building a team.

Starting an Outreach Team

Start small. One-on-one relationships are where this all begins. By getting to know volunteers, the agent learns which ones are passionate about the program's purpose. Start by visiting with an informal group of a few people. Just one or two volunteers can be the foundation for a future team. This informal group might eventually become a formal committee, but a committee is not necessary to launch this effort. Develop a relationship in which the agent and volunteers are always working together.

Planning Outreach Activities

Following are three teamwork examples of an agent and volunteers planning and delivering public outreach. Be creative and consider other activities that fit your abilities and programming needs.

Lunch & Learn Events

Who: A small team led by the agent and two or three invited EMG volunteers

Planning: Meet in August or September to determine logistics.*

- Determine the Lunch & Learn location and secure the calendar dates with the host location. This location might last for several years; however, it is important to confirm its availability every year.
- Discuss with volunteers potential topics and speakers for the following year. Determine who

will contact and confirm presenters. Remember to include other Extension agents and Extension Master Gardener volunteers as potential speakers.

- Determine a budget (e.g., rent for the location, if needed, speaker travel, speaker gift cards, supplies such as cups, ice, water bottles, door prizes, etc.).

*This should be an in-person meeting as this achieves the best outcomes. A personal investment connects the agent with the EMG volunteers, and vice versa, letting everyone know that their opinions matter. Remember, this is a team.

Suggested agent responsibilities:

- Secure speakers (related to personal contacts).
- Secure location for the year or for the month (location might change each month).
- Create flyer for year-long schedule. Use a template from Extension.

Suggested EMG volunteer responsibilities:

- Secure speakers (related to personal contacts).
- Proof flyer.
- Promote Lunch & Learn sessions in the county.
- Contact speakers in advance of the program, confirm AV needs, request biographical information, etc.
- Deliver and set up all AV equipment at Lunch & Learn location.
- Provide hospitality, if desired. As examples, this might only be providing drinks; in others, the group might provide drinks and dessert.
- Provide a gift certificate to the speaker if the speaker travels a great distance or is not a local EMG volunteer or agent. (This is a suggestion).



- Send thank-you notes to speakers afterward
- Maintain database from all past events with a sign-in sheet.
- Keep a folder for each event containing the following:
 - Sign-in sheet
 - QR code for evaluation
 - Speaker/topic suggestion sheet for future
- Purchase or find donations of door prizes for the end of the program.

Educational Workshops for the Public

Who: A small team comprised of the agent and six to eight EMG volunteers. A minimum group size of three people, including the agent, is recommended.

Planning: Possibly start with just one workshop in the first and maybe second year. Gradually grow the offerings to three or four events per year. Hosting one workshop per quarter is a recommended goal.

In October, ask EMG volunteers to pitch workshop ideas they think the general public would attend. The agent then communicates these ideas to the county director to gain input and support for the public events.

Brainstorm topic ideas:

- Current horticultural trends
- Timeless classics
- New or favorite speakers
- Hot topics in horticulture

Brainstorm logistics:

- Speaker names per each topic
- Length of and start/end times of workshop(s)
- Food or no food
- Advertising as “brown bag” lunch
- Beverage and/or dessert options
- Date(s) and location(s)

- Door prizes or not
- Who is creating and editing promotional material (flyer(s), social media posts, etc.)?

Divide tasks with team members:

- Secure the location, date, and time with the host location.
- Communicate with speaker(s) about the presentation topic and duration.
- Create a schedule of the event.
- Coordinate the meal or snack.
- Coordinate the registration process and fee collection. This could be done through the Master Gardener association.
- Provide setup and breakdown of the workshop.
- Promote workshop.
- Gather needed supplies.

Determine distribution of funds:

- Incorporate registration and bookkeeping processes into the workshop planning phase or annual budgetary cycle.
- Be clear from the start and have agreement among all parties involved in the financial management for these workshops:
 - Example 1. If the EMG volunteers or MG association handle registration, they pay all expenses from this revenue and keep the proceeds. As an invested partner in this effort, the agent should also benefit financially. The volunteers or association can share proceeds by purchasing materials the agent needs for other educational projects and programs during the year, such as intern training, graduation, and public workshops.
 - Example 2. If registration is handled by the agent, fees are collected by Extension. The agent then handles all workshop expenses. Similar to example 1, the agent can share proceeds through public projects and programs that involve both the agent and EMG volunteers.

Consider planning your annual budgets with the above points in mind. A relationship in which everyone benefits will build and nurture the team.

Extension Master Gardener Intern Training

Who: A team comprised of agent and one to three EMG volunteers. The agent designates a leader/chair and, when possible, a co-leader/co-chair. In Canvas, the online training platform, the volunteer members of this team are referred to as teaching assistants (TA).

Planning: Meet in late summer to start planning for spring intern training classes. Meet in midspring to start planning for fall intern training classes.

The volunteer training coordinator will email all teaching assistants (TA) before the first day of class and weekly during the semester. The first email will include four items: an onboarding checklist for TA and an EMG intern checklist to help with orientation, a lab guide with suggested weekly activities, and a template for temporary name badges. Subsequent weekly emails will include timely reminders. Face-to-face activities are required for EMG volunteer certification. These might include field trips and lab activities, each determined locally.

Logistics to consider:

- Location. These are usually hosted at an Extension office, but other locations might be considered. Remember to have Extension signage present at weekly classes hosted at locations that are not an Extension office.
- Lab activities team. Decide and define the lab period, what each class looks like, and a schedule of each topic taught. For each lab, decide and coordinate these items:
 - Needed activities and materials
 - Speakers
 - Lab activity or field trip
- Lab day facilitator(s)
 - Give weekly update.
 - Announce all upcoming volunteer opportunities and events for the public and for volunteers.
 - Send weekly emails to the interns. The Extension volunteer training coordinator will copy all facilitators in an email to the agents who lead intern training locally. This will include basic information for each week, such as the topic and book chapter for next week and assignments due soon. Facilitator

will need to add local information about the next class, such as location and directions for any upcoming field trip, items to bring if the lab is a hands-on opportunity, etc.

- Copy the Home Horticulture agent
- First class day facilitator prepares folder containing the following:
 - List of acronyms and related definitions
 - Project flyer or volunteer opportunities list
 - Mentor info sheet (if applicable)
 - Soil test and form
 - Association projects and workday locations and times
 - Association board members and their monthly meeting location, date, and times
 - This facilitator might recruit other certified EMG volunteers to assist.
- Mentor program coordinators (if applicable). These are certified EMG volunteers in charge of matching mentors with interns.
 - Mentors communicate regularly with intern.
 - Mentors are invited to all field trips
 - Mentors come to lunch one week of class to meet and socialize with their intern
 - Mentors assist with assigned Helpline days (depending on the county).
- Meal or snack coordinator (if applicable)
 - Create a schedule of the dates when meals or snacks will be needed.
 - Solicit members at the association meeting to sign up on the schedule (idea to consider)
 - Coordinate with previous EMG intern classes to provide a meal/snack for specific weeks (idea to consider). This might pull in people who haven't participated in a while. Use or engage the bonds formed from previous class groups to encourage participation.
 - Include interns as part of the schedule (idea to consider). Field trips or other days might be designated with a sack lunch, or interns might have a potluck meal once or twice.
- Local or regional graduation coordinator (if applicable)



Mallory Kelley and **Bethany O'Rear**, both *Extension Agents*, Home Horticulture, Auburn University

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

Trade and brand names used in this publication are given for information purposes only. No guarantee, endorsement, or discrimination among comparable products is intended or implied by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact one of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's HR departments which are located on Auburn University's campus at (334) 844-1326 and Alabama A&M University's campus at (256) 372-5710. You may also contact the USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

New September 2026, ANR-3300

© 2026 by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. All rights reserved.

aces.edu