



## Measuring the Impact of a Master Gardener Training Program

### STUDY TEAM

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### PROGRAM

Most Pennsylvania counties have a Master Gardener volunteer program, an effective link between Cooperative Extension and the home gardening community. Cooperative Extension has an opportunity to demonstrate our impact on these volunteers.

Master Gardeners are trained by Cooperative Extension on horticultural topics. They then volunteer to educate home gardeners and community groups on a wide range of gardening topics, using research based information.

Once Master Gardeners complete their training, they are required to give 50 hours of volunteer time their first year, and 20 hours in subsequent years to remain active in a Pennsylvania program.

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Coordinators of county-based Master Gardener programs will integrate new volunteers into their existing program and motivate them to use and to effectively teach good horticultural practices to others in their communities. Much time and effort is invested in new volunteers, first by offering training classes on horticultural topics and communications. Then, Master Gardener coordinators provide continued guidance to keep volunteers involved and active in the program.

Specifically, as a result of this Extension training, Master Gardener volunteers will:

1. Increase their knowledge of the topics covered in the classes. [KNOWLEDGE]
2. Gain confidence in their ability to answer questions on the topics. [ATTITUDE]
3. Plan to use, and then actually adopt recommended gardening practices in their *own* gardens. [INTENTION AND BEHAVIOR]
4. Teach recommended gardening practices to other home gardeners. [BEHAVIOR]
5. Improve their skills for working with others. [SKILLS]
6. Understand the requirements of completing and maintaining their Master Gardener status. [KNOWLEDGE]
7. Believe they can find appropriate and meaningful volunteer activities. [ATTITUDE]
8. Believe they are a valuable member of the program. [ATTITUDE]

## **EVALUATION STRATEGY**

A strategy of three evaluations was developed by the horticulture agent and program evaluation specialist to measure the objectives of the training in order to document impact on individual Master Gardeners during their involvement in the program.

### **#1 Master Gardener Training Class Evaluation (pre-post).**

The first evaluation measures objectives 1 (gain in knowledge) and 2 (confidence before and after). This evaluation, formatted as an attractive tri-fold brochure, is given to the trainees at the beginning of the first training class. The trainees are reminded to fill it out at the end of each class. Having this brochure to use after each class allows the Coordinator to gather data when the class experience is fresh in the memory of the trainees. [Click here](#) for evaluation #1 which can be printed as a PDF file for your use. **Use legal size paper for this evaluation.** Although the survey can be printed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper, it is more readable to print on legal size paper. Before printing on legal size paper, change the printing options to *legal size*, and select *landscape* in the print screen on your computer.

An example of how this particular evaluation garnered useful short term pre-post impact data from the multi-topic program taught by many instructors in a 16-county area is detailed in a *Journal of Extension* article. The article also demonstrates how to summarize the data in different ways, either for the purpose of program improvement or simply to demonstrate accountability. See <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005december/a4.php>

### **#2 Master Gardener Post Class Evaluation.**

The second evaluation measures objectives 3, 6, 7 and 8. This evaluation is formatted as one written sheet, and is only given at the end of the last training class. [Click here](#) for evaluation #2 which can be printed as a PDF file for your use.

### **#3 Master Gardener Evaluation (follow-up survey).**

The third evaluation, sent by mail to the Master Gardeners one year or more after the training, measures the long-term impact of the training *and* their involvement in the program combined. Specifically it measures objectives 3, 4 and 5 over time. [Click here](#) for both evaluation #3 and a letter of request to participate in the evaluation. Both can be printed off as a PDF file for your use.

All three evaluations contributed to the improvement of Master Gardener training classes, provided evidence of the program's impact to county commissioners and university administrators, and provided data for the agent's dossier. Additionally, the second evaluation provided information about the extent to which new volunteers understood the requirements of remaining active in the program which in turn lead to restructuring the newsletter.

The evaluations, and the letter associated with the third one, have been approved by the Penn State Office of Research Protections for the program year 2002/2003. If you plan to publish or present the results at a conference, be sure to use the informed consent form which you can obtain from Emelie Swackhamer, ([exs33@psu.edu](mailto:exs33@psu.edu)).

**For further information about the evaluation, please contact Emelie Swackhamer ([exs33@psu.edu](mailto:exs33@psu.edu)). This Web site is copyrighted by the Pennsylvania State University. The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.**