



How to Become a Master Gardener in Ontario

What Is A Master Gardener?

Being a Master Gardener is about:

- becoming a **VOLUNTEER** with the Master Gardeners of Ontario to help educate the public about gardening.
- learning to ask the right questions and knowing how to look up information from appropriate resources. It's not about knowing everything about gardening.
- helping deliver meaningful community programs to improve the well-being of individuals and communities, to protect natural flora & fauna; and to help gardeners grow fresh fruits and vegetables for their family.
- working together with Master Gardeners and other volunteers to make a difference in the places we live, learn, and work.

How can I become a Master Gardener (MG)?

All Master Gardeners in Ontario must belong to a local MG group, so your first step would be to join one. You don't need to take courses before joining. There are about [30 Master Gardener groups](#) across the province and many groups have information about joining directly on their website. You can contact a local group directly or fill out the online form and we will forward your request to the group coordinator who is nearest to your location. Once you make contact, arrange to attend a meeting and meet members¹. Some groups accept members year round, while other groups have a specified time of year when members can join.

If you don't live close to an established group, [Cochrane District Master Gardeners](#) offer a "distance" membership. They are the only Master Gardener group that is fully virtual with members from all over Ontario. While they meet virtually, they work in their own communities, so distance is not an issue.

¹ During the Covid-19 pandemic, in person meetings & activities may be suspended.

I attended a meeting and now I want to join. What happens next?

New members usually write a short eligibility or knowledge test². You may be asked to answer questions about your gardening experiences and how you'll contribute to the group. Finally, you'll be asked to complete a [Master Gardener Agreement](#) to ensure that you are aware of member requirements. You will then be a **Master Gardener in Training (MGiT)** and start to take part in group activities.

What does a Master Gardener in Training do?

- You'll start to participate in your group's activities, usually with another MG. Your expertise in gardening will increase dramatically as you listen to questions from the public and try to answer them.
- Some groups offer a mentorship program and pair each MGiT with a Master Gardener to support them. Many lasting relationships develop from this initial pairing.
- All Master Gardeners and MGiTs are expected to complete 30 hours of volunteer work a year. (see examples below)
- MGiTs must successfully complete an education component to become certified as Master Gardeners.

How do I complete the educational component?

There are three ways of completing the educational component and you can take up to 3 years to complete it. *All costs are the responsibility of the MGiT, but some groups offer financial support. Members have reported satisfaction with all three options.*

1) University of Guelph Courses

This program has 3 courses (see website for prices):

- [Plant Identification](#)
- [Soils and Plant Growth](#)
- [Integrated Pest Management](#)

2) [Dalhousie Master Gardener Training program](#)

This program has 4 courses (see website for prices):

- The Science of Gardening
- Maintaining the Garden
- Plant ID
- The Art of Gardening

² The test is currently being revised. It is now offered using Survey Monkey so it can be taken remotely.

3) Certification Exam

- a) You may also undertake a program of self-directed study leading to a Certification Exam. The group coordinator can provide a list of the knowledge required for MGITs choosing to follow this path.
- b) The Certification Exam is an open-book exam that is to be completed in 2 ½ hours under supervision of an invigilator chosen by your local coordinator. A pass is 70% or more and has an excellent success rate. The cost of the exam is \$100.

When do I become a Certified Master Gardener?

You need the following to become a certified Master Gardener:

- Successful completion of the educational component, e.g. designated online courses or the Certification Exam.
- Completion of the 30 yearly volunteer hours for 2 years
- Complete the application to become a **Master Gardener** (MG)

Once you receive your certification as a Master Gardener you will be expected to keep up to date about gardening issues on a yearly basis. There are many opportunities to do this such as Technical Updates (one day conferences), self-study and attending gardening presentations.

What does a Master Gardener do?

Master Gardeners are expected to provide current and up-to-date advice and information to the gardening public. Each member in the group contributes in their own way, but here is a partial list of things groups do:

Working directly with the public:

- Answer garden questions with science-based, sustainable information at various public events, e.g. garden tours, festivals, farmer's markets, Canada Blooms
- Advise school garden programs to promote science awareness in children
- Help children plant seeds at a public event
- Facilitate gardening projects at schools, libraries, and other public community sites
- Prepare & present garden talks and workshops for gardeners at local venues, e.g. garden centers, public libraries, horticultural societies
- Demonstrate how gardens can protect and support pollinators and other wildlife

Education & Promotion

- Promote sustainable gardening practices, e.g. soil health, Integrated Pest Management, and the ecological role of native plants

- Educate the public about the negative impacts of non-native invasive plants
- Respond to gardening questions on social media platforms

Learning & Enjoyment

- Learn from other Master Gardeners who share your passion for gardening
- Attend MG organized Technical Updates (i.e. garden conferences) to fulfill the yearly educational component
- Participate in the Summer Workshops organized exclusively for MGs at the Niagara School of Horticulture
- Improve communication skills by answering garden questions, writing articles, organizing workshops or presenting to the public
- Encourage gardening activities to maintain a sense of well-being
- Tour unique gardens or horticultural-related businesses
- AND OF COURSE, have fun with fellow Master Gardeners; sharing stories including successes and failures in your garden!

What are the benefits of being a Master Gardener (MG)?

Here are just a few:

- Increase your horticultural knowledge
- Provide a valuable service to your community
- Develop personal leadership skills
- Improve communication skills in a supportive environment
- Receive recognition as a Master Gardener
- Meet and work with enthusiastic people who are excited to share their horticultural knowledge

We travel or live out of the country during the winter. Can I still be a Master Gardener?

If you have Internet access, you can:

- Give gardening advice to the public on the [Master Gardener of Ontario Facebook forum](#)
- Research and answer questions for your group via social media or email
- Research and write gardening articles/blogs
- Use online information/tools to upgrade your horticultural skills and complete your yearly educational requirements

All these activities will count towards your required 30 hours of volunteer work.

What computer skills will I need?

- Notices for events and meetings usually go out by email. You should have an email account and be able to “reply to” and “send” email.
- Information is posted on the [MGOI](#) and group websites, so you should be able to search the Internet and navigate in general.
- Files are usually sent out in PDF form to make it easier for all users to read and open, so you will need a copy of Acrobat Reader which is free to download.
- Some groups meet virtually, so you may need to learn how to use Zoom or other virtual meeting platforms.

If your computer skills need updating, a member of your group will likely be able to support you.

What if I have more questions?

Please feel to email info@mgoi.ca or a local group. Many groups have links on their websites with information about how to apply and become a Master Gardener. The [Groups and Advice](#) tab has contact information for all our MGOI groups.

Useful Links

- [Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc](#)
- [MGOI Twitter](#)
- [Master Gardener of Ontario Facebook forum](#)
- [Extension Master Gardeners](#) (U.S.)

Acronyms and definitions

MGOI	Master Gardeners of Ontario Inc. – the provincial organization consisting of a Board of Directors & local MG groups
MGiT	Master Gardener in Training – a member working towards certification as a Master Gardener
MG	Master Gardener – a member of a Master Gardener of Ontario group who has fulfilled the requirements for certification (i.e. 2 years as a MGiT, 30 hours of volunteer work per year, ongoing education requirements)
Coordinator	Head of a local MG group (similar to a club president)
Technical Update (TU)	A one-day conference organized by a local MG group. Master Gardeners are expected to provide current and up-to-date advice and information to the gardening public. To achieve this, Master Gardeners must engage in continuing education activities, such as Technical Updates.
CEU	Continuing Education Credit- Master Gardeners value life-long learning and are committed to earning 6 CEUs per year. A Technical Update usually is equal to 6 CEUs. Attending a one hour presentation on horticulture is usually equal to 1 CEU. A description of how to complete CEUs is provided to members, as well as links, videos and courses to keep up to date.
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