



## Volunteer Onboarding Policy

Individuals who complete the MSU Extension Foundations of Gardening (FOG) course may wish to apply to the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program® (MSU EMG Program). The MSU EMG Program is a volunteer program where individuals work closely with the MSU Extension Consumer Horticulture Team to educate others about sustainable gardening practices, while earning hours to maintain MSU EMG certification each year.

To begin the volunteer application process, MSU Extension FOG graduates follow the instructions outlined in the document “Steps to Apply to the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program®”, which is made available to FOG enrollees approximately halfway through the course. Here, we review the final step in that process: Volunteer Onboarding.

MSU EMG Onboarding consists of a short series of online and in-person orientation sessions conducted by local MSU Extension Consumer Horticulture Team members. These sessions are designed to help new volunteers understand MSU EMG Program policies and procedures - as well as connect with fellow MSU EMGs and local projects. Onboarding includes presentations, practice sessions, social activities, and often short field trips to local project sites.

### Key Points:

- All steps of the MSU Extension Volunteer Selection Process (VSP) must be completed—including final acceptance as an MSU Extension volunteer—before attending an onboarding session. Acceptance into the MSU Extension Volunteer Program is not guaranteed.
- FOG graduates should not initiate the VSP until after they contact their local MSU EMG representative, whose contact information is provided midway through the FOG course. It is the FOG graduate's responsibility to notify the local MSU EMG staff to express interest in applying to the volunteer part of the program.
- Onboarding does not take place until after a participant receives a FOG certificate. Since onboarding sessions vary in time and location, local MSU Extension staff may not contact interested participants immediately after they contact staff to express interest. However, they will hold their name and contact them when the local onboarding session is ready for registration.
- Onboarding session dates and locations vary by region and are not continuously held throughout the year. Most locations offer 1-2 onboarding sessions per year and typically cap the total number of registrants to ensure the best learning experience.
- Once registration for a local onboarding opens, applicants should reserve a spot in an upcoming onboarding via a registration link provided by MSU Extension staff. VSP does not need to be complete to reserve a spot; however, a reservation is void if the VSP is not completed by a set deadline before the



first onboarding session. Areas with high demand may also limit the time a reservation is valid (i.e. two weeks) to provide priority to those who complete their VSP in a timely manner.

- VSP takes time due to the various steps in the process (application, background checks, references, interviews, video training) - applicants with limited time to complete the process may need to wait for a future onboarding session. To increase the likelihood of attending the next available session in your area, begin your VSP application soon after completing FOG.
- Those who start VSP but miss an onboarding session do not have to restart VSP and can continue the application as it stands to prepare for the next available onboarding session.
- Despite the limitations on the number of onboarding sessions offered each year, FOG certificates do remain valid for up to three years from the date of issuance, allowing time to register for a future session.
- Applicants should register for an onboarding session in the area where they plan to volunteer. In some cases, participants may attend an onboarding session in a neighboring area if space is available. This must be arranged through MSU Extension staff and cannot be coordinated independently.
- Onboarding is partially online and partially in-person. Attendance at all sessions is mandatory to complete onboarding. Trainees are not certified until they complete 40 hours of volunteer service.
- Regardless of when onboarding takes place (spring, summer, or fall; year two, etc), all new MSU EMG Trainees have the same deadline to complete their 40 hours of volunteer service: November 30 of the following year.

For example:

- If you receive your FOG certificate in May 2025 and onboard in August 2025, your 40 hours are due by November 30, 2026.
- If you receive your FOG certificate in May 2025 and onboard in May 2026, your 40 hours are due by November 30, 2027.



For more information on the MSU Extension Master Gardener Program, visit our website at: [https://www.canr.msu.edu/master\\_gardener\\_volunteer\\_program/](https://www.canr.msu.edu/master_gardener_volunteer_program/)

**To contact an expert in your area, visit [extension.msu.edu/experts](https://extension.msu.edu/experts) or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)**

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