

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Master Gardener (MG) volunteers are nonpaid, education partners with Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). The VCE MG program has existed for over twenty years, during which time the role of MGs has evolved from being a “volunteer with gardening answers” (Relf and McDaniel, 1994) to that of educational program support staff. Nationally, MGs have become leaders who deliver educational programs to their local communities, such as work with juvenile offenders (Finch, 1995); school garden projects, weather watching, and horticulture hotline management (Meyer, 1997a); and, horticultural therapy (Flagler, 1992).

VCE MGs assist Extension agents in meeting VCE’s educational goals and mission. They follow the Sustainable Landscape Management educational program objectives within the VCE Plan of Work (Relf, 1998) that states

The landscaping of residential, commercial and public grounds in Virginia plays an important role in the addressing VCE's goals expressed in A Plan to Serve Virginia Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resources. Economic growth is directly influenced by landscaping. Landscape horticulture is the fastest growing segment of agriculture in the U.S. and landscape/nursery crops are second only to tobacco in farmgate value of Virginia's agricultural crops. Landscaping plays an important role in such economic issues as tourism, residential and commercial development, and worker productivity. For example, research has shown that a well-maintained landscape adds seven to 14% to the value of a residential property; the single, largest, contributing factor to the selection of a retirement community is the quality of the grounds; and, that interior plantscapes can provide a seven to one return on the annual dollar investment at tourist sites. Proper education of users of horticultural crops and services is a key in expanding the market and benefits.

The youth of Virginia benefit from horticulture as an interdisciplinary teaching tool that provides them with a sense of accomplishment and responsibility while teaching them science, math and writing. A survey of Virginia teachers found that 78% currently use or would like to use horticulture as a tool to increase hands-on-learning across the curriculum and many indicate a need for additional help such as that provided by 4-H and Master Gardeners.

MG volunteers perceive their work as having value to themselves and their local communities (Relf and McDaniel, 1994). “As we continue to realize the environmental impact and value of horticulture on our daily well-being, MGs will become increasingly more valuable as environmental stewards and teachers of horticulture.” (Meyer, 1997a)

To provide the necessary assistance to VCE for educational program implementation, the MG volunteer programs must be managed appropriately so that volunteers are prepared for their jobs, complete their volunteer jobs, and remain an active part of the local program. Prior to 1996, management of VCE MGs was similar to that reported by other states (Bradshaw, 1997). Local agents trained and managed MG volunteers and supervised the projects in which MGs volunteered.

Budgetary actions in 1996 transitioned management from state-funded agents to a system of local MG coordinators. This transition is further discussed in chapter 2, “The Transition of Virginia Master Gardener Program Management.” Evaluation of new MG program management resources is presented in chapter 3, “Assessing the VCE Master Gardener Coordinator Manual: A Volunteer Management Reference.” Finally, the resulting changes in local MG management are discussed in chapter 4, “Changing Management Practices of VCE Master Gardener Volunteer Program Coordinators.” These chapters have been prepared in format for submission for publication in HortTechnology, the primary outreach publication of the American Society for Horticultural Science.