



Calculating Service Hours

(Updated by Mallory Kelley for 2018)

Volunteering as a Master Gardener, you represent the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. As a representative, your goal is to help people improve their quality of life by sharing research-based, non-biased information. This might be done through Extension programs or through your own creative endeavors.

All volunteer service must be accepted or approved by the Local Master Gardener Coordinator (Mallory Kelley). You must enter your volunteer hours into the on-line service report website: (<https://ssl.acesag.auburn.edu/mgmanager/login/>).

Four guidelines for validating volunteer work:

Will it benefit the community?

Is it associated with a non-commercial group?

Is it related to gardening, the environment, or an Extension program?

Are you helping people learn?

If you can answer yes to these four questions, then the activity meets the mission of the Master Gardener program and you should count it in your annual service report for volunteer hours.

Hours should be done through a variety of activities. You more effectively represent the program and its mission when considering a variety of audiences to interact with during activities. Examples: All documented hours relate to business meetings, or all hours relate to writing a single article in the quarterly newsletter, or all hours are in an annual bed at the botanic garden – these are one sided and perhaps miss the mission of the MG Program.

Following are examples for activities that count toward Master Gardener service hours.

Intern Master Gardener Volunteers

- Any activity accepted or approved by the Local MG Coordinator (Mallory Kelley) counts as volunteer hours. The Extension Agent may request some of the Intern's time be done on a specific project or type of volunteer service. Interns are required to participate in and report a minimum of 50 volunteer hours to accomplish certification (10 of these 50 hours are to be done working the Master Gardener Helpline).
- Attendance at extramural educational meetings counts as volunteer hours.
- Travel time to and from a volunteer activity or to and from an educational workshop counts toward volunteer hours.
- Participation in Alabama Master Gardener association meetings (local and/or state) counts as volunteer hours.

- Drive time to monthly MG association meetings ONLY counts when you are an intern, then once certified, you ONLY count drive time if you are involved with a committee giving a report or have a specific responsibility at the meeting.

Certified Master Gardener Volunteers

- Any activity accepted or approved by the Local MG Coordinator (Mallory Kelley) counts as volunteer hours. To encourage Certified MG's to stay active in the program, we request that they report half the volunteer hours required of Intern MG's. This is a **minimum of 25 volunteer or CEU hours**.
- If you do not achieve these hours each year your name will be removed from the MG Association roster even if dues are paid.
- Time spent in Master Gardener Association business meetings counts as volunteer hours and the time spent listening to the speaker counts as CEU hours.
- Drive time to monthly AMG association meetings ONLY counts when you are involved with a committee giving a report or have a specific responsibility at the meeting.
- Travel time to and from other educational or volunteer activities counts as volunteer time.
- Time spent listening to an educational speaker or topic should be counted as CEUs. When entering your CEU hours into the service report please supply a description of the event such as: the location, speaker, topic presented.
- Labor in your garden or someone else's **in preparation for a program** is volunteer time.
- Time spent working the MG Association Plant Sale and time spent preparing and planting the plants for the sale is counted as volunteer time.
- Time spent preparing food counts as volunteer time, but **only** for MG association meetings, MG programs or workshops and MG intern classes.
- For Members of the Herb Society, a Garden Club, Tree Society, Beekeepers Association, Bluebird Trail, etc..... (Any clubs or societies that relate to the MG Program and has to do with gardening, plants, trees, water quality, insects, birds)- For those club meetings you can only count the educational program time as a CEU, NO volunteer time for the business meetings. Time spent working with these clubs or associations to provide **education to the public** can counts as volunteer time.

Counting Contacts

Contacts are ONLY counted if you are the instructor or speaker for an educational program.

An example where contacts CAN BE counted: If you are working at a public educational garden and a group of school kids walk into the garden and you personally **have a conversation with the group in the garden about the flowers, herbs, vegetables, etc. (not just that they walked in and looked around)**.

For contact numbers you count everyone that was present at the educational program you were teaching or each individual child that you spoke with in the garden.

At a MG Association monthly meeting, ONLY the educational speaker for the meeting can count each person present as a contact.

Using Volunteer Hours for Awards

To further give credit for volunteer time dedication, CEU hours and Volunteer hours should be combined for a gross total of volunteer time for the year (Example: In 2007, Susie accomplished 20 CEU's and 180 volunteer hours for a total of 200 volunteer hours).

Hours will no longer be accepted in paper form and should be entered into the online service report so that the "Stars" Awards Chair has access to individual's total hours for awards to be given.

Also, these hours must be entered online in the service report so that totals can be used by Kerry Smith in the Annual Federal Report. (Also, it looks great for your association).

Guidelines from IRS

Mileage: All mileage counts for any and all activities if using these numbers in an itemized IRS tax deduction. Mileage expense for volunteers, as defined by the IRS, is deducted as a direct expense OR at the mileage rate. Mileage is a deduction for the vehicle on the owner's itemized tax form (see IRS publication 526)

Defining CEU's

These guidelines will help you decide if an activity should count toward CEU's:

- Does the activity have a specific learning objective?
- Is the speaker at the activity a recognized authority in the subject presented?

If you answer yes to these two questions, then count the activity toward your CEU's. If you are still in doubt, ask an Extension agent.

You should also count CEU time spent researching a subject in preparation for teaching/presenting that subject to an audience.

Count CEU's by the number of hours present in the activity (example: you attend the Fall AMGA CEU workshop; there are three speakers each giving a one-hour program; this equals 3 hours of CEU's).