

# Master Gardener Volunteers: Part of Maine's food chain

SJ [sunjournal.com/2019/12/12/master-gardener-volunteers-part-of-maines-food-chain/](http://sunjournal.com/2019/12/12/master-gardener-volunteers-part-of-maines-food-chain/)

By Nicole Carter Advertiser Democrat

December 12,  
2019



A community garden project in Naples tended by Master Gardener Volunteers. *Submitted image*

PARIS — Oxford Hills community gardening projects are about to receive a long-awaited life line. Starting on January 27, University of Maine Cooperative Extension Oxford County will hold a 17-week training program for Master Gardener Volunteers.

“The mission for the Master Gardener Volunteer Certification program is educating home gardeners,” said Rebecca Long, Agriculture and Food Systems professional at Oxford county’s Cooperative Extension office. “We bring research-based information to participants, and they in turn volunteer their knowledge in their community.”

The training will take place once a week at Cooperative Extension’s Paris office from January to June, led by experts in their respective fields.

“Each session will have a specific focus,” said Long. “Our priority is food production, but it includes other aspects of sustainable landscaping as well.”

Soil health, composting and fruit and vegetable production dominate the first half of the program. Native plants, horticulture and managing insects and disease will also be covered. To earn certification, participants must complete 60 hours of class-based and hands-on training, followed by 40 hours of volunteer work in the community within one year. Volunteers must then log a minimum of 20 hours of service yearly to maintain their certification.

“People choose how they wish to volunteer their time,” said Long. “They can work at community gardens or with students on public school garden projects. They can also volunteer at agricultural fairs, developing educational displays or provide public outreach at the events.”

Qualifying events include the Oxford, Waterford and Fryeburg Fairs and the Foothills Food Festival, which takes place in Norway each August.

Pat Griffin of Otisfield has been a Master Gardener Volunteer since 1998.

“I became an empty nester, and it was a way for me to validate years of studying botanicals, wild medicinal plants and edibles,” said Griffin. “Over the years I have learned way more from others than they learned from me, like immigrants who focused on urban container gardens and raised bed gardens. I’ve done gardening for the blind, helped build a children’s garden and worked on gardens for elders. And a lot of what I’ve learned I implement around my own home.”



Master Gardener Volunteer-in-training Terry Korish learns about fruit trees from orchardist John Bozak at a University of Maine Cooperative Extension York county workshop. *Supplied image*



A raised garden vegetable bed, built and grown by a Maine Master Gardener Volunteer. *Supplied image*

One memorable project Griffin worked on was a tutorial garden at Camp Sunshine in Naples, teaching food pantry recipients how to become more food secure by growing their own food. She also volunteers at the Seeds of Peace garden in Otisfield, although that work doesn't count towards maintaining her certification.

"I've gone rogue with the Seeds of Peace gardens," laughed Griffin. "I don't submit my volunteer hours because it's in Otisfield (Oxford county) and I'm on the books with Cumberland county's Cooperative Extension office. At my age, I feel a bit of a rebel to have a project off the record."

Long looks forward to reestablishing the volunteer program for Oxford county, which has not held Master Gardener training for several years.

"It will provide a way for community members to find research-based answers to sustainable gardening and landscaping," she said. "Master gardeners work on food production and programs like the Maine AgrAbility project, which provides assistance to farm, fishing or forestry workers whose lifestyle and business have been impacted by a disability, to Garden Angels, which provides gardening support to the elderly, and the Maine Harvest for Hunger program.

"There are so many needs in Oxford county and now that volunteer training is restarting we can help address food insecurity and sustainable production at the community level."

Having a 20 year tenure as a Master Gardener Volunteer has raised Griffin's awareness of how it helps out those in need, and her profile in the community.



Pat Griffin of Otisfield became a Master Gardener Volunteer in 1998. It has helped her create beautiful home gardens.

“Being a Master Gardener, I get asked to speak to local groups,” she said. “It’s one of the most valuable things I have ever participated in and I get to spend time with some of the most special and interesting people I’ve known.

“It has led to my own gardens being explored by others. I try to hold a garden luncheon at my house every summer to share ideas and learn new things to try. My gardens are based on wildlife habitat, keeping things simple and natural—what I call anti-gardening.”

University of Maine Cooperative Extension Oxford County is accepting applications for Master Gardener Volunteer Certification training until December 20. The cost is \$220, with limited financial assistance available for those who qualify. Classes will be held Mondays at 1 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. from January 27 – June 8 (excluding holidays), at UMaine Extension Oxford County office (for most classes), 9 Olson Road, South Paris, Maine.

“I highly recommend taking the courses,” said Griffin. “It’s helping your community, and yourself, in a very significant way.”

Comments are not available on this story.