

Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

Master Gardener Program

The mission of the Phipps Master Gardener (MG) Program is to empower highly motivated and trained volunteers to share their knowledge and expertise to assist Phipps in carrying out its mission and build a stronger, more knowledgeable horticultural community, while providing a rewarding and engaging experience in an environment that values and appreciates their contributions.

Master Gardeners volunteer to support Phipps Conservatory in a variety of ways, detailed below:

Support Phipps Education and Outreach Programming

- Staff “Dr. Phipps” phone, email, and tabling efforts
- Volunteer in support of classes, workshops and conferences
- Give public presentations on topics important to Phipps’ mission
- Help plan and support educational fundraisers

Maintain landscapes at Garden Center and Phipps Conservatory to create a high quality outdoor classroom

Support Homegrown’s community outreach efforts

- Help maintain the community garden at the Homewood YMCA and other off-site gardens
- Construct raised bed garden bed sides, fences and other outreach materials
- Volunteer at special events

Volunteer across Phipps to support our organizational mission

- Fill on-going or one-time volunteer roles for Phipps, across the organization, to help fulfill Phipps’ mission.

Phipps Mission: *To inspire and educate all with the beauty and importance of plants; to advance sustainability and promote human and environmental well-being through action and research; and to celebrate its historic glasshouse.*

Application Process

1) Submit an application: The attached application is our first chance to get to know you, so please fill the application out thoughtfully. **Applications are due October 1, 2026.** You can submit an application by mail or e-mail. *Enrollment in Phipps Master Gardener program is limited, and not every qualified applicant will be able to enroll in the Master Gardener program.*

Mail: Phipps Garden Center, 1059 Shady Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15232, Attention: Master Gardener Program

E-mail: edu@phipps.conservatory.org

2) Program Interview: If your application is selected, you will be contacted in mid-October to interview for the program. We have in-person interview slots reserved from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. on Thursdays, November 12 and 19; December 10 and 17; and January 7

3) Class Payment: If accepted into the program, you can secure your place by paying \$300, which includes the Master Gardener manual (\$75 value).

4) Submit Proof of Clearances: All Phipps volunteers are required to obtain Act 33: Child Abuse Clearance and Act 34: Criminal Record Check. Clearances may be submitted online or by hardcopy. When submitting as a “volunteer”, there is no fee. Generally, it takes 2-4 weeks to receive results.

5) Attend Orientation: This is a mandatory meeting to review expectations for the program, meet fellow classmates, and receive class materials. **The 2027 orientation date is from 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Feb. 25 (snow date: March 4), at Phipps Garden Center in Mellon Park (1059 Shady Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15232).**

Course Information

The Master Gardener class is divided up into two semesters – Spring and Fall – with classes meeting weekly. During the Summer, trainees should volunteer to make sure they accrue enough volunteer hours (36) to graduate.

Class times and days vary each year. **In 2027, the class will meet on Thursdays, from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.** A complete schedule will be included as part of orientation, but the semesters will adhere to this general outline:

Spring Semester: Thursdays, March 11 – May 13

Fall Semester: Thursdays, September 9 – October 28

Location: The majority of classes take place at Phipps Garden Center in Mellon Park, which is the center for Phipps' adult education programming. Some classes will take place at the Conservatory and off-site locations.

The core of the MG class is lecture based instruction from an array of knowledgeable instructors on the topics outlined below. Students are provided with a textbook for pre-class preparation, and to keep as a reference. Hands-on and experiential learning are also utilized throughout the class. Students will also be given Phipps-specific training, enabling them to graduate from the MG class uniquely prepared to support Phipps' many educational and horticultural efforts.

Course topics include:

- | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| • Soil Ecology | • Indoor Plants | • Herbs | • Native Plants |
| • Botany | • Perennial Fruit | • Pruning | • Landscape Design |
| • Ornamental Plants | • Vegetables | • Plant Propagation | |

Program Structure

Once admitted into the program, there are four expectations you must meet in order to qualify as a Phipps Master Gardener:

1) Class attendance: Due to the self-contained structure of each class, attendance at all sessions is important. If a session must be missed, it can be made up the next year at no additional cost. Students may miss two classes and still receive Master Gardener certification.

2) Tests: Students are tested at the end of each semester. The tests will cover content in the manual, in-class lectures and workshops. Students must attain an overall average score of 75% or higher in order to pass.

3) Independent Project: Students will choose a topic for an independent project that they will work on over the duration of the class and present on to fellow students and guests at the end of the training.

4) Volunteering: Master Gardeners **must** volunteer a *minimum* of **36 hours** of approved activities over the course of the calendar year in order to qualify to be a Master Gardener for one year. At least half those hours (18) must be with Phipps. The other half can be volunteered through other horticulturally appropriate activities in the community.

Note: Continuing Education and Volunteerism: After the first year, 12 hours of continuing education and at least 36 hours of volunteerism are required each year to maintain your Master Gardener certification.

We look forward to receiving your application. If you have any questions, please contact us:

Phone: 412/441-4442 x3925 **E-mail:** edu@phipps.conservatory.org

MASTER GARDENER APPLICATION

I wish to become a Master Gardener with Phipps and would like to be accepted into the training program beginning in March. I understand that if accepted into the program, I will attend the required classes and agree to donate a minimum of 36 hours of public service in the Master Gardener Program within a year. At the end of a year, if the above requirements are met, I will receive a Master Gardener Certificate.

Each year thereafter, I can renew my certification by completing at least 36 hours of public service in the program and 12 hours of update training.

NAME		DATE	
ADDRESS			
CITY	STATE	ZIP	
HOME PHONE		CELL PHONE	
EMAIL		DATE OF BIRTH	

How did you hear about the Master Gardener program?

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Are you a member of Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens? ☐ yes ☐ no

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

ORGANIZATION/COMPANY	DATE(S)
Please give a brief description of your position and responsibilities.	

ORGANIZATION/COMPANY	DATE(S)
Please give a brief description of your position and responsibilities.	

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

ORGANIZATION/COMPANY	DATE(S)
Please give a brief description of your position and responsibilities.	

ORGANIZATION/COMPANY	DATE(S)
Please give a brief description of your position and responsibilities.	

EDUCATION

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	DEGREE/FIELD OF STUDY
HIGH SCHOOL	
TECHNICAL COLLEGE	
OTHER	

Please briefly describe your gardening background, including how long you’ve gardened, and any relevant classes or trainings:

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Do you have any other special skills or certifications that may be applicable to your volunteer work at Phipps (e.g. first aid, sign language, woodworking)?

Please check the activities below that you enjoy and have experience doing.

	Vegetable Gardening		Canning/Preservation		Culinary Arts/Cooking
	Herb Gardening		Landscape/Garden Design		Giving Presentations
	Perennial Garden Maintenance		Floral Arranging		Working with Children
	Pruning		Indoor Plant Care		Other:
	Composting		Native Plantings/Local Ecology		Other:

How do you prefer to volunteer? ___ working alone ___ working as part of a team

Master Gardeners are asked to make a minimum commitment of 36 hours of volunteers per year. Are you willing and able to work a three-hour shift, one to two times a month?
___yes ___no

What is your general availability to volunteer? Please check all that apply.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Mornings (usually 10 a.m.– 1 p.m.)							
Afternoons (usually 1 – 4 p.m.)							
Evenings (occasionally)							

If you are available for a limited time, please note the date range you will be available.

How do you plan to collect the 36 volunteer hours needed for certification?

- ___ All through Phipps
- ___ A combination of Phipps and community volunteering

(Continued)

What would you bring to the volunteer program at Phipps?

What would a successful volunteer experience at Phipps feel like for you?

Please list one personal and one professional reference.

Name	Relationship	Phone
Name	Relationship	Phone