

Issue #4: Requirements for Interns – Volunteer hours

In the last couple of blogs, we learned that the requirements of the Master Gardener Volunteer program during the intern year were to:

- Complete the CORE curriculum
- Complete 15 hours of continuing education
- **Complete 50 hours of volunteer work**
- Complete responses of research to 15 questions from the public

For this blog, we will go in depth on the volunteer requirement. There are 50 hours of volunteering required for the intern year. It does decrease to 25 hours in subsequent years to maintain master gardener active status. For the intern year, you are not expected to lead any volunteer activity on your own (unless you choose to do so). Interns are paired with one or two master gardeners for each activity which is a very supportive way to learn. I am grateful for all the expertise freely shared from the master gardeners I have worked with this year not to mention the fun of meeting and getting to know new people.

Since the intern year is a year of learning about the various opportunities, it is encouraged to try different activities. My first volunteering activity was teaching 2nd graders a pollinator class. It was offered in many different elementary schools and I ended up helping with or teaching the module at Marcy School and Kenny School in Minneapolis and elementary schools in Eden Prairie and Minnetonka. The lesson was written by youth educators so it was very well done. For support materials, there was a video, a script and slides as well as laminated posters to support the educator. I was impressed by the lesson but I was even more impressed by observing the master gardeners in action. In my first experience, the master gardener was a retired elementary school teacher so it was mesmerizing just watching her interact with the kids. And the kids loved the module, particularly the activity at the end where they “fly” around with Velcro wristbands and pipettes from flower to flower to collect pollen (pompoms) and nectar (water). The kids were so precious and I was amazed at how much they knew already. I was hooked! You can count prep and travel time in your volunteer hours so for the 11 pollinator classes I participated in, I had 25 volunteer hours. Obviously, this was an activity I loved so I did choose to volunteer more in this area.

In the spirit of trying different things, I also participated (or will be soon) in two educational/activity sessions at a senior center, a youth pop up activity at a

community garden, an info booth at Fulton, Bloomington, and Kingfield farmers markets, and a shift on the yard and garden helpline. I will help at the info booth at the MN State Fair next week. I also volunteered at the Plant Sale in May and the Master Gardener Tour in July and helped to plant at Vera's garden and Kenny school pollinator garden. By the end of August, I will have 82 volunteer hours so I have more than met this requirement.

I did not get involved in the vegetable community gardens, seed collection, or other youth activities but many interns do get involved. Because of the pandemic, the leadership allowed interns to count hours in developing pollinator gardens in their own yard or to grow and donate food to food shelves. Those projects have continued to be options for volunteer hours.

It is also possible to propose an individual project (such as this Master Gardener blog for me) but one does need approval from the County leadership. Creativity and flexibility in meeting the public's needs within the Master Gardener framework (shared in MG Blog #1) seems to be encouraged. I continue to learn about different existing volunteer options – everyone has their favorite and there are many more that I have not mentioned... There are also new opportunities that come up as the public contacts the MG gardener program for help. To facilitate a sign-up process, an online scheduling program is in place which you can also use to get ideas of what you might be interested in since descriptions are included.