

Advanced Master Gardener–Tree Steward: Training to Enhance Community Volunteerism

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SUMMARY. The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Advanced Master Gardener–Tree Steward (AMGTS) program provides advanced training in leadership development and arboriculture to MG volunteer educators so they may expand the influence of extension through leadership in community forestry. A statewide survey of agents, MGs, and foresters served as the basis for developing the training package, which was funded in part by the Virginia Department of Forestry. According to a statewide survey, 70% of VCE MGs and extension agents with MG programs would like to be involved in community tree programming, while only 26% was currently involved. Typically, agents cited limited staff and volunteer resources as the primary factors in restricting program expansion. Furthermore, 90% of municipal foresters indicated they would like to work with trained volunteers. The AMGTS program simultaneously answers the desire of MGs to expand their role in the community landscape and the need of VCE to expand its outreach with increasingly limited resources. AMGTS training, guided by a 10-unit resource book, integrates technical and program management expertise to foster volunteer pride and self-sufficiency. This allows MG tree stewards to coordinate much of their own training and recruit and manage non-MG volunteers to whom they can provide limited training for specific projects, thus allowing program expansion without additional staff. The training is designed for delivery by knowledgeable professionals in the local community, such as arborists, horticulturists, college professors, extension specialists, MGs, and others who can provide quality training following the program guidelines.

The benefits of trees to the community are widely recognized (Connecticut Cooperative Extension System, 1989; Morgan and Johnson 1993; Schroeder 1991), as is the importance of volunteers (Getz et al., 1982; Moll and Young 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Sommer et al., 1994) in implementing tree programs. The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Advanced Master Gardener–Tree Steward (AMGTS) program is an advanced training program in leadership development and arboriculture for MG volunteer educators so they can expand the influence of VCE through leadership in community forestry. The specialized training enables MGs to get involved in and lead programs concerning one of a community's greatest assets—its trees. This new program is a response to the need for VCE to do more with less and to heighten public interest in urban and community forestry. It is similar in concept to other extension tree stewardship programs, such as Minnesota's Tree Care Advisor program (Johnson, 1995).

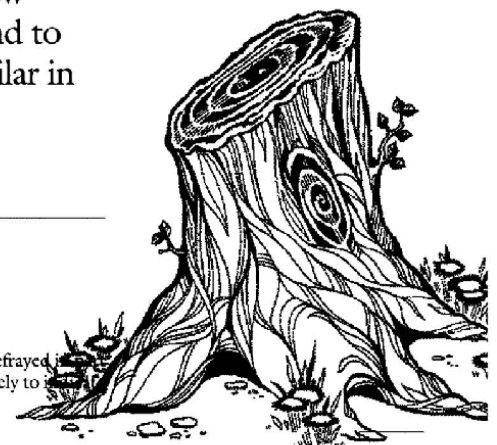
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Volunteer needs in urban forestry

The AMGTS program was designed to meet the needs of MGs, extension agents, and urban foresters. An unpublished 1994 survey of Virginia MGs, extension agents, and urban foresters revealed that there was tremendous interest in a tree stewardship program. Indeed, 70% of MGs responding to the statewide survey indicated interest in a community forestry program, 70% of responding extension agents indicated interest in helping with such a program, and 26% of those agents currently had urban forestry activities. The survey also revealed that 43% of urban foresters currently used volunteers and 90% of those urban foresters not currently using volunteers would like to use them. The survey results indicated a definite need for trained volunteers. An AMGTS offered an excellent opportunity as a train-the-trainer model in which the skills and knowledge of MG volunteers are focused on the education and development of community forest volunteers.

Program goals

The goals of the AMGTS are as follows:

PROVIDE TRAINING THAT INTEGRATES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE. AMGTSs will develop the skills in arboriculture that result from increased technical knowledge, programming and leadership training essential to conduct successful projects, and the development of skills to pursue the resources for conducting regional tree stewardship programs, such as teachers for the training course, fund raising, and in-kind resources. The benefits of such integrated training include self-sufficiency, increased volunteer pride and commitment, use of increased skills, and expanded volunteerism opportunities for MGs.

PROMOTE COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY EFFORTS.

The structure of the AMGTS program and the organization and operation of regional tree steward groups are designed to promote community interaction and cooperation and result in access to professional advice, ensure program relevance and community interest, and offer channels for volunteer recruitment. Specifically, adequate instructional resources are provided directly to new and ongoing AMGTS groups so they can initiate and manage all aspects of volunteer urban forestry activities they feel are appropriate.

ENHANCE THE COMMUNITY FOREST. While developing community leadership, the AMGTS program also seeks to enhance the community forest through the efforts of dedicated volunteers. This attention to the com-

munity forest increases benefits of trees to community, develops community respect and appreciation for trees, and builds support for community forestry.

Project development

Cooperative extension MGs nationally represent a unique force for environmental change in the urban environment and have created a significant interest among other agencies in developing similar programs, e.g., Master Treescapers from Clemson University. Extension personnel have been repeatedly requested to develop parallel programs to the MG program to address specific interests in a community. However, the success of such specialized programs depends on the same basic knowledge and skills required by MGs; therefore, agents and MGs include the following statement in their revised policies effective 1 July 1996:

"RELATED HORTICULTURE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS. To avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts, parallel volunteer training programs that require much of the same training and skills as the MG program will not be established and conducted by VCE agents or Master Gardener Coordinators. Rather, such programs shall build upon the initial training and be an advanced level of the Master Gardener Program.

All organized, named, VCE volunteer programs related to horticulture, gardening, or residential landscape environment will use the completion of Master Gardener training and internship as a prerequisite for additional training and volunteering, thus building on the skills and experience of Master Gardeners and maintaining an effective organizational and management structure. These advanced-level training programs will allow Master Gardeners to develop specializations in specific areas, such as Master Gardener-Tree Steward and Master Gardener-Yardwaste Manager.

However, Master Gardeners who have completed these advanced specialty programs may, in turn, organize or train subgroups, such as lawn demonstration site volunteers and others, e.g., Community Tree Planters or other specialty subgroups. These subgroups of volunteers are not Master Gardeners" (Relf and Dorn, 1997).

BENEFITS OF THIS APPROACH. The AMGTS program builds on the existing framework of MG programs, offering the opportunity to access a well-recognized and highly visible statewide program.

Individuals trained as AMGTSs will have completed at least 50 hours of volunteer time and have a clear understanding of how to work within the extension model and will

Fig. 1. *Advanced Master Gardener–Tree Steward Handbook* table of contents. Each of the 10 units represents one 3-hour training session, for a total training time of 30 hours.

Unit 1: Introduction to Advanced Master Gardener–Tree Steward

- Understanding Trees
 - Benefits of Trees to the Community
 - How Volunteers Can Help the Urban Forest
- Becoming a Steward
 - Introduction
 - Creating a Lasting Impact Through Education

Unit 2: Tree Biology and Urban Soils and Program Organization

- Understanding Trees
 - Tree Biology
 - Assessing Urban Soils and Site Limitations
- Becoming a Steward
 - AMGT'S Program Organization Flow chart
 - Leadership Development
 - AMGT'S Program Committees
 - Selecting Advisory Boards

Unit 3: Urban Tree Problems and Their Diagnosis and Introduction to Programming

- Understanding Trees
 - The Urban Environment
 - Plant Management
 - Diseases and Pests
 - Construction Impacts
- Becoming a Steward
 - The Five Levels of Programming
 - Level 1 Programming Resource List
 - Level 2 Programming Resource List
 - Level 3 Programming Resource List
 - Level 4 Programming Resource List
 - Level 5 Programming Resource List

Unit 4: Basic Tree Selection and Targeting Your Community

- Understanding Trees
 - Background Information for Plant Identification
 - Consideration for Species and Cultivar Selection
 - Identification List 1
- Becoming a Steward
 - Identifying Community Needs
 - Setting Goals

Unit 5: Trees for Various Site and Comprehensive Planning

- Understanding Trees
 - Specific Uses of Trees
 - Trees for Various Sites
 - Identification List 2
- Becoming a Steward
 - Developing a Comprehensive Plan
 - Incorporating Maintenance into a Comprehensive Plan
 - Planning the Short-term Project

Unit 6: Optimal Tree Planting and Behavioral Changes

- Understanding Trees
 - Characteristics of Quality Trees
 - Tree Care (planting, staking, wrapping, mulching, and watering)
- Becoming a Steward
 - Planning a Level 4 Program: Addressing Behavior Change

Unit 7: Pruning and Training Trees and Evaluation and Reporting

- Understanding Trees
 - Maintenance Pruning
 - Mechanisms of Wound Closure
 - Tree Hazard Prevention
- Becoming a Steward
 - Evaluation and Reporting

Unit 8: Identifying Tree Problems and Community-volunteer Management

- Understanding Trees
 - Conducting Street Tree Inventories
 - Tour of Community—Discussion of Social, Technical, and Management Issues in Urban Forestry
- Becoming a Steward
 - Community-volunteer Management
 - Finding and Recruiting Community Volunteers

Unit 9: Publicizing Your Program and Resource Development

- Becoming a Steward
 - Media Involvement
 - Resource Development

Unit 10: Presentation and Final Planning Meeting (all AMGTs invited)

- Becoming a Steward
 - Public Presentations

have a network of contacts to help them in reaching their goals.

The AMGTs program has a clear role within the MG management system that would allow it to function effectively in the extension office without creating an additional workload for the agent (thus, significantly increasing the participation by agents throughout the state).

AMGTs training and programming is cooperatively managed by MG volunteers and extension agents. For a project to qualify for volunteer involvement, it must fit in the VCE plan of work and be approved by the extension agent. This new program area has been conducted in two extension offices, and agents and MGs from four additional offices have received training and materials to conduct their programs.

Project tools

The *Advanced Master Gardener-Tree Steward Handbook* (Day and Dorn, 1996) is designed as a curriculum guide and resource for the advanced training of MGs as tree stewards (Fig. 1). The table of contents for the training manual is divided into 10 units, each covering topics in two areas that can be used together in one training session: "Understanding Trees" (covering arboriculture information) and "Becoming a Steward" (covering program development and volunteer management). The handbook is not a text book, rather a collection of fact sheets, magazine and journal articles, and newsletters from a variety of sources that serve as background and reference material to be used to train AMGTs. In addition, worksheets and other information compiled especially for AMGTs training are included. Throughout the book, some of the materials serve as related reference resources rather than strictly training information. Each unit is referenced to the appropriate sections of the *Virginia Master Gardener Handbook* to be reviewed before each training session.

The *Advanced Master Gardener-Tree Steward Teacher's Guide* is designed to supplement the *Advanced Master Gardener-Tree Steward Handbook* as a suggested curriculum guide and resource for those involved in training MGs as tree stewards. The teacher's guide comes conveniently packaged in a three-ring binder and includes 1) a sample classroom plan for each of the ten units that outlines how the handbook unit contents can be used together in a training session; 2) additional worksheets enclosed in sheet protectors for easy duplication; and 3) tools for evaluation and documentation, such as trainee evaluations and pre- and post-exams. Results of the preliminary exam in Unit 1 indicate

which training areas need emphasis so the training coordinator can tailor the program accordingly. The lesson plans were developed with the advice of Marilyn Lange, a MG volunteer with 10 years experience in educational training design and organizational development.

The sample classroom plans provide a starting point for organizing the instruction for each session. The programming section of each unit will help trainees use these activities to plan and structure their volunteer activities, referred to as field internship experiences. A "Resources" section in the front of the teacher's guide references useful materials or teaching aids that can be used with each unit. In addition, two slide sets—"Transplanting Techniques for Community Trees" and "Getting to Know Urban Soils"—were developed specifically for this training. The complete training is 30 hours, broken into ten 3-hour units of instruction (Fig. 1).

Volunteer activities

AMGTs commit to volunteering 20 hours annually in tree stewardship programs at one of five levels as their training progresses. Programming at each level is independent of programming at other levels, but not mutually exclusive. That is, programming at Level 3 does not require programming at Levels 1 and 2, although this may, in fact, occur. Nor does programming at Level 4 require any of the preceding levels be completed. Each level is more demanding and requires more energy, planning, and effort. Using levels helps the AMGTs see that an important contribution to the ultimate goal can be made with different levels of commitment. The five levels of volunteer programming developed by VCE agents are as follows:

LEVEL 1 is the most basic level of programming, requires the least AMGTs commitment, and focuses on information dissemination. This level involves responding to individual needs, such as answering peoples' questions concerning tree management and conducting informational projects to increase awareness of an issue. Programming at this level could be in the form of simply answering questions over the telephone; answering questions face to face in the extension office; distributing pamphlets and brochures at libraries, retail stores, and as mail inserts; or having a tree stewardship hotline. In some cases, it may involve home visits by AMGTs.

LEVEL 2 is a more active level of information dissemination, where AMGTs conduct outreach efforts to inform the community about proper tree stewardship and not only create awareness, but also increase the knowledge and personal commitment of commu-

nity members. This may involve giving presentations to existing groups who have an interest, such as local gardening groups, elementary school classes, civic organizations, homeowners, or other interested groups; writing articles for the local newspaper; or doing spots on public access television.

LEVEL 3 requires greater planning and participation by AMGTs and members of the community and increases knowledge and skills by demonstrating proper tree stewardship to the community on a larger scale and time frame through one-time events or projects, field days, workshops, a demonstration site at a local library, or a 1- to 2-day conference. These events are highly publicized, more lengthy, and open to the public rather than just an existing group of people. They often provide hands-on activities where participants can begin to learn skills. This type of event also has a recognized time frame within which it will be completed and its goals met, after which no further action by AMGTs will be required.

LEVEL 4 involves an organized program of education, community action, and a documented change in the way tree plantings are managed in the community or neighborhood involved. This level requires long-term programming, much planning, involvement of many people and different agencies, and results in a committed change in behavior of members of the community. Long-term goals become reality. Examples include vacant lot reclamations and restorations and street tree plantings. These kinds of programs are those that many people in a given community or neighborhood will either hear about or become involved with over time. As they actually change behavior, Level 4 activities have the greatest long-term impact.

LEVEL 5 is the ultimate goal of a tree stewardship program. At this level, community-based programming, drawing from programming at some or all of the first four levels, has been established and is running well with the involvement of many volunteers and other community participants. The program, from this point on, will be a permanent part of the tree stewardship system in the community. The program will go on for years to come with continued volunteer support

and community involvement, even after AMGTs leadership is removed. At this point, it is time to move to new programs and allow this one to evolve on its own (Day and Dorn, 1996).

We believe this added dimension to the MG program will facilitate the training of Advanced MGs and others who use the program so that they might truly address the needs of their community forests. As this is an integral part of an existing program, it will be maintained in the future in conjunction with all other aspects of MG programming.

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