

Our volunteers share their thoughts about what being a Master Gardener has meant to them...

☞ I wanted to become a MG volunteer to get a more formal education in horticulture, to rub up against experts, compare notes, learn new techniques, and meet new people. I have accomplished everything in one short year. The classes given to become a master gardener taught me things I did not know and helped me review the things I did. As far as rubbing up against experts... everyone is an expert in something. My MG class of 2010 had an orchid expert, herb experts, natural medicine experts, to name just a few. In addition to my own classmates there were lectures by the experts at Cornell and visiting lecturers. How much luckier could I get? Learning new techniques has been fascinating whether it is about lasagna gardening, compost tea or new and exciting plants. Meeting new people? I've never had a problem with this but encountering so many people with the same passion for gardening has been fun. The position of trip committee chair fell into my lap early on and this has utilized not only my organizational skills but also my social skills. Who knew that my background in event planning, teaching and arranging trips to Europe for my students would come in so handy as a MG. I'm enjoying it all!
Susan Kavy, Class of '10

☞ My Dad was the gardener. He died when I was 15 and I took over the outside work. After I married, I was an apartment dweller and had hundreds of houseplants. When we bought our home, vegetable gardening became my primary interest. I had always heard the term Master Gardener but did not know what it was. After my husband died of a long illness, I threw myself into my neglected flower gardens for "therapy". The day that changed the course of my life was reading in the paper that Cornell Cooperative Extension was interviewing for the next class of Master Gardener volunteers. After a lifetime of volunteering with organizations related to my children, here was something for ME. Half way through the class I felt like I had been reborn. I have made so many fantastic new friends. We are all so different but have the common tie of gardening. I have had so many rewarding experiences while learning, teaching and working side by side with others. This has been the best thing to date that I have ever done just for myself. At first I was intimidated by all the knowledge placed in front of us, how would I ever remember it all? I had not taken a class or had home work in close to 40 years. I came to realize I did not need to ever know it all, but where to find the answers. That each of us has our areas of expertise and we all help each other. If you want a rewarding volunteer "life experience", come and grow with us! ***Judy Wolf, Class of '06***

☞ I first learned about Master Gardeners through an article in the Poughkeepsie Journal. I had always had an interest in gardening and the program sounded like something that would be very interesting. When I sent in my application and participated in the group interview, I thought that I was too much of a beginner to fit in. More than ten years later, I am still learning about plants,

Integrated Pest Management and other gardening techniques. Being involved has done a great deal for me; not only for the wonderful classes, meetings and projects, but for the opportunity to meet and work with an amazing group of volunteers and staff. Like many volunteer opportunities, I have gotten back so much more than I have given. **Cathy Lane, Class of '97**

- ☞ There are so many reasons to become a Master Gardener volunteer. I applied to help jumpstart myself back into working on a garden needing massive changes. I was looking forward to learning more, meeting new people and being of service to my community. What I found far surpassed those expectations. The MGs are absolutely fabulous people, both the men and the women. They are fun, knowledgeable, and very collegial. The staff is a delight to be with. It is a pleasure to be a part of this group. I want to make more time to participate in Master Gardener activities. **Johanna Shafer, Class of '08**
- ☞ A few years ago I had a very dear friend who was an avid, and highly successful, flower gardener. At that time I was rather ho hum about gardening because I thought I could never learn all those names or pick the right plants or remember which one needed what kind of care. When my friend suddenly passed away, I felt as though she had "willed me" her love of all things green and growing. Suddenly I found I loved working in the dirt and looking for the right plant for the each area. I quickly realized I needed to know more, and becoming a Master Gardener volunteer was the answer. Through Master Gardeners, I've learned so many things: how to search for answers to plant problems, how to figure out the best plant for a certain area, what to do about an insect problem, how to identify a weed and what to do about the latest garden issues such as this year's late blight problems. I now have a great network of people and information to rely on. I've also made some fabulous new friends, other gardeners who share my love of gardening as well as understand the frustrations that occur and who also are happy to share cuttings and occasional lunch dates! Being a Master Gardener volunteer has opened a world of ideas, information and friendships that I am very grateful for. My friend would be proud of me. **Donna Croshier, Class of '08**
- ☞ I had just lost my husband & I was shutting myself away from everyone. I finally got into a grievance counseling class at Hospice. We were talking about something that interested us to try to help. I mentioned the love of gardening that my husband and I had shared. The counselor asked "Why don't you become a Master Gardener volunteer?" After starting training, I quickly realized what a wonderful thing it was going to be. Everyone was friendly and we all had gardening in common. I can honestly say that it is the best thing that has ever happened to me. It has been the best therapy and it saved my sanity. I have made so many friends, who I treasure. I love working alongside everyone in the gardens. I am so proud to say I helped make those

beautiful gardens and I am proud to be called a Master Gardener volunteer.
Grace Elder, Class of '06

- ☞ I became a Master Gardener volunteer because I was interested in learning more about horticulture and related fields. I enjoyed the classes and the other MGs, liked the projects and the continual learning aspect of the program. I love having access to research based information, the Cornell fact sheets, articles, and the MG network of information. I am regularly able to apply this information to my activities at the Vanderbilt Garden, where I have been president for the last 3 years. In 1998, I attended an all-day Urban Forestry Workshop co-sponsored by Extension and DEC in White Plains. This opened up a whole new area of interest and exploration for me, starting with helping to rewrite the Hyde Park Shade Tree Ordinance, and becoming a member once it was reestablished. I have served on it since 2000, as chair for the last 5 years. Along the way, we have written tree planting grants, planted nearly 200 trees, employed innovative tree planting and maintenance techniques, teamed up with our Planning Board to insure appropriate trees are included in new sub-divisions and generated a renewed interest in street trees in the community. All of these activities have stemmed directly from what I learned as a Master Gardener volunteer. **Margi Delafield, Class of '95**

- ☞ 2009 is my 10th year as a master gardener volunteer. Since I joined, I have learned new things every year and am still learning. The real neat thing about being a master gardener volunteer is that you meet the most interesting and diverse group of people. We learn from each other through the sharing of all kinds of gardening information and we have the opportunity to share our knowledge with the public. **Norma Chang, Class of '99**

- ☞ I originally became a Master Gardener volunteer because I wanted to learn more about gardening but I have received so much more from this program. I have learned from reputable experts and received valuable information about soils, planting techniques, plant varieties that work best, insects and diseases of plants, design strategies, invasives and gardening aids. I have also acquired a support group that enriches my gardening experiences. I have traveled to gardens in New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts with fellow gardeners to share experiences that are unforgettable. Belonging to this group of special people gives me the satisfaction of knowing that I am contributing to my community and helping others to learn. Learning about new things keeps my mind fresh and active. All of this gives me a sense of belonging to something that is beneficial. It has helped me to become a better, more knowledgeable gardener and has opened my life to wonderful experiences, travel to new gardens, and has introduced me to a group of friendly dedicated people I can call friends. **Susan Eschbach, Class of '03**

- ☞ When people hear that I am a Master Gardener volunteer, they usually exclaim great words of praise and wide-eyed admiration. On a day when the

humdrum of life has the tendency to have reduced one to a vegetable, this really elevates the spirit! When I was a child, my grandfather had a huge garden and chicken business. I had to help harvest berries and vegetables, which included helping to can and freeze in our new deep freezer. I was a child in the 1940's and 50's and I hated it! Somehow the positive part of the experience must have stayed with me. When I heard about Master Gardeners, I knew that I not only wanted to relive my early experiences but to add to them through this volunteer opportunity. It has been hard work but it has been well worth the effort. I have met the most sincere "down to earth" individuals who have become my friends and my mentors. I believe that my grandfather would be proud of me. ***Evelyn Stevenson, Class of '05***

☞ Years ago, while working in Gifford garden in Millbrook, a group of generous volunteers came to work along side the paid gardeners. This group of committed men and women came weekly. I grew to really enjoy the days the volunteers would come because they were always willing to learn. One volunteer in particular was very knowledgeable and I found myself learning from her. In time, I learned that the knowledge possessed by this helpful volunteer was in part, due to her being a Master Gardener volunteer. Her training and participation in the program had enriched her life in a way that appealed to me. She shared with me the requirements of the program. Although the initial demands of time and effort seemed to require a lot of planning and commitment, I felt up for it because I believed the payback would be knowledge, opportunity to see more, do more, and be more. I am now part of a group of volunteers reaching out to the community, sharing what they have learned. It may be hot some days and may be cold others but there are those special, perfect days in the garden. It's then that you remember how life can be when at its best and no matter what the climate. There is always the warmth of friendship that comes with working alongside a fellow Master Gardener volunteer. ***Sandra Richey, Class of '05***

☞ Being a Master Gardener Volunteer has provided me the opportunity to pursue my passion for gardening while affording me the additional benefit of being in a dynamic learning environment. Our association with Cornell University puts me in a position I love as it provides me with up to date, cutting edge, scientific based horticulture information. I can now take that information and apply it directly to my love of gardening as well as an additional passion of mine – the ability to share that information and to help others. And on top of all this, is the added enjoyment of working side by side with fellow Master Gardeners on various projects within our program. I can now call many of these folks friends. ***Judy D. Killmer, Class of '93***